Your guide to
RECOGNIZING & RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Available on the DalSAFE app
(under Safety Toolbox)

Last updated: August 2019
1 RECOGNIZING a student in distress

SIGNs THAT A STUDENT MAY BE IN DISTRESS:
- Significant changes in mood
- Difficulty controlling emotions
- Others have expressed concern about the student
- Changes in academic performance
- High levels of irritability
- Listlessness or falling asleep in class
- Unusual behaviour
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Changes in hygiene or dress
- Difficulty concentrating or communicating
- Disordered eating
- Assault and/or harassment
- Learning and academic challenges
- Withdrawal from social interaction

2 RESPONDING to a student in distress

“have noticed you’ve been absent from class lately and I’m concerned about you.”
- It is OK to ask and express concern
- Be specific about the behaviour that worries you

“Is there anything I can do to help you?”
- Listen with an open mind
- Be patient and give your undivided attention

“It sounds like you’re feeling out of place.”
- Acknowledge their thoughts and feelings in a compassionate way
- Offer hope and reassure them you are concerned and want to help

3 REFERRING a student in distress

Refer the student to the Dalhousie Student Health & Wellness Centre where a member of our interprofessional health care team will assess, triage, and assist the student in meeting their needs.

Don’t forget to: Point out that help is available and seeking help is a sign of strength and courage, not a weakness. Offer to follow up with the student, but don’t insist on knowing what the student has done.

Has someone shared an experience of sexualized violence with you?
The Purple Folder is your guide to responding and navigating these conversations. dal.ca/purplefolder

If the student appears reluctant:
- Offer to refer the student online to our on campus case manager, who will reach out to the student and offer support.
- Offer to sit with the student while they make initial contact themselves.
- Accompany the student to their appointment if appropriate and you feel comfortable.

IF THE STUDENT SAYS “NO” TO A REFERRAL
- Respect their decision. Accepting or refusing assistance must be left up to the student, except in emergencies when life is in danger.
- Don’t force the issue or trick them into going.
- Try and leave the door open for later consideration.

“Would you like someone to reach out to you?”

“I respect your decision. I hope you will keep these options in mind. My door is always open.”

“Would you like me to take you to their office?”
Students have access to Dalhousie’s on-campus Student Health & Wellness Centre. The Centre provides quality primary and mental health care services to promote and enhance students’ health.

The Student Health & Wellness Centre’s interprofessional team includes:

- counsellors
- nurses
- physicians
- psychiatrists
- psychologists
- social worker
- health promotion expertise

If there is an academic issue, you can also refer your student to: Bissett Student Success Centre (902-494-3077), the Student Accessibility Centre (902-494-2836), and/or Faculty Advising dal.ca/advising.

The inclusion of resources external to that of Dalhousie University does not reflect importance or endorsement, and the University does not control or guarantee the relevance or competence of their services.
IN A MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY SITUATION

Is someone...
Making direct or indirect reference to wanting to die/suicide?
Making threats or engaging in disruptive behaviour?

*If you answered ‘yes’ to EITHER of the above,*
call one of these numbers now:

**DAL Security**
902-494-4109

**Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team**
902-429-8167

**Off Campus Emergency Services**
911