

# TALKING TO A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

## 1. ACKNOWLEDGE

- Be specific about the behavior that you've noticed
- Express your concern

I've noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned about you.

## 2. INQUIRE AND LISTEN

- Ask open-ended questions
- Be patient and give your full attention

How is everything going?  
Are you okay?

## 3. PROVIDE INFORMATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

- Provide the student with information about resources
- Encourage the student to contact one of the resources provided

I'm concerned about you and I want to support you. I'd like to share a few resources with you that might help.

## 4. FOLLOW UP

- Enter an Early Alert concern
- If feasible, follow up with the student but don't insist on knowing what the student has done

How are things since our talk last week?

## WHERE STUDENTS CAN GO FOR HELP

- Follow the process on page 2 and 3 of this document
- Tell students that resources are available on UBCO's Student Services website: [students.ok.ubc.ca](http://students.ok.ubc.ca)

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, OR REQUESTS FOR COPIES OF THIS DOCUMENT CAN BE DIRECTED TO:

**Health & Wellness**  
UBC Okanagan Campus  
250.807.9270  
[healthwellness.okanagan@ubc.ca](mailto:healthwellness.okanagan@ubc.ca)

## ENCOURAGING A STUDENT TO SEEK SUPPORT

- Point out that help is available and seeking help is a sign of strength
- Acknowledge that seeking help can be scary

## IF A STUDENT DOESN'T WANT HELP

- Respect their decision. Accepting or refusing assistance must be left up to the student, except in emergencies
- Don't force the issue or trick them into going to a referred resource
- Try and leave room for reconsideration later on

## TAKE CARE OF YOUR WELLBEING

Taking care of your own wellbeing is important.

## HEALTHY UBC INITIATIVES

Healthy UBC Initiatives are free, ongoing, university-wide programs, trainings, and educational opportunities that focus on promoting positive mental health and physical wellbeing for staff, faculty, and departments:  
[hr.ok.ubc.ca/health](http://hr.ok.ubc.ca/health)

## EMPLOYEE AND FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Faculty, staff, and their family members can find support through the confidential UBC Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP):  
[1.800.387.4765](tel:1.800.387.4765)  
[hr.ubc.ca/benefits/efap](http://hr.ubc.ca/benefits/efap)

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

## ASSISTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

### Everyone plays an important role in supporting student wellbeing



#### Pay attention to warning signs

You may be the first person to see signs that a student is in distress, and it's important to pay attention to warning signs. Mental health concerns can have a significant impact on everyday life, including academics.



#### Trust your instincts

Say something if you're worried about a student or if they leave you feeling concerned. It's okay to share your concerns about a student with someone else at the University in order to provide the student with the support they need.



#### Reach out and help

A student may not know help is available or may hesitate to ask for it. Connect the student with resources and identify your concerns using Early Alert.

► Use this document as a guide to help you know what to look for, say, and do.

Original concept for this document courtesy of Queen's University and McMaster University

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
Okanagan Campus

# HOW TO HELP A STUDENT IN DISTRESS



## 1 OBSERVE

Take a moment to reflect on what you've seen and heard. Write down your answers to the following questions:

What did I see?

What did I hear?

**How many** similar incidents involving the student have I witnessed?

**For unusual or particularly complex student concerns** that are not addressed in this document, or for questions about student behaviour, contact:

**Health & Wellness**  
UBC Okanagan campus  
UNC 337  
[250.807.9270](tel:250.807.9270)  
[healthwellness.okanagan@ubc.ca](mailto:healthwellness.okanagan@ubc.ca)

## 2 REFLECT

Think about what you have seen and heard, and then use the examples below to help determine next steps. It's OK to feel unsure about how to respond and you don't need to have all the answers. Choosing any response over remaining silent is always the best option.

### I AM CONCERNED ABOUT THE STUDENT'S IMMEDIATE SAFETY: THERE MAY BE IMMINENT RISK OF HARM TO SELF OR OTHERS

- Behaviour that is violent, destructive, harmful, aggressive, or threatening to self or others

- Self-harming behaviour such as cutting or hitting
- Expresses hopelessness or references suicide
- Disclosure of sexual assault

- Student may be experiencing relationship problems, homesickness, a traumatic event, lack of social support, or physical health problems
- Student may be experiencing difficulties such as depression, anxiety, agitation, grief, or anger

### I AM CONCERNED ABOUT THE STUDENT'S GENERAL WELLBEING: RISK OF HARM TO SELF OR OTHERS IS LIKELY LOW



## 3 RESPOND

Respond as you feel appropriate. Remember that it's OK to feel unsure about how to respond and you don't need to have all the answers. Choosing any response over remaining silent is always the best option.

### CALL 911 AND CAMPUS SECURITY

First, call Emergency Services: [911](tel:911)

Then, call Campus Security: [250.807.8111](tel:250.807.8111)

### CONTACT HEALTH & WELLNESS

First, call Health & Wellness and request an urgent appointment for the student, and/or request to consult with a counsellor: [250.807.9270](tel:250.807.9270)

Then, encourage the student to go directly to Health & Wellness: [UNC 337](#)

#### AFTER-HOURS

Call Campus Security: [250.807.8111](tel:250.807.8111)  
Contact Crisis line: [1.888.353.CARE](tel:1.888.353.CARE) (1.888.353.2273)

### CONNECT THE STUDENT TO SUPPORT

Mental health concerns and/or difficulties coping  
Primary health concerns (family doctor care)

Health & Wellness  
[students.ok.ubc.ca/health-wellness](http://students.ok.ubc.ca/health-wellness)

Confidential support and advocacy

Sexual Violence Prevention & Response Office  
[svpro.ok.ubc.ca](http://svpro.ok.ubc.ca)

Arms-length student support service

Ombuds Office  
[ombudsoffice.ubc.ca](http://ombudsoffice.ubc.ca)

Accommodations for disabilities, including chronic mental health condition

Disability Resource Centre  
[drc.questions@ubc.ca](mailto:drc.questions@ubc.ca)

Academic, financial, or other concerns

Student Services & Financial Support  
[advising.ubco@ubc.ca](mailto:advising.ubco@ubc.ca)



## 4 USE EARLY ALERT

Always submit an Early Alert concern as part of your response, regardless of the perceived severity.

Early Alert allows faculty, staff, and TAs to identify their concerns about students sooner and in a more coordinated way.

#### EARLY ALERT:

- Provides support for all students
- Allows for earlier support before difficulties become overwhelming
- Results in less time and fewer resources needed for students to recover
- Collects concerns from different sources across campus, allowing for a better understanding of individual student needs and how to provide appropriate support in a coordinated way
- Protects student privacy using a secure system
- Is not connected to the student's academic record

### SUBMIT AN EARLY ALERT CONCERN

[facultystaff.students.ubc.ca/systems-tools/early-alert](http://facultystaff.students.ubc.ca/systems-tools/early-alert)

#### HOW DOES EARLY ALERT WORK?

- Faculty and staff notice a student is facing difficulties and identify their concerns using Early Alert
  - Early Alert Case Managers review all concerns submitted and identify the most appropriate resources for students in need of support
  - Advisors then reach out to students and offer to connect them with resources and support
- ✓ 92% of students respond positively to the invitation to meet with an advisor

#### EARLY ALERT TRAINING:

[facultystaff.students.ubc.ca/systems-tools/early-alert](http://facultystaff.students.ubc.ca/systems-tools/early-alert)