Supporting Students in Distress

Response Guide for Faculty and Staff

At times, you’ve probably noticed students who seem to be in distress. You may have worried about them and hoped they’re getting the help they need — but not known whether you can or should do anything about it.

Your observations and actions can help connect students to the many available resources at SFU.

Together we can build a more supportive campus community.

Emergency
If a student exhibits behaviour that poses an immediate threat to themselves or others call
• Campus Security 778-782-4500
• Call 911 if off campus
Take seriously any reference to attempting suicide, regardless of the context. Consult Campus Security or HCS immediately.

Health and Counselling Services (HCS)
Monday to Friday 9 AM – 4:30 PM
Phone: 778-782-4615
sfu.ca/students/health
Contact us for advice. If you are calling from Surrey or Vancouver campus, please say so. There are options specific to those campuses.

Campus Security
Available 24/7
Phone: 778-782-4500
Security staff will assess the situation. They may provide advice or call 911 if police or an ambulance is required.

Vancouver Crisis Line
Available 24/7
Distress Line: 604-872-3311
www.youthinbc.com
www.crisiscentre.bc.ca
This Response Guide is intended to help you identify, and potentially assist, students in distress. You don’t need to take on the role of a counsellor, but you can play a key role in connecting students with resources and support. You’ll find more information, including professional development opportunities, at [www.sfu.ca/students/sid](http://www.sfu.ca/students/sid).

**Observations that might prompt you to have a conversation with a student**

- Other students, faculty or staff express concern for the student
- A student says (or writes) something that makes you think they are unusually unhappy or angry
- You have a sense that the student is struggling with something
- You notice specific behaviours of concern, including chronic absenteeism

**Connect with the student**

- If appropriate, talk to the student privately about what you have seen and express your concern
- Focus on the specific behaviour(s) you have observed
- Be patient and allow the student to speak freely
- Avoid giving advice
- If the student is agitated, consider having someone else present (or nearby), or call Campus Security

**Confidentiality**

If you seek advice, you are acting in the best interest of the student. In most cases, you won’t be required to identify the student. Under BC’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, you can provide identifying details to fellow employees of SFU in situations that could affect anyone’s health or safety.

**Support for you**

Please take care of yourself and seek the support you need. In an emergency situation, you can receive personal support in Health and Counselling Services. You may also have access to the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP): [www.sfu.ca/human-resources](http://www.sfu.ca/human-resources).

**Reflect and refer**

Consider the student’s responses, and the appropriate referral. Keep in mind that students may choose to decline support, unless they are at risk to self or others.

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**Observe and check-in**

Here are some examples of behaviours you may observe, and questions you might ask. If you are unsure, ask for advice.

<table>
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<th>Mild to moderate concern</th>
<th>Moderate to severe concern</th>
<th>Severe concern</th>
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<tr>
<td>You may have noticed a specific behaviour, for example:</td>
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<td>- Sudden decline in academic performance</td>
<td>- Repeated requests for special consideration</td>
<td>- Suspected drug/alcohol misuse</td>
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<td>- Exaggerated emotional responses</td>
<td>- Changes in dress/hygiene</td>
<td>- Behaviour that is violent, destructive or threatening to self or others</td>
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<td>- Changes in attendance</td>
<td>- Changes in social behaviour</td>
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<td>You might ask:</td>
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<td>“I’ve noticed you haven’t been attending class regularly, are you ok?”</td>
<td>“I’ve noticed you’ve made several requests for accommodation recently, is everything ok?”</td>
<td>“Have you felt that life is not worth living?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Have you been under a lot of stress lately?”</td>
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<td>“Have you had any thoughts of harming yourself or others?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Do you feel unable to cope?”</td>
<td>“Are you thinking of killing yourself?”</td>
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**Mild to moderate concern**

- If the student’s response suggests:
  - that they are having personal or relationship problems, academic concerns, depression or anxiety

  **Encourage the student to seek support in the near future, but don’t insist.**
  Tell the student that Health and Counselling Services provides free counselling; and/or refer them to other services, such as:
  - Academic Advising
  - International Services for Students
  - Interfaith Centre
  - Centre for Students with Disabilities.

  You’ll find a full list of services at [www.sfu.ca/students/sid](http://www.sfu.ca/students/sid)

  Follow up with the student.

**Moderate to severe concern**

- If the student’s response suggests:
  - that they may have experienced sexual assault or another traumatic event
  - that they may be having suicidal thoughts
  - that they are having difficulty coping but there is not an urgent concern of harm to self or others

  **Encourage the student to seek immediate counselling support, but don’t insist.**
  You may walk the student to Health and Counselling Services or call HCS to refer the student. Let the student know about the Vancouver Crisis Line 604-972-3311 (available 24 hours). In the event of a sexual assault, see [www.sfu.ca/sexual-assault](http://www.sfu.ca/sexual-assault) and help the student find information on their options for support and referrals.