

Identifying and Responding to Students in Distress



SIGNS OF CONCERNS

Communication Style

- Sent multiple messages within a few hours.
- Used multiple modes of communication (i.e. phone, email, social media) to contact the same person repeatedly.
- Contacted multiple staff/faculty about the same issue.
- Sent communication very early in the morning or very late at night (relative to their time zone).
- Used ALL CAPS LOCK as digital shouting.
- Length of communication is out of character for the student.

Behavioural Changes

The more significant the change the greater the concern.

- Stopped responding to communication attempts.
- Stopped participating in class (i.e. discussions, break-out groups, asking questions).
- Stopped attending class, events, or extracurriculars.

Language Use

Direct or Indirect References to Wanting to Die by Suicide

- Expressed thoughts that world/family/friends would be better off without them.
- Expressed thoughts of being a burden.
- Expressed wanting to die by suicide.
- If a student indicates having a plan, call 911.

Hopelessness and Isolation

- Expressed feelings of hopelessness and loneliness.
- Expressed feeling cut off or ostracized from social interaction or social group.

Video Calls

- Suddenly stopped using video.
- Background displayed offensive imagery or severely unhygienic conditions.

3 KEY THINGS TO REMEMBER

1

Know the student's current location

If you need to contact emergency services for a student in immediate distress, knowing a student's current location is vital information. Ask about a student's whereabouts at the beginning of a virtual interaction as part of rapport-building. It is useful to have the information before a situation escalates.

2

Set clear expectations

If you set clear expectations with your online class or group, it will be easier to detect when a student is deviating from them. For example, you should outline how you take attendance, when you typically respond to messages and how/when you prefer to be contacted.

3

Trust your instincts

It can be hard to express the exact reason you are feeling concerned. If you think a student may be experiencing difficulties, make note of what you are observing and contact Support Services (supportservices@queensu.ca).

WHAT TO DO IF YOU NOTICE SIGNS OF DISTRESS IN A STUDENT?

Emergency Situations

Call 911. For remote students, tell the operator the student's current location as soon as possible.

Situations Requiring Referral/Reporting

CARE Referral System

The CARE Referral System helps to support students by getting them referred to resources early before situations escalate. When a faculty or staff member notices a student who is having difficulties, they can identify this concern by submitting a CARE Referral. An Intake Coordinator will reach out to the student to connect them with appropriate resources and supports.

queensu.ca/carereferral

Counselling Services

Ontario Students Only

Student Wellness Services offers remote counselling sessions via secure video platform or by phone if you are already known to your counsellor. Counsellors will work with students to develop an individualized care plan, which may include additional pre-booked sessions, as well as referrals to skills or therapy groups, mental health resources, and/or other campus services.

queensu.ca/studentwellness/counselling-services

Situations Requiring Attention

Empower Me

Connect confidentially for free - 24/7, 365 days per year with qualified counsellors, consultants, and life coaches for various areas of expertise.

queensu.ca/studentwellness/empower-me

