IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

A Guide for Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff are often in the best position to notice a student who may be in crisis or distress. Your frequent interactions with individual students might make you particularly aware of changes in their behaviour that may signal emotional distress. You play an instrumental role in helping the student seek and receive the assistance they need.

Common signs that a learner may be struggling include:

- problems with academic performance
- repeated requests for special consideration
- changes in behaviour (tearful, irritable)
- significant changes in weight
- A learner may also make direct or indirect reference to suicide or intent to harm another person

Any reference to suicide should be taken seriously and a mental health team should be contacted. Depending on the level of concern, this may include reaching out to Learner Experience, a Crisis Centre or bringing the student to the closest Emergency Department.

Levels of Distress

An **EMERGENCY** means someone's life is in imminent danger.

If you have immediate concerns about safety, call 911. When calling from an on-campus phone, this will connect you to the Campus Safety and Emergency Services (London) or Campus Community Police (Windsor).

A **CRISIS** is any event or period that will lead to, or can possibly lead to, an unstable or dangerous situation. In that moment that individual may not be able to cope. This highly distressing situation requires urgent attention – but it is not immediately life threatening.

During the week, **call** the **Learner Experience Office at**:

- London: 519-661-4234
- Windsor:519-253-3000 ext. 4312

London office hours are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8:30 am - 4:30 pm and on Wednesday from 11:30 am - 7:30 pm.

Windsor Office hours are Monday to Friday 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Students may wish to connect with Health and Wellness at Western 519-661-3030 or Student Health Services at Windsor 519- 973-7002.

Students requiring assistance after hours should be referred to:

- Good2Talk at 1-866- 925-5454
- Reach Out (London) 519-433-2023
- CMHA Walk-in Crisis Centre- 519-433-2023 (London); 519-973-4435 (Windsor)

For **NON-CRISIS** situations, where the student is distressed or struggling, they may still benefit from a referral to the various support services on campus. This can include Learner Experience, Student Health at Western and Windsor or more specific resources such as Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Supports, 519-661-3568.

Responding to a Student in Distress

- **Observe** – In your role, you may know the students well and notice subtle changes.
- **It is OK to ask**. You should not try to diagnose, but it is absolutely appropriate to take someone aside privately and share what you have noticed. Tell them that you are concerned and ask if they are OK.
- **Be prepared** for what they have to say.
- Also be prepared that they may dismiss your concerns. **Keep the door open.**
- **Take their concerns seriously** and try not to minimize.
- **Know where to get help**. Provide them with resources and ideally connect them with those resources. Remember Learner Experience is here to help.
- **Know your limits.** If there are concerns about safety, you may not be able to keep confidentiality. You may also need to get others involved.

The Learner Experience Team is here to support a future generation of physicians and dentists in their personal well-being, academic success and professional development. Our service areas include:

- Health and Safety
- Mental Health Services
- Learner Wellness
- Academic Support
- Career Management
- Learner Mistreatment Support

To learn more, go to https://www.schulich.uwo.ca/learner_experience/ or contact us at learner.experience@schulich.uwo.ca (London) or learnerexperience@uwindsor.ca (Windsor).

December 2021

Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry

Pathways for Students in Distress

Step One: **NOTICE**
Is the student in distress?

YES → Step Two: **LISTEN**
Is the student in IMMEDIATE risk to themselves or others?

NO → N/A

YES → **CALL 911**
Have learner back up contact information if you are providing assistance remotely.

NO → Step Three: **CONNECT**
Is the student in crisis but not immediately at risk?

YES → **NEXT STEPS**:

- Call LEO to see if you can arrange an immediate meeting with Laura Donelan (L) 519.661.4234 or Laura Little (W) 519.253.3000 ext. 4312
- Call Student Health Services at 519 661-3030 for a same day crisis appointment. A trusted adult should accompany the learner to the appointment (you, LEO staff, family member, or friend).
- After hours: Contact Crisis Services (24/7) for next steps:
  - London – Reach Out- 519.433.2023
  - Windsor – 519.973.4435

NO → **EXPLORE** what sort of accommodations and support might alleviate some of the student's distress

Connect Students as appropriate:

- Refer to LEO London/Windsor
- Refer to Student Health Services – 519 661-3030 (L)/ 519.973.7002 (W)
- Western Financial Aid – 82100
- Human Rights Office
  - L: humanrights@uwo.ca
  - W: ohrea@uwindsor.ca
- Office of the Ombudsperson – ombuds@uwo.ca
- Code of Student Conduct – studentconduct@uwo.ca
- Gender-Based Violence and Survivor Support Case Management (L) support@uwo.ca
- Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct (W) svssupport@uwindsor.ca
- Accessible Education – aew@uwo.ca
- Indigenous support Services (L) is.staff@uwo.ca
- Aboriginal Education Centre (W) katpasq@uwindsor.ca
- Food support: L: foodsupport@westernusc.ca
- Campus Food Bank W: foodpantry@uwindsor.ca