



**RECOGNIZE,
RESPOND TO,
AND REFER
A STUDENT
IN DISTRESS**

UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO



MENTAL HEALTH: SETTING THE CONTEXT

The mental health of students at post-secondary institutions has become a prominent topic of discussion across Canada. At University of Waterloo, student mental health is an important focus for administrators, staff, healthcare providers, and faculty.

The National College Health Assessment II (NCHA-II) is a national research survey used to assist colleges and universities in collecting data about their students' habits, behaviours, and perceptions on health topics. The last NCHA survey was administered at University of Waterloo in 2016.

KEY FINDINGS

61.5%

of students felt
hopeless in the
last year

89.9%

of students felt
overwhelmed by what
they needed to do

44.5%

of students felt so
depressed it was
difficult to function

SO, WHY THIS GUIDE?

One of the themes that emerged during the President's Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health (PAC-SMH) process was the need for greater awareness of services available on campus. Given that faculty and staff can often be the first to notice the signs of mental health concerns amongst students, this guide is intended to help you learn more about how to help students who might come to you in distress and what resources are available to support your students.

RECOGNIZING THE INDICATORS OF STRESS AND DISTRESS

WHAT ARE COMMON SIGNS OF STUDENTS IN DISTRESS?

- > A sudden disinterest in, or absence from, class
- > Excessive fatigue
- > Self-harm behaviours
- > Difficulty controlling emotions
- > Sudden social withdrawal
- > Feelings of hopelessness
- > Patterns of perfectionism
- > Excessive use of alcohol

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS OUR STUDENTS FACE?

STRESS

All people experience stress at some time in their lives, usually when high pressures or demands are placed on them. When stress becomes chronic and overwhelming it might be time to find help.

ANXIETY

Most people experience anxiety in their lifetime. The body has a natural response to anxiety inducing situations, called the flight or fight response, which helps us avoid dangerous situations. For some people, anxiety and worry can create a debilitating feeling that makes it difficult to manage daily tasks.

DEPRESSION

Depression is most often associated with a period of low mood and sadness. There are many types of depression that can be impacted by different factors.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Find more definitions and symptom information on the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health website.

camh.ca

ASSISTING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE OR SELF-HARM

An encounter with a suicidal person is a deeply emotional experience. Basic empathy and offers of hope and help are key ingredients in the intervention process.

› **NEVER PROMISE CONFIDENTIALITY**

If you feel the person is at risk of self-harm or harming others, don't hesitate to inform someone who can help.

› **BE WILLING TO DISCUSS FEELINGS**

Allow the person to discuss the suicidal thoughts and feelings to determine the immediacy of the danger and determine the best referral source.

› **SHOW CONCERN AND OFFER HOPE**

Verbally and non-verbally indicate your general concern by listening completely and expressing your concern for the person's safety.

› **KEEP THEM SAFE AND REFER**

Do not leave the person alone. Phone Campus Wellness (Counselling Services at ext. 32655 or Health Services at 519-888-4096) or Campus Police (at ext. 22222), express the urgency of your concerns, and stay with the person until help arrives, or walk the individual to Campus Wellness. Outside of Campus Wellness office hours, please contact Police Services and they can help direct you to the right resources.

DIVERSITY AND MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS

Students from diverse or marginalized backgrounds face unique concerns and challenges.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Depending on the student's home culture, students may feel a significant stigma about seeking support. They may also be afraid that a record of their visits to Counselling Services would appear on their transcript or that the school will call their parents. You can share that getting help from a Campus Wellness department is confidential within the bounds of the law and a record will not appear on their transcript. Assure them that everyone needs support at some point in their life, and reaching out for help is completely normal.

RACIALIZED STUDENTS AND PEOPLE OF COLOUR

People of colour, indigenous students, or racialized students may face unique experiences such as racism, hate crimes, or other inequalities. These experiences may compound or combine with other stressors they face and add to their distress.

LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

Students who identify as LGBTQ+ may experience stigma and discrimination across their life spans and are often targets of sexual and physical assault, harassment, and hate crimes.

According to Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and Rainbow Health Ontario:

- › **LGBTQ+ people** face higher rates of depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive and phobic disorders, suicidality, self-harm, substance use and have increased risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- › **LGBTQ+ youth** face approximately 14 times the risk of suicide and substance abuse than heterosexual peers.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Many graduate students report mental health concerns while studying. It is important to remember that graduate students have a unique set of concerns and experiences. In a 2015 study from University of California, Berkeley 47% of graduate students reported suffering from depression.

UNIQUE STRESSORS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

- > Working relationships with supervisors
- > Stress around key publication dates
- > Work-life balance
- > Family expectations
- > Feelings of isolation
- > Financial strain

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- > Set clear and reasonable expectations with your graduate students about work levels, how often you will meet, and how involved you wish to be in their research.
- > Provide and encourage supportive networking opportunities such as conferences and graduate student association contacts.
- > Value your student's need for work-life balance.
- > Provide supportive feedback.

RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

HOW AND WHEN TO TAKE ACTION

Faculty or staff members are often the first to notice a student struggling. You can provide useful information to assist the student in getting help. You should not adopt the role of parent or counsellor or try to diagnose a student.

If you are comfortable doing so, speaking directly to the student and expressing your concern can often help someone take the first steps to getting help. If you are not comfortable approaching the student, contact Counselling Services at ext. 32655 and ask for advice about the situation.

WHERE TO REFER

COUNSELLING SERVICES

519-888-4567, ext. 32655

HEALTH SERVICES

519-888-4096

GOOD2TALK

1-866-925-5454

HERE 24/7

1-844-437-3247

GRAND RIVER HOSPITAL

519-749-4300



KEEP THE FOLLOWING TIPS IN MIND IF YOU CHOOSE TO SPEAK DIRECTLY WITH SOMEONE YOU THINK IS STRUGGLING

- › Meet in a private place where you won't be interrupted
- › Express your concern in a positive tone and point out specific behaviours that concern you
- › Ask how things are going for the student
- › Listen with empathy and without judgment, encourage them to elaborate
- › Remember, opening up can be difficult and emotional for both you and the student
- › Avoid promising to keep the student's concerns a secret. If the student expresses something that might indicate a safety risk, you should always contact someone else who can help
- › Ensure you let the student know about the different options to get help

AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

Due to confidentiality policies, Campus Wellness is not able to provide an update on how a student you refer is or the progress of their appointment, unless the student gives permission to do so. Campus Wellness encourages you to reach out to any student that you refer to a Campus Wellness Service to see how they are doing and continue the conversation with them.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

Try a Campus Wellness Mental Health Training opportunity to learn more about responding to people with mental health concerns or in crisis. Learn more about the different training options available on our website at

uwaterloo.ca/campus-wellness/faculty-and-staff

The Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) provides a great list of resources for creating supportive and positive learning environments.

uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Responding to a student in crisis can be tough and overwhelming. Remember to look after your own health as you navigate difficult situations. If you need support or debriefing assistance, consider the following resources.

EMPLOYEE AND FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Employee and Family Assistance Plan provides support for employees of the University. The EFAP is a complement to the current benefits program, at no additional cost to employees. In addition to providing confidential counselling services, the program also offers Life Smart Services – a series of work-life services for expert advice, information, and coaching that you can access and use in your own way. You can call the EFAP at 1-800-663-1142.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Occupational Health maintains, promotes and restores employee health, safety and well-being. Occupational Health:

- > Strives to assist you to maximize the relationship between your job and your health
- > Fosters healthier working environments
- > Promotes healthy lifestyles and behaviours, providing resources and education
- > Is committed to supporting employees in returning to work following an injury or illness
- > Ensures appropriate workplace accommodations

Occupational Health can be found at COM 115 or reached by phone at 519-888-4567 ext. 36264 or ext. 30338.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Occupational Health website:

uwaterloo.ca/occupational-health

Employee and Family Assistance Plan:

uwaterloo.ca/employee-assistance-plan

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CONTACT US

Find us in the Health Services Building
and Needles Hall North.

Contact Counselling Services
519-888-4567, ext. 32655
counselling@uwaterloo.ca

Contact Health Services
519-888-4096

 Facebook: @UWaterlooWellness

 Twitter: @UW_Wellness

 Instagram: @UWaterlooWellness

View more information online at

uwaterloo.ca/campus-wellness



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