mental health WORKS

Starting the Conversation:

Raising our awareness of
student mental health

Resource Booklet
for Instructors

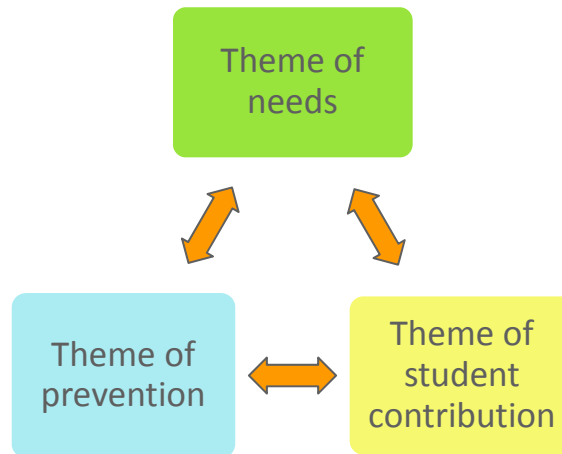**ALGONQUIN COLLEGE**
Student Support
Services

Algonquin Students' Association

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Starting the Conversation
Raising our Awareness of Student Mental Health

The Mental Health Works Themed Approach
adapted for the instructor-student conversation

Theme of needs

Theme of prevention

Theme of student contribution

This approach is designed to be used when a focused conversation between instructor and student will help uncover solutions to issues affecting the student's success. In this approach the instructor and student sit down together and explore three themes: the theme of needs, in which the student's needs are explored, the theme of student contribution, in which the student considers how to contribute to their own success at school, and the theme of prevention which looks at addressing issues in the future should they arise.

This document contains many questions to use in the conversation. Not all of the questions apply in every situation. Use the questions that explore areas that are important in the current situation, based on the challenges and issues the student is facing. At the end there are further general empowering questions that can be used at any time in the process.

As you discuss these questions together, it is likely that areas of unmet needs will be uncovered. When those areas are uncovered, together you can then begin to think of different ways, or strategies, to help meet those needs.

All three themes are important. It may take more than one meeting to go through all three themes thoroughly.

EXPLORING PRACTICAL, PROCESS AND PERSON NEEDS

In this themed area, the conversation can look at three kinds of needs:
practical needs, process needs and person needs.

Practical Needs

Exploring practical needs about:	Questions to explore practical needs
Assignments and tasks	Are my materials for the course organized? Do I understand what all my tasks are for this course? Do I know what is expected of me in this course? Do I know how to begin an assignment? Do I know how to use the library and other sources of information? Do I know how to get materials: textbooks, photocopies, library access, student card, etc.
Learning needs	How do I learn best? How can I best demonstrate my learning? What is my motivation for taking this course? What is the most interesting part of the course for me? What is the least interesting part of the course for me?
Physical wellbeing	Do I have a comfortable place to study? Do I feel comfortable in the classroom? Do I have any needs about where I sit? With whom I sit? Is my living situation comfortable and conducive to study? Am I eating well? Do I have some form of physical activity? Do I have any concerns about my physical safety?
Attending class	Are there challenges with attending class? Is it difficult for me to get to class on time? What contributes to this difficulty? Is the time of day difficult for me? Is the size of the class difficult for me? Is the style of instruction conducive to my learning?
Equipment, technology	Do I have all the equipment I need? Is there any technology that could help me that I don't have?

Process Needs

Exploring process needs about:	Questions to explore process needs
Assignments	Do I understand the processes regarding assignments?

How information is shared	Do I feel that I have access to information that applies to my studies? Do I know who to ask if I have questions? Do I know what to do if I still don't have an answer that I understand?
Group work	Do I understand the expectations of group work? Do I have choice about group work partners? Do I know who is relying on me for my part of group work? Do I know on whom I rely for other parts of group work? Do I struggle with any part of group work? Do I know what to do if I am struggling with group work?
How my work is evaluated	Do I understand how my work is evaluated? Do I know what standard I am being expected to maintain?

Person Needs

Exploring person needs about:	Questions to explore person needs
Being heard, being understood	Do I feel heard in this course? Do I feel that my instructor understands me? Do I feel that students in my group understand me? What does it look like when I feel heard and understood? What does it mean to me to be heard and understood?
Appreciation	Do I believe my instructor sees me as a whole person that includes a life outside of school? Do I feel appreciated for my attempts? Do I believe my instructor focuses more on the negative? Do I believe my instructor sees the positives in my work?
Autonomy, choice	What does choice in this course mean to me? Do I have choice about how I do my work in this course? With whom I work in this course?
Meaning	Can I see the purpose in succeeding in this course? How can I link succeeding in the course with what I want to do in my life?
Independence, guidance	Do I feel comfortable with how my instructor directs me? Do I wish for my instructor to approach me differently when there are concerns? Do I wish for more input from my instructor? Do I wish for less input from my instructor? Do I understand when my instructor is critical of my work? Do I understand how to improve my work?

Fairness, consistency	Do I feel comfortable in how my work is evaluated? Do I understand the methods my instructor uses to evaluate my work? Do I feel my work is evaluated fairly?
Competence	Do I believe I have the skills and tools to succeed in this course?
Challenge, predictability	Do I wish for more challenge in this course? Less challenge? More variety? More consistency? Do I wish to do more tasks with less depth? Fewer tasks with greater depth?
Clarity, consideration	Do I feel comfortable with how my instructor delivers critical feedback to me? Do I believe my instructor considers my feelings when giving me critical feedback? Are there approaches that my instructor doesn't use that would work better for me when critical feedback is required? How do I want critical feedback given to me?
Inclusion, connection	What do I enjoy about the way students in this course interact? What do I wish were different? Do I enjoy the way I interact with them? Do I feel included? Are there any aspects of me that I feel are not included? e.g. age, gender, LGBTQ, disability, learning style, ethnicity, background, etc. What does inclusion look like to me? How do we deal with conflict in class or work groups? Do I enjoy the way we deal with conflict? Do I wish for conflict to be dealt with differently? What does it look like for conflict to be dealt with in a way that works for me?

Are there <u>any</u> other issues or areas (large or small) that haven't been explored?

EXPLORING STUDENT'S CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR OWN SUCCESS

These are not questions to demand an answer, rather to give the student a safe space to uncover how to contribute positively to success and wellbeing at school. Sometimes students need time to reflect on these questions because they can be difficult to answer, or can cause emotions to rise to the surface. If during this exploration, more unmet needs are uncovered from the above section, the discussion can go back to exploring those needs before continuing further with exploring student contribution.

Needs that may be explored	Questions to explore the student's contribution
Autonomy, ease, self-worth	What am I willing to do to contribute to my own success at school? In this course? When I feel at ease at school, what am I doing? What am I remembering to do easily? What do I forget to do? What I am I not doing? What do I avoid doing? Why am I avoiding it? What could I do differently when I am avoiding?
Connection, inclusion, mutuality	What am I willing to do to contribute to connection with other students? What can I do right away to demonstrate my wish to connect with them? What can I do to include them? What does it look like when I demonstrate inclusion to my fellow students?
Comfort, ease, consideration of others	What am I willing to do to regulate my emotions in the classroom and/or online? What methods can I use to reduce outbursts, anger, arguing or other behaviours that do not contribute to comfort and ease for me and others? What am I willing to do if I am experiencing conflict with my instructor? What am I willing to do if I am experiencing conflict with other students? How can I contribute to positive processes around conflict?
Self-knowledge, self-management	What are my early signs that I need help? What are my early warning signs that I am not coping well? How can I pay attention to my early warning signs more effectively? What can I do when I notice early warning signs? What are my triggers in the classroom? What are my triggers outside of the classroom? What are my triggers online? What can I do when I notice I may be or I am triggered? What will I do to help me stay focused on my own success in this course? Who can I turn to for support at school? Who can I turn to for support outside of school? How can I build a strong support network for myself?

Needs that may be explored	Questions to explore the student's contribution
Self-reliance, support	What am I willing to do to make requests for help when I need it? What will I do to help myself try first, before asking for help?
Comfort, ease, health, rest	What am I willing to do to contribute to my wellbeing in terms of self care? What am I willing to do about managing key components of health at school and outside of school? Some examples to consider: • physical activity • healthy eating, limiting caffeine, limiting or eliminating alcohol/drug use • adequate sleep • intentional stress-reduction – meditation, relaxation, yoga, etc. • seeking support
Cooperation, contribution, mutuality	If I notice problems arising again, what am I willing to do to help my instructor address the issues as early as possible? How will I address being on time for class? How will I avoid unnecessary absences? What will I do to maintain appropriate appearance and behaviour?
Consistency, trust	What will I do to show that I take responsibility for my actions? For my intentions? For my commitment to success? How will I demonstrate the same desires of how I want to be treated towards others? Are there any other issues or areas (large or small) that haven't been explored?
Are there any other issues or areas (large or small) that haven't been explored?	

EXPLORING PREVENTION

Now that needs have been fully explored and the student's contribution has been fully explored, it is important to plan ahead just in case problems arise again in the future. It is possible that this part of the discussion will uncover unmet needs and/or areas of student contribution, so it may be necessary to move back to the other two areas before continuing in discussing prevention.

Needs that may be explored	Questions to explore the theme of prevention
Predictability, trust, comfort	If the same problems arise again in the future, how do I wish them to be handled? What approaches work best for me? What do I wish my instructor to say if he/she notices the same problems? What do I wish my fellow students to do if they notice that my behaviour is "off"? What does my "off" behaviour look like?
Security, trust, comfort	If different problems arise in the future, how would I like them to be handled? What approaches work best for me? What do I wish my instructor to say if different problems are noticed? What do I wish my instructor to do if the same problems are noticed? Who can I turn to at work if I am feeling unwell? Who can I turn to if I need support? Who are the people in my support network that I can let my instructor know about in case of crisis?
Connection, trust, hope	How do I want to communicate with my group about my needs? How do I want to consider what the needs of others in my group might be?
Clarity, support	What language works best for letting others know that I am noticing problems? How do I want others to let me know that they have noticed problems?
Predictability, security	How will we each follow up on what we have explored in this meeting? What are our action items?
Support, information	Where do we need support, information, resources, assistance?
Are there <u>any</u> other issues or areas (large or small) that haven't been explored?	

EMPOWERING QUESTIONS – follow all with "And what else?"

What would be helpful?
How can things be done in a way that works for me?
How can things change to work better for me?
What has worked well in the past?
What parts work well now?
What does it look like when that need of mine is met?
What is a solution that I think would make this better for everyone?
What do I care about in this situation?
What am I committed to?
If I knew I would succeed, what would I do?
If I were to raise the bar, what would it look like?
What are my choices?
What do I need help with? Who can help me with that?
In an ideal world, how would I face this problem?
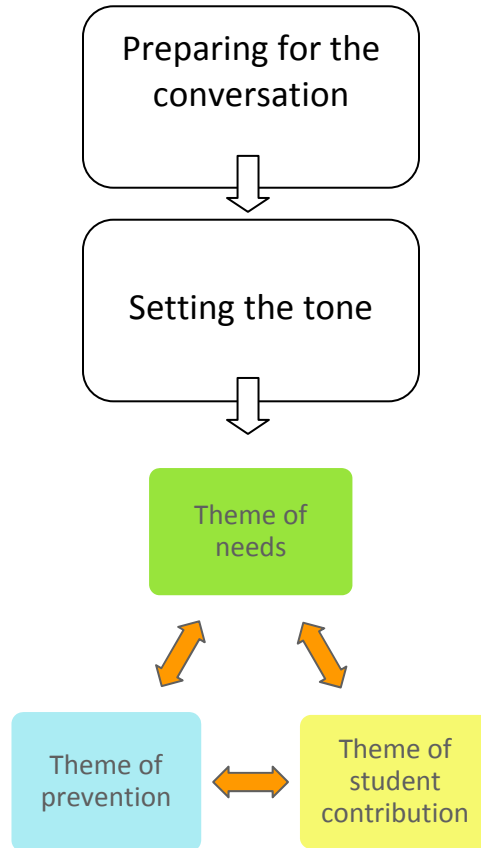What can I stop doing so that I can make room for what is important?
What am I doing now that IS working?
If I only focused on one thing, what would it be?
What might I do differently next time?
When I am at my best, what is different?

Preparing to use
The Mental Health Works Themed Approach
as adapted for the instructor-student conversation

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Preparing for the conversation

The preparation for your meeting is as important as the meeting itself. Your positive attitude and information-seeking approach are vital to the success of the meeting. You play a big role in setting the tone, building trust, and incorporating the student's perspective into solutions.

It's easier to engage fully in the conversation with your student when you feel:

- Calm
- Hopeful for a successful outcome to the meeting
- Physically comfortable
- Curious about what's going on for the student
- Open to finding solutions

Consider the following and where you are on each of these bands in relation to how you feel about the student and the meeting you are about to have.

I feel calm	--------	I feel nervous
I feel confident	--------	I feel worried
I feel supported	--------	I feel alone
I feel I have enough time	--------	I feel rushed
I have eaten	--------	I am hungry
I am hydrated	--------	I am thirsty
My stomach feels fine	--------	My stomach hurts
My head feels fine	--------	I have a headache
I feel rested	--------	I feel tired
I feel alert	--------	I feel sleepy

I am wondering about the student's needs   --------   I don't care about the student's needs

I am able to step back from any previous assumptions I may have made   --------   I'm not able to step back from assumptions

I believe that I am missing important information about the student's perspective   --------   I believe that I have got this student figured out

I trust this student   --------   I don't trust this student

I am confident that I can find solutions   --------   I doubt we'll make any progress

I believe there are solutions that will benefit everyone   --------   I believe we'd be better off without this student

I value this student   --------   I do not value this student

I can share with this student what I value about them   --------   I would find it hard to find anything to share about how I value this student

I am glad that I have this opportunity to turn around a difficult situation   --------   I wish someone else could do this

If you notice that you are more towards the right side of any of these bands, you may want to:
- Take care of your physical needs for food, water, rest, relaxation
- Engage the support of someone you trust – your supervisor, a colleague, other resources
- Practice what you will say to the student with your supervisor, or a colleague
- Take time to give yourself the opportunity to change your mindset about the student so that you can be open to finding solutions
- Take time to come up with at least one reason why you value this student so that you can share it with the student when you are setting the tone for the meeting.

<u>Taking care of your own needs</u>

Sometimes we engage in behaviour that are strategies to meet our needs, and in doing so cause other needs to be become unmet. For example, suppose as the meeting progresses, you may find that you want to interrupt the student to correct some of their assumptions that you know are wrong and seem very unfair. This urge to correct the student is an indication that your need for fairness perhaps is not being met. If you were to try to meet this need by interrupting the student and correcting their assumption, you may cause the student to feel like you are engaging in an argument instead of in a collaborative kind of conversation. The student's need for expression, need for being heard may not be met. Your need for fairness is important, but consider not trying to get it met during this conversation.

<u>Other needs that may become unmet while we are using a themed approach</u>

Our need for expression (it's about finding out what works for the student)
Our need for support (it's about being there to support the student)
Our need for recognition (the student may not yet be ready to acknowledge your efforts)

Consider how to meet these needs in other ways before and after the meeting with your student.

Setting the tone

Setting the tone means indicating to the student by what you say and do that you feel positively about the student and are optimistic about finding solutions.

There are many ways to do this. Here are some suggestions for setting a positive tone.

"I value you as a student. This is what I value about you _____."

You may need to take some time during your preparation to find a reason to value the student if there have been ongoing or long-standing problems. Share why you value the student with

the student at the beginning of the conversation. This can contribute to meeting the student's need for validation and recognition.

"Our previous discussions have not gone as well as I had hoped. I'm hoping to use a new approach today to help us find solutions. This is what the approach looks like."

Share with the student the handout *The Mental Health Works Themed Approach adapted for the instructor-student conversation*. Indicate that you want to approach things differently – you may need to do this if you have had unsuccessful and ineffective discussions with the student. The student may believe that this meeting will be just like the others. Stating that your intention is to do things differently may be an important piece of information for the student. And showing the student the approach you intend to use can be help the student engage in the process.

Indicate that you are willing and able to continue to work together to find solutions – you may need to reiterate this if the student feels cynical about the process or hopeless about finding solutions.

A. If a student appears to be at imminent risk of harm, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, in a psychotic break or unable to care for themselves and/or is not co-operative   :

- Contact Safety and Security Services at extension 5000 or through one of the emergency phones on campus. They can call 911.

B. If the student is not in immediate danger and is cooperative:

- The student can be brought to:
  Health Services, C-141 or Welcome Desk, Student Support Services, E-3rd floor
  1. At Health Services, C-141:
     Briefly describe the situation to Reception. The student will be seated in a front-area office. A nurse will be notified. The student is a priority. The nurse will meet with the student in the front office. The nurse completes a risk assessment with the student.
  2. At Student Support Services, E-3rd floor:
     Briefly describe the situation to Reception. The student will be seated in a front-area office. A counsellor will be notified. The student is a priority. The counsellor will meet with the student in the front office. The counsellor completes a risk assessment with the student.

  Reception stays on hand to call security if requested. Another nurse or counsellor may be asked to assist.

  The nurse, counselor or security will inform emergency personnel of the situation.

  3. If security and emergency personnel are not required, the nurse or counsellor will complete a risk assessment, safety plan, and follow up plan with the student.

C. If the student is not in immediate danger, but it is after hours, contact Safety and Security or the Mental Health Crisis Line at 613-722-6914. They can activate the Mobile Mental Health Unit or call 911 if necessary.

Starting the Conversation:
raising our awareness of student mental health
Further study for faculty

This document contains supplemental activities for you to engage with if you wish to further your exploration of the issues related to student mental health. You may use these in any way you wish: on your own for self-reflection, or in groups with one or more of your colleagues.

<u>Activity 1</u>

Consider the following statements.

What is your reaction to them? Do you ever have these thoughts? Have you heard others say them? What are you reactions when you are thinking them? Or when others are saying them?

What are your thoughts, feelings and beliefs about each of them?

- "I've never met anyone who has a mental illness."

- "Working with stressed out students stresses me out."

- "Dealing with health issues among students is not part of my job."

- "Who can I turn to when I need support?"

- "I can't help someone who refuses my help."

- "I get stressed just thinking about having to talk to that student – we never get anywhere."

- "This student seems to be blaming the school and me for her anxiety disorder."

- "I can't get the student to take any responsibility for his behaviour."

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<u>Activity 2 - Case Study</u>

From across the cafeteria you hear a commotion involving Ben, one of your students. You turn to see Ben grabbing another student, Jane, very forcefully.

Make a list of all the possible reasons you can think of for Ben's behaviour.

Then consider the following:

Would you have made different assumptions if you knew that Ben

- was a top student who recently received an award from the college for outstanding contribution

OR

- was on academic probation

OR

- had a disability plan

Were your reasons different based on the three possible scenarios for Ben's history?

How does knowledge of someone's history affect our assumptions?

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<u>Activity 3 - Case Study</u>

Julie is a student who has been in your class for the past two months and lately seems to be struggling with a noticeable decrease in the quality of her assignments. You've noticed several changes:

-she appears to have decreased energy and enthusiasm in class
-she doesn't contribute during class at all anymore
-she seems to sit as far away as she can from other student
-her marks are slipping from high 80s to low 60s

You have asked Julie if everything is okay, and she has said that she will try harder, nothing is wrong and she doesn't need any help. You have reminded her that Student Services can be a great support for students. She repeated that she doesn't need any help. You are increasingly frustrated by her refusal to be helped and you feel dread with having to give her a failing grade, as she was a high performing student at the beginning of the course.

Last class, you approached Julie again, telling her that you were concerned about her marks and her wellbeing. You offered to meet with her later today in your office, and she agreed. You plan to use the Mental Health Works Themed Approach in your conversation with Julie.

Before the meeting, consider:

- How would you prepare yourself before you meet with Julie?
- When you meet with Julie, what might you say that would be different from before?
- What questions might you use from the resource document: *The Mental Health Works Themed Approach adapted for the instructor-student conversation*

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Alice, Ken and Jacob are three students in a work group in your class. You have noticed an escalating dynamic among the three of them that is concerning to you. Generally in your class students are respectful and supportive of each other. During group work time, Alice and Ken engage in humourous banter that can involve poking fun at people, directed equally at all classmates, including themselves. The other students generally seem to find this to be funny and you have enjoyed that the humour creates a happy mood in the classroom. In your opinion, the humour is light-hearted and not demeaning. Lately, however, you've noticed that when the humour is directed at Jacob, he doesn't laugh along with everyone else. He appears upset and angry, and he defends himself.

You've noticed that Alice and Ken poke fun at aspects of Jacob's character related to his striving for perfection, his behaviour of checking his work very carefully, and his attention to detail. Jacob has a disability plan that includes only one accommodation requiring him to have additional time to complete tests and exams. You do not know what the disability is.

Consider the following:

- What are the potential short and long-term problems of not addressing the issue?
- Consider the situation from Alice and Ken's perspective, and from Jacob's.
- What needs might Alice and Ken be meeting by engaging in this behaviour?
- What needs of Jacob's might be unmet when Alice and Ken engage in this behaviour?
- If you were to have a conversation with Jacob, what would you say?
- Think about what questions you might ask from the resource document: *The Mental Health Works Themed Approach adapted for the instructor-student conversation*

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Algonquin Resources - Links

Heading	Title	URL
Resources for students	ICopeU List of community resources List of emergency supports in the college	http://icopeu.com/Algonquin/home.html
Resources for students	Student Support Services at the college	http://www3.algonquincollege.com/studentsupportservices/
Resources for students	Your Education-Your Future, A guide to college and university for students with psychiatric disabilities	http://www.cmha.ca/youreducation/
Resources for students	Centre for Students with Disabilities	http://www3.algonquincollege.com/csd/
Resources for students	Student Support Services	http://www3.algonquincollege.com/studentsupportservices/
Resources for students	Mind Your Mind	http://mindyourmind.ca/
Resources for students	The Jack Project	http://www.thejackproject.org/
Mental health	Check up from the neck up	http://www.mooddisorders.ca/quiz2/checkup.php
Mental health	Are you in balance quiz	http://www.cmha.ca/?s=&submit=Search&lang=en
Mental health	What's your stress index quiz	http://www.cmha.ca/?s=&submit=Search&lang=en
Mental health	Stress Busters	http://mindyourmind.ca/toolbox/stress-busters
Mental health	Coping Kit	http://mindyourmind.ca/toolbox/self-management/coping-kit
Mental illness	Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) fact sheets	http://www.cmha.ca/mental-health/understanding-mental-illness/
Mental illness	Mood Disorders Association of Ontario (MDAO)fact sheets	http://www.mooddisorders.ca/fact-sheets

Policy	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC)	http://www.universityaffairs.ca/universities-to-examine-their-role-in-students-mental-health.aspx
Policy	Mental Health in Canada's Post Secondary Education System	http://www.collegestudentalliance.ca/?post_type=research-publication&p=559