

Identifying Students in Distress

If you have immediate concerns about the student's health or safety, please call Campus Security at 585 4999 or extension 4999

Over the past year at the University of Regina, Counselling Services has seen an increase in students reporting increased levels of mental health distress. This guide is for faculty and staff who might not have an understanding of statements or behaviours that commonly associated with a deterioration in student mental health.

What is a Student in Distress?

“Distressed Student” refers to any University of Regina students that are currently experiencing a reduced ability to cope with the various forms of stress in their lives. The reduced ability to cope can be in the form of an already identified mental illness that the student is aware of, or it can be the result of unforeseen changes in the student's life.

What Are Some of the Causes of Distress?

- Identified health condition that the student is aware of, which has become more pronounced and is impacting the student's functioning. This would include any mental health or medical diagnosis.
- Trauma, either experienced personally or by someone who is close to the student
- Death or illness of a loved one
- Lack of support – social isolation
- Relationships
- Lower than expected grades
- Too many commitments, both academic and personal
- Financial worries
- Drug or Alcohol use
- Being far away from home, limited family contact
- Academic difficulties
- Perfectionism
- Undiagnosed medical condition
- Undiagnosed learning disability

What Are Some of the Signs of A Student in Distress?

Physical Changes

These are changes are a noticeable decline from what was previously observed. They are consistent.

- Lack of focus
- Poor hygiene
- Looking tired
- Unkempt appearance

Behavioural Changes

These actions are observable to the instructor through either the student's verbal or nonverbal behaviour, communication with the instructor, or through submitted work. They can either be consistent from the first day of classes, or they can be a sudden marked change.

- Failure to turn in assignments when previously the student completed all assignments
- Strange or irrational responses on exams or assignments
- Emotional outbursts in class
- Irrational or illogical responses in class
- Threatening statements – **if threat is immediate contact Campus Security**
- Statements of feeling persecuted by other students or instructor when no credible threat exists
- Withdrawal from class participation
- Statements about harm to self or others, either in class, assignments, or through emails
- Appearing physically agitated
- Excessive absences
- Repeated requests for special accommodation
- Disclosure of trauma or assault. This can be trauma or assault directly experienced by the student or by someone close to them
- Significant change in country or community of origin
- Statements about feeling hopeless
- Statements about being suspicious of the motives or intentions of others, when no threat exists

How Can Counselling Services Provide Support?

Counselling Services provides free confidential therapy for students experiencing mental health distress. We also refer students to community providers or agencies when the identified need of the student is greater than what we can provide.

We can provide consultation to faculty and staff that are not sure if there is an actual distress or if faculty think they might have to deliver information to the student that could cause a change in their mental health. For example, if a faculty member has to inform the student that they are not going to pass a course, Counselling Services will work with the faculty member to create support for the student when the student receives the news.

Counselling Services can also provide assessments to confirm or deny the presence of any learning disability or mental illness affecting academic performance. This can help faculty members make informed choices about accommodations, extensions, or deferrals. Counselling Services will provide recommendations, but the final decision rests with the faculty member or department.

How Can I Access Counselling Services?

For consultation you can call 306 585 4497 or extension 4497 within the University. Urgent messages will be returned by the end of business day and non-urgent messages will be returned within 24 hours.

A Care Report is available on the Counselling Services web page under the “For Faculty and Staff” area on the main page. A Care Report is a way for Faculty or staff to identify a student that they believe is experiencing distress. Counselling Services staff will arrange for a consultation with the faculty or staff member and create a care plan to meet the needs of the student.

It can also be accessed here:

<http://www.uregina.ca/student/counselling/facultystaff/index.html>