

IDENTIFYING & REFERRING STUDENTS IN DIFFICULTY

- a basic guide for peer mentors

As a peer mentor, your role in helping students experiencing difficulty starts with:

- Recognizing signs of distress
- Forwarding them to the appropriate resources
- Understanding the limits of your role

This short guide is meant to complement any local training or support available in the department, college, faculty, division, or campus you belong to. Contact: mentorship@utoronto.ca for additional information.

Boundaries and Healthy Limits as a Mentor

- Do not extend yourself beyond your comfort level, skills, time commitment
- Always draw on available resources and referrals. Providing long-term support in the place of professional supports can do more harm than good for a student

How to Identify Students in Difficulty

Signs to look for include:

Changes in Behavior

- Withdrawal from social interactions/academic work
- Disruptive behavior, unexplained bursts
- Noticeably rapid or slow speech

Marked Changes in Mood

- Change in mood from one session/meet-up to the next
- Expressed feelings of hopelessness and despair

Obvious Changes in Appearance

- Noticeable weight loss or gain
- Poor hygiene

Apparent Distortions of Reality

- Suspiciousness
- Irrational conversations

Significant Changes in Identity or Relationships

- Changes in family circumstance or break-ups
- Illness or death of family member or close friend
- Exploration of personal, sexual or cultural identity

Health Concerns

- Long-term illnesses
- Frequent short-term illnesses
- Disordered eating

Serious Academic Concerns

- Missed, late or incomplete assignments
- Violence
- Recent Experience of assault or abuse
- Violence towards self or others
- Previous trauma (stress can trigger problems associated with this)

Situations Requiring Immediate Referral or Action

- **Direct or Indirect Reference to Suicide**
- Indirect references may include feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness
- Unreasonable feelings of guilt
- **Harm to Others**
- Verbal and non-verbal threats
- Intimidating behavior
- Violent acts
- Drug and alcohol abuse

Situations where you may feel unsure, uncomfortable or unstable

- Consult appropriate resources before acting
- Notify your program coordinator or supervisor of your concerns

How to intervene

- Listen carefully to the student as they describe their situation
- Ask questions to clarify that you understand their specific needs
- Acknowledge and express concern
- Offer hope
- Give printed information, use website info or write out phone number
- Arrange to follow-up with the student

If the Student appears hesitant or reluctant to use resources

- Offer to contact resource yourself with the student present
- Offer to sit with the student while they contact the resource
- Offer to accompany the student to the appointment

Points of Contact

- University of Toronto Campus Police - (416) 978-2222
- Community Safety Officer - (416) 978-1485

For a complete list of Emergency Contacts across Three U of T Campuses

- www.communitysafety.utoronto.ca