ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY
MENTAL HEALTH

HELPING A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

This document is a guide to recognizing signs of a student in distress, how to respond in the moment, and who to contact or refer.

1 – RECOGNIZE signs that a student is experiencing mental health concerns.

ACADEMIC SIGNS

- Repeated absences
- Decline in work quality
- Classroom disruptions
- Repeated requests for special provisions outside of formal accommodation plan
- Intense focus on perfectionism
- Extreme responses to grades or other evaluations

PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Changes in physical appearance, including decreased personal hygiene
- Excessive fatigue or falling asleep in class repeatedly
- Noticeable cuts, bruises, or burns
- Frequent or chronic illness
- Disorganized, rapid, or slurred speech
- Bloodshot or watery eyes
- Smelling of alcohol or other signs of intoxication

EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS

- Difficulty controlling emotions
- Excessive tearfulness, anxiety, irritability, and/or apathy
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Aggressive, excessively demanding, or dependent behaviour
- Disclosure of distress (e.g., family problems, financial difficulties, loss)
- Shakiness, tremors, fidgeting, pacing, and/or inability to make eye contact
- Expressions of concern from student's peers

SAFETY SIGNS

- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Disturbing content in assignments (e.g., violence, suicide, and/or death)
- Implied or direct threats to harm self or others (e.g., *I'm going away for a long time* or *It won't matter soon*).

EMERGENCY SIGNS

- Physical or verbal aggression towards themselves, others, animals, or property
- Lack of response to the external environment. For example, the student is:
  - Incoherent or passed out
  - Demonstrating a severe disturbance of cognitive, behavioural, or emotional functioning
  - Displaying disruptive behaviour that appears to be out of control

Updated September 2023

2 - RESPOND appropriately to a student who needs support based on the signs present, your relationship with them, and whether you have time to respond in the moment.

A student experiencing the above signs may ***not*** be experiencing mental health concerns. A helpful rule is to watch for ***changes*** and respond to...

SEVERAL LESSER SIGNS

- **OPTION 1:** ***"I have a relationship or rapport with the student."***

PREPARE:

- Choose a time and place where you can speak privately
- Ensure you have time to listen
- Minimize potential distractions (e.g., phone calls or emails)
- Remember supportive body language (e.g., mirror their body language, leave space for silence, respect cultural differences)

START THE CONVERSATION:

- Refer to specific behaviours (e.g., *I noticed you missed three classes last week*) and avoid judgments (e.g., *I noticed you've been skipping a lot of classes*)
- Share your concern and ask permission to talk (e.g., *I am concerned about... Would it be okay if we talked about...*)
- Use tentative language to provide room for disagreement (e.g., *I may be wrong, but...*)
- If you are concerned about suicide risk, ask the student if they are considering suicide. Asking will ***not*** make them consider suicide.

BALANCE PRIVACY AND SAFETY:

- Do ***not*** promise privacy. Safety always comes first. Be honest with the student that you must disclose what they tell you to emergency and/or mental health services if safety is a concern.
- Only ask for the information you need to connect the student to appropriate resources and services. Do ***not*** ask for detailed information (e.g., diagnosis, details of an assault, family history). If the student shares detailed information, gently inform them that you only need enough information to help connect them to a resource or service that can help.

- **OPTION 2:** ***"I do not have a relationship or rapport with the student."***

EMAIL THE MENTAL HEALTH COORDINATOR (mentalhealth@stu.ca) and ask for assistance.

ONE OR MORE SAFETY RISK SIGNS

PLEASE CONTACT

- Campus Security **506-453-4830** (24/7, 365 days per year) or
- Mobile Crisis Unit **506-453-2132** (available noon to 10 p.m., 7 days a week, including statutory holidays) or
- Chimo Helpline **506-450-4357** or **1-800-667-5005** (available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year) and ask for assistance

ONE OR MORE EMERGENCY SIGNS

PLEASE CONTACT

- Campus Security **506-453-4830** (24/7, 365 days per year) or
- Emergency Services **911**

3 – REFER a student to mental health services and resources in an appropriate way.

- Be aware of the resources and services listed below so your referrals are appropriate and helpful to the student
- Acknowledge your limitations (e.g., *I am not the best person to help with this, but there are resources and services available that can help you*)
- Normalize the need to ask for help (e.g., *We all need to access help at different times*)
- Emphasize personal control (e.g., *It is your decision, not mine*)
- Let them know there are options (e.g., *There are a variety of options available*)
- Wrap up the conversation
  - -Thank the student for speaking with you (e.g., *I appreciate your willingness to speak with me*)
  - -Acknowledge the conversation may have been difficult (e.g., *I know it takes courage to talk about this*)
  - -Review next steps (e.g., *Before you go, let's review how you'll connect to those referrals*)
  - -Keep the door open (e.g., *Please reach out again if you need anything*), but do not promise availability (do ***not*** say "*I'm here any time*" or give your personal email or phone number)

CRISIS SERVICES

MOBILE CRISIS UNIT Addiction and Mental Health Services **Call** 506-453-2132 **Hours of operation:** Noon to 10 p.m., 7 days a week, including statutory holidays **You will speak to a registered social worker or nurse.**	**CHIMO HELPLINE** **Call** 506-450-4357 (Fredericton area) or 1-800-667-5005 (toll-free, province-wide only) **Hours of operation:** 24 hours per day, 365 days per year **You will talk to someone trained in crisis intervention.**
TALK SUICIDE CANADA **Call** 1-833-456-4566 (available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year) **Text** 45645 from 5pm-1am **You will talk to someone trained in suicide prevention.**	**CALL 911** or visit your local hospital. The hospital closest to STU campus: **Dr. Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital** **Phone:** 506-452-5400 **Address:** 700 Priestman Street, Fredericton, NB E3B5N5

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Visit **www.stu.ca/mentalhealth** for detailed information on mental health resources and services available to students, including options for one-at-a-time and ongoing counselling (see **STU.ca/counselling**)	**STUDENT WELLNESS** Available to all STU students; you will speak to a professional counsellor. FREE counselling is available 24/7 by phone 1-833-549-3281 **Questions? studentbenefits.ca/studentwellness** or call **1-833-549-3281**

CAMPUS SUPPORT SERVICES

ACADEMIC ADVISING Kelly Hogg & Alison Belyea Email: **advising@stu.ca** | Call **506-452-0530** Office: GMH 101	**HEALTH SERVICES – MEDICAL CLINIC (SHARED SERVICE STU/UNB)** Email: **shc@unb.ca** | Call **506-453-4837** Office: 3rd floor, CC Jones Student Services Centre, UNB
ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES Natalie Carrier & Bailey Gardner Email: **accessibility@stu.ca** | Call **506-453-7207** Office: GMH 104	**INDIGENOUS STUDENT SERVICES COORDINATOR** Kamryn Saulis Email: **ksaulis@stu.ca** | Call **506-452-9669** Office: JDH 208
CAMPUS MINISTRY Claire Morrison Email: **campusministry@stu.ca** | Call **506-452-0636** Office: HCH G14	**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT COORDINATOR** Carrie Monteith-Levesque Email: **cmonteith@stu.ca** | Call **506-452-9593** Office: GMH 203
CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT ADVOCATES Megen Gaudet & Hilary Swan Email: **csasa@svnb.ca** | Call **506-453-4530** Office: JDH 2nd floor	**MENTAL HEALTH COORDINATOR** Brittany Sprague Email: **mentalhealth@stu.ca** | Call **506-460-0382** Office: GMH 307
CAREER DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR Erin Feicht Email: **efeicht@stu.ca** | Call 506-460-0300 Office: GMH 302	**REGISTRAR'S OFFICE** Karen Preston & Kate Crawford Email: **registrarsoffice@stu.ca** | Call **506-452-0530** Office: GMH 101
COUNSELLING SERVICES (SHARED SERVICE STU/UNB) Email: **counsel@unb.ca** | Call **506-453-4820** Office: 2nd floor, CC Jones Student Services Centre, UNB	**RESIDENCE LIFE** Cory Flynn, Jeremy Fowler, & Sylenah Beckford Email: **residencelife@stu.ca** | Call **506-452-0578** Office: GMH 303
CULTURAL DIVERSITY COORDINATOR Saa Andrew Gbongbor Email: **sagbongbor@stu.ca** | Call **506-452-0423** Office: GMH 306	**STUDENT SUCCESS COACH** Kath Hyndman Email: **khyndman@stu.ca** | Call **506-452-9654** Office: GMH 305
DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES AND RESIDENCE LIFE Brock Richardson Email: **brockr@stu.ca** | Call **506-453-7213** Office: GMH 312	**TRANSITIONS COORDINATOR** Brett McCavour Email: **brettm@stu.ca**
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING Clara Santacruz, Ale Navas, & Chelsea Harris-Carr Email: **experientialoffice@stu.ca** Call 506-460-0360 Office: GMH 302 & GMH 311	**WRITING CENTRE** Heather MacDonald Email: **hmac@stu.ca** | Call **506-452-0480** Office: ECH 102

4 – REFLECT after interacting with a student in distress.

Helping a student in distress can be emotionally draining. It may be helpful to:

- Debrief with a colleague or friend (while maintaining student privacy)
- Monitor changes in your emotional, physical, or behavioural state, as they could indicate that you are struggling and need support
- Remember to take care of yourself

You can also reach out to the Mental Health Coordinator (**mentalhealth@stu.ca**) with any questions or concerns.