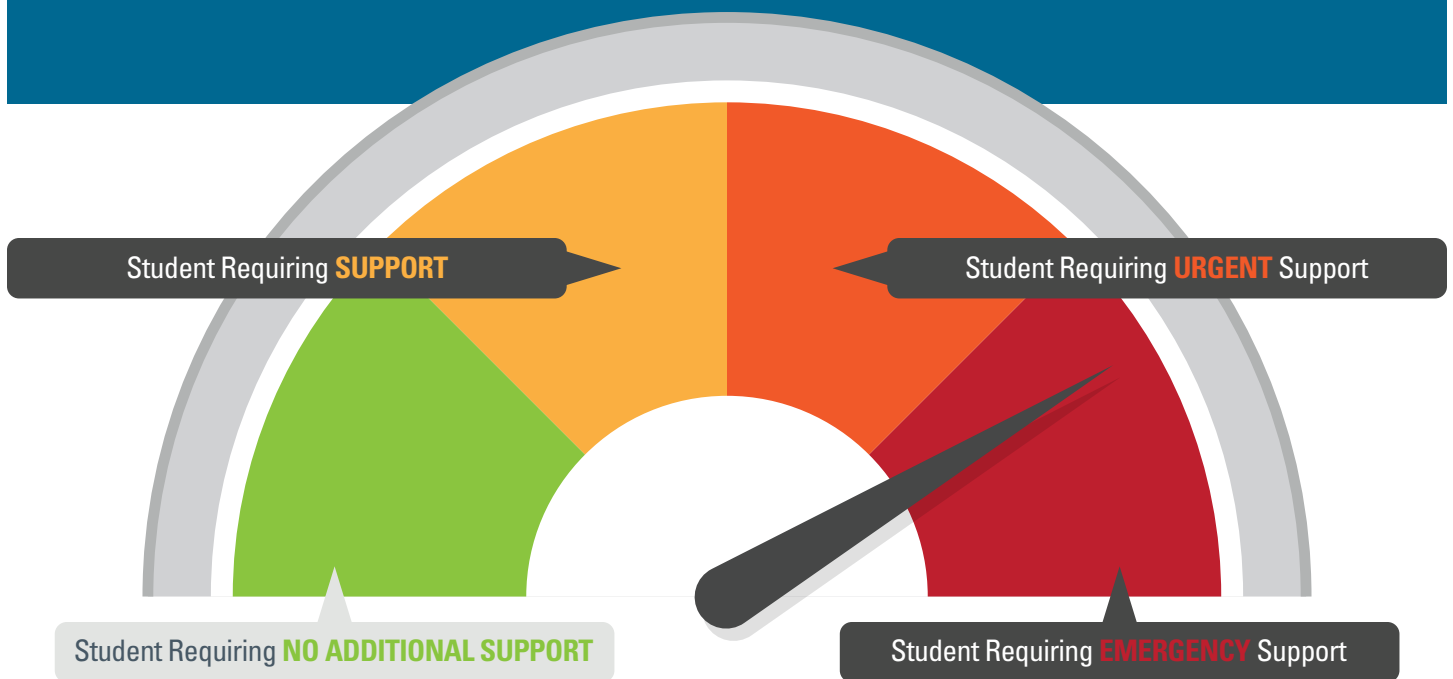


RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS OR DIFFICULTY

Definition: Distress or difficulty are terms to describe emotions or behaviours which interfere with a student's ability to function on a day-to-day basis in the university setting.



The 5 R's: STEPS IN HELPING A STUDENT IN DISTRESS OR DIFFICULTY

| RECOGNIZE | REACH OUT | RATE | RESPOND | REVIEW |

1 RECOGNIZE signs of difficulty or distress. These may be direct (observed by you or communicated by student) or indirect (observed or communicated by others). Signs of difficulty or distress could be observed in face to face interactions, on-line, in submitted work or communicated by others.

A more complete list of indicators organized under 4 categories (academic, physical, behavioural, emotional) available in APPENDIX 1: Indicators of Students in Distress or Difficulty

A student may not exhibit signs but may still be in distress or difficulty. If you are aware of harassment, abuse, violence, discrimination or other difficult experiences, it may also be appropriate to proceed to Step 2.

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF STUDENT DIFFICULTY OR DISTRESS:



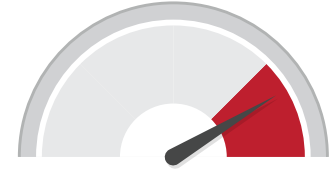
Possible SUPPORT Situation:

- Change in participation, attendance, ability to work with others
- Missed, late or incomplete work or change in quality of work
- Changes in demeanour (e.g., tearfulness, appears sad)
- Changes in energy level and alertness
- Changes in weight or appearance



Possible URGENT Situation:

- Significant decline in academic performance
- Failure to submit assignments, missing tests or exams
- Requesting multiple extensions
- Expression of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Difficulty interacting with classmates or instructors
- Other learners express concern, avoid student or refuse to work with them



Possible EMERGENCY Situation:

- Active expressions or threats of suicide or self-harm
- Altered level of consciousness (drowsy or impaired with substances)
- Marked confusion, incoherence or agitation
- Evidence of self-harm (lacerations or scars) or other unexplained injuries
- Passive references to or preoccupation with death, dying, self-harm or suicide

2 REACH OUT to the student or identify alternate helper to reach out to the student. Approach will vary based on the level of concern at the outset of conversation. When possible and appropriate, find private and safe location for conversation with phone access.

If situation is clearly an Emergency, proceed directly to Emergency column in step 4.

SAMPLE PHRASES TO CONSIDER:

Possible SUPPORT Situation:

“How are you doing?”
 “You look a little stressed.
 Is there some way I can help you?”
 “Just wanted to check in with you to see how you’re doing.”

Possible URGENT Situation:

“I’ve noticed a few changes (can specify, e.g., marks, emotions, behaviours) in you lately. How are you doing?”
 “I’m worried about you. Can you meet me in my office later today?”

Possible EMERGENCY Situation:

If student appears violent, do not approach and proceed to step 4.
 “I need to talk to you right now in the hallway.”

3 RATE or confirm level of distress or difficulty based on interaction (in Step 2) or other indicators (see Appendix 1).
(NO ADDITIONAL SUPPORT, SUPPORT, URGENT, EMERGENCY)

NO ADDITIONAL SUPPORT indicates that the student is not in distress or difficulty that warrants additional support or intervention.



SUPPORT

- Student in **some** distress or difficulty
- Student does **not** appear to be a risk to self or others
- May need help within next week or more



URGENT

- Student in **significant** distress or difficulty
- Student does **not** appear to be a risk to self or others
- Needs help in next 1-2 days



EMERGENCY

- Students in **serious** distress or difficulty
- Student appears to be a **risk or potential risk** to self or others
- Needs help **now**

4 RESPOND to the situation and student. Recommend if **SUPPORT**, Refer or Accompany if **URGENT**, Act if **EMERGENCY**.

NO ADDITIONAL SUPPORT – No need to recommend, refer, accompany or act, unless requested.

Possible Response to a Situation of SUPPORT:

"I have some resources to suggest that are often helpful."

SUPPORT

RECOMMEND

RECOMMEND OR PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT RESOURCES:

Student Wellness Centre: **ext. 27700**
Community Family Doctor
Good2Talk **1-866-925-5454**

OTHER KEY RESOURCES:

Academic Advisors
Sexual Violence Response Coordinator:
ext. 20909 or prahh@mcmaster.ca
See Resource List for more info (Appendix 2)

Possible Response to an URGENT Situation:

"I'm going to make a phone call and see how we can connect you to help quickly."

URGENT

REFER OR ACCOMPANY

ACCOMPANY OR CALL AHEAD to Student Wellness Centre if open
PGCLL 210 OR **ext. 27700**

If closed (late evenings or weekends)
CALL SECURITY* at **88** or **ext. 24281** for advice.

Possible Response to an EMERGENCY Situation:

"We need to get help for you right now. I'm going to make a call."

EMERGENCY

ACT

CALL SECURITY* at **88** or **ext. 24281**
OR **Call 911** if student off campus.

**All McMaster Security are trained to respond to mental health situations on campus.*

NOTE: Privacy/Confidentiality Guidelines: McMaster University is committed to upholding the principles of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and the Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA). It is important to be clear about the limits of your ability to keep information confidential. You can provide assurance that you'll respect a student(s) privacy to the best of your ability but that there are certain situations in which you are compelled to inform others (i.e. concerns about the student's physical safety or capacity to care for themselves, and/or concerns about the safety of others, including suspected abuse/neglect of a minor).

5 REVIEW student needs (i.e. accommodations or other supports) and review situation with Faculty designate (i.e. Associate Dean, Program Manager) or supervisor in **EMERGENCY** or contact Student Affairs at **ext. 27455** for further support, if needed.

Reminder: the student is NOT compelled to answer questions or disclose to faculty/staff whether or not they have sought or received help. You will NOT receive information or feedback from the SWC or other health services according to PHIPPA (Personal Health Information Protection Act) unless it is an emergency or the student has consented.

STAFF/FACULTY SUPPORTS AND SELF CARE: We recognize that supporting students who are in distress or crisis can be stressful. If you would like support or assistance, some resources for faculty and staff include (but is not limited to):

- **Employee and Family Assistance Program:** Confidential support available 24/7 at: 1-800-663-1142 or <http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/efap/>
- **Employee Health Services:** Occupational Health Nurse ext. 20309/20310 (not 24/7, hours/days vary)
- **Workplace Wellbeing:** <http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/healthy-workplace/>

APPENDIX 1: Indicators of Students in Distress or Difficulty

ACADEMIC INDICATORS



- Change in participation or attendance
- Poor participation or attendance
- Significant decline in or poor academic performance
- Missed, late or incomplete work or change in quality of work
- Failure to submit assignments, missing tests or exams
- Requesting multiple extensions
- Difficulty working with others on group work or assignments
- Concerning, illogical or incoherent content in submitted work

BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS



- Changes in behaviour
- Altered energy level and alertness (increased or decreased)
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Difficulty interacting with classmates or instructors
- Other learners express concern, avoid student or refuse to work with student
- Classroom outbursts (verbal, other)
- Confusion, incoherence or agitation
- Altered level of consciousness (drowsy or impaired with substances)

PHYSICAL INDICATORS



- Changes in weight or appearance (weight loss or gain, change in dress or make-up)
- Poor grooming or hygiene (body odour, hair, clothing)
- Inappropriate clothing choices for context or weather conditions
- Evidence of self-harm (lacerations or scars) or other unexplained injuries

EMOTIONAL INDICATORS



- Change in or difficulty managing emotions
- Changes in demeanour (e.g., tearfulness, appears sad)
- Irritability, anger or agitation
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Passive references to or preoccupation with death, dying, self-harm or suicide
- Active expressions or threats of suicide or self-harm

APPENDIX 2: McMaster University and Hamilton Community Resources for Students

On-Campus Professional Services

Student Affairs oversees service delivery and staff who support the overall health and welfare of students at McMaster. GH 207 | ext. 27455 | student-affairs@mcmaster.ca

Student Wellness Centre (SWC) provides a range of counselling options, medical services and wellness education resources to support students in their academic success and positive experience at McMaster. PGCLL 210 | ext. 27700 | wellness.mcmaster.ca

McMaster University Security Services assists in achieving a safe and secure environment developed through prevention programming and law enforcement within the McMaster community. E.T. Clarke Center 201 | ext. 24281 or dial 88 on any University phone

Sexual Violence Response provides ongoing case management and referral to campus and community services. UH 104 | ext. 20909 | svpro.mcmaster.ca

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) support students who have a disability or disorder with their academic and disability-related needs. MUSC B107 | ext. 28652 | sas.mcmaster.ca

Student Success Centre (SSC) engages students and alumni in diverse learning opportunities to support their academic, personal and professional growth. GH 110 | ext. 24254 | studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca

Graduate Student Office supports students in navigating their graduate studies, including: program selection, funding and awards, and skills and opportunities. GH 212 | ext. 23679 | graduate.mcmaster.ca

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Aboriginal Students Health Sciences Office (ASHS) addresses the needs for: increased student preparedness, entry and completion of Health science programs, ongoing identification and work to remove barriers to success for First Nations students in University, and to improve relationships between the University and local aboriginal communities. HSC 2A1E | ext. 23935 | <https://ishs.mcmaster.ca/>

Chaplaincy Centre helps students, staff, and faculty with the challenges they experience. Academic, relational, faith/spiritual and crisis help is provided. MUSC 231 | ext. 24207 | mcmaster.ca/chaplain

Equity and Inclusion Office (EIO) works with campus and community partners to ensure that McMaster University is a place where all students, staff and faculty are treated equitably and respectfully in all areas of campus life. Some programs include: confidential complaint resolution, educational opportunities, and identification and removal of barriers to accessibility. UH 104 | ext. 27581 | equity.mcmaster.ca

Faculty of Engineering provides academic advising on a drop-in basis. JHE H301 | ext. 24646 | eng.mcmaster.ca

Faculty of Health Sciences (BScN) provides academic advising by appointment. HSC 2J36 | ext. 22140 | nursing.mcmaster.ca

Faculty of Health Sciences (BHSc) provides academic advising by appointment. MDCL 3308 | ext. 22815 | bhsc.mcmaster.ca

Faculty of Humanities provides academic advising on a drop-in basis. CNH 107 | ext. 27532 | humanities.mcmaster.ca

Faculty of Science provides academic advising on a drop-in basis. BSB 129 | ext. 27590 | science.mcmaster.ca

Faculty of Social Science provides academic advising on a drop-in basis. KTH 129 | ext. 23772 | socialsciences.mcmaster.ca

Indigenous Students Services supports indigenous students through: counselling, elder-in-residence program, writing skills workshops, library, and lounge. LRW 1811 | ext. 27426 | indigservices.mcmaster.ca

International Students Services provides support to international students including: cultural transition support, referral services on issues related to citizenship, new student orientation, mentorship, and workshops. GH 110 | ext. 24254 | iss.mcmaster.ca

Ombuds Office provides impartial, independent, and informal dispute-resolution advice and assistance to all members of the University community. MUSC 210 | ext. 24151 | mcmaster.ca/ombuds

Student Financial Aid & Scholarships deliver financial aid and scholarship programs with a professional and empathic approach thus developing our students, our University and our community. GH 108 | ext. 24319 | sfas.mcmaster.ca

Student Support and Case Management Office has two primary, often intersecting areas of focus: providing support to students through case management services; and administering the Code of Student Rights and Responsibility. MUSC 226 | ext. 20220 | sscm.mcmaster.ca

Youth Wellness Centre Mobile Team (McMaster site) provides a Mobile Team of Mental Health Professionals for students at McMaster: <https://wellness.mcmaster.ca/counselling/youth-wellness-centre/>

On-Campus Peer-Led Services

Graduate Students Association (GSA) organizes events, workshops and learning opportunities for graduate students at McMaster University. Refectory Rathskeller Bldg., East Tower, 2nd Flr. | ext. 22043 | gsa.mcmaster.ca

McMaster Indigenous Student Community Alliance (MISCA) is an OPIRG working group. They strive to provide social and academic support to Indigenous learners and allies. facebook.com/mcmastermisca/

MSU Student Health Education Centre (SHEC) is a peer-run health promotion, education and referral service for McMaster students. MUSC 202 | ext. 22041 | <https://www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/6-student-health-education-centre-shec>

Pride Community Centre (PCC) is a space for those identified as gender and sexual minorities and their allies at McMaster University. They offer educational programming and access to resources of interest to the LGBTQ community. MUSC 221 | ext. 27397 | <https://www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/9-queer-students-community-centre-qsc>

Women and Gender Equity Network (WGEN) hopes to establish services and events to create a safe(r) space on campus for women-identified people, trans* people and survivors of sexual assault. MUSC 204 | ext. 20265 | <https://www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/46-women-and-gender-equity-network>

Maccess provides peer support by trained volunteers, with lived experiences with any of the following: disability, chronic illness, mental illness, madness, mental health concerns, neurodivergence, and additional identities that are part of the larger disability rights movement. MUSC B111 | maccess@msu.mcmaster.ca | <https://www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/47-msu-maccess>

Food Collective Centre is a student run, non-profit service dedicated to building stronger food systems in the community operating out of McMaster University. ext. 23139 | <https://www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/14-mac-bread-bin>

Off-Campus Professional Services

Alcohol, Drugs & Gambling Services (ADGS) provides information, counselling and programs. 21 Hunter Street East (3rd floor) | 905-546-3606

Alternatives for Youth (AY) provides substance use counselling services for children and youth ages 12 - 22 years, and those who care about them. Their services include substance education, assessment, individual, group, and family counselling. 38 James Street South | 905-527-4469 | ay.on.ca

Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST) is a program of St. Joseph's Healthcare and serves the residents of the City of Hamilton who have serious mental health issues or in crisis. A mental health worker will respond to a call on the COAST crisis line and they will determine whether to respond with phone support or a mobile team visit. 905-972-8338 | coasthamilton.ca

Youth Wellness Centre – St. Joseph Healthcare is a safe, accessible environment for young people age 17 to 25 to receive expert care for mental health and addictions issues. 905-522-1155 ext. 31725 | <http://www.stjoes.ca/hospital-services/mental-health-addiction-services/mental-health-services/youth-wellness-centre>

Professional Online/Phone Services

911: The Hamilton Police/Fire/Paramedics serves and protects in partnership with their communities.

Sexual Assault Centre Hamilton and Area (SACHA) provides free, non-judgmental services based on the belief that survivors are the experts of their own experiences. They have a 24 hour support line, counselling and advocacy services, outreach, and public education programs. 905-525-4162 | sacha.ca

Good2Talk is a free, confidential post-secondary student helpline open 24/7 that provides professional counselling and information and referrals for mental health, addictions and well-being. 1-866-925-5454 | <https://good2talk.ca/>

Graduate Students: Empower Me is a 24 hour counselling service funded by the GSA insurance plan. 1-844-741-6389

Undergraduate Students: Real Campus provides counselling service funded by the MSU. 1-877-390-7325 | realcampus.ca/mcmaster/