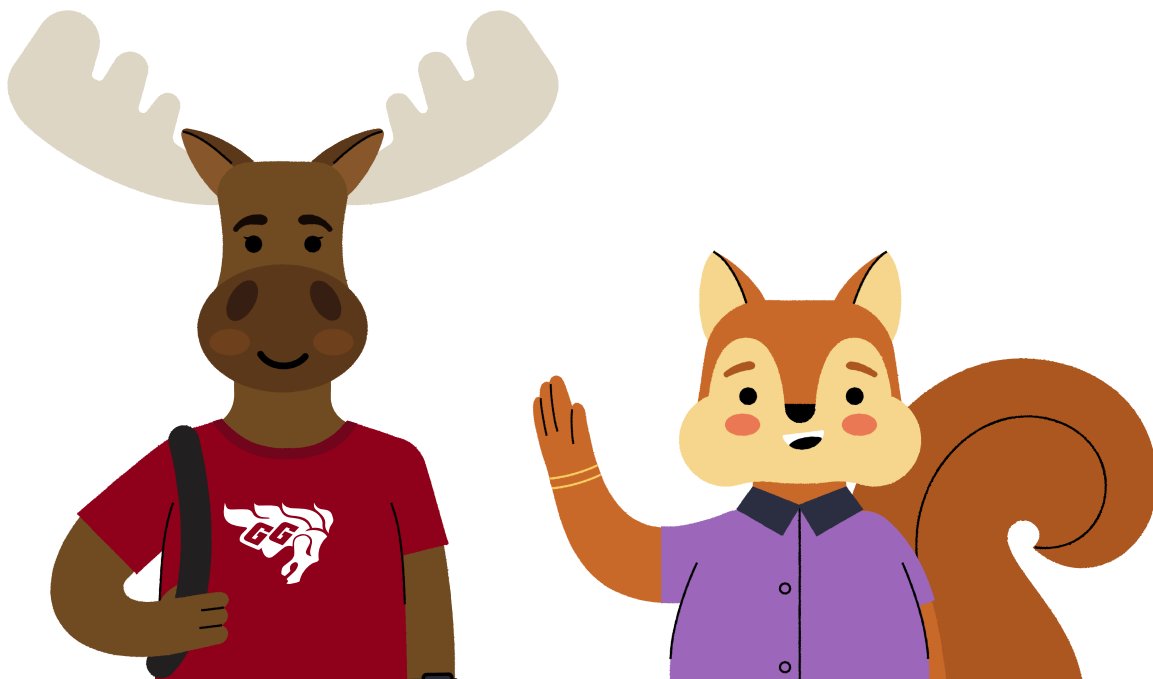


A caring University community

A resource for faculty and staff
when students may be in distress

The University of Ottawa strives to be a caring and compassionate community, in which everyone has a role to play in student success and in the wellbeing of both students and employees. This guide is for employees who interact with students. You can refer to this information when you are approached or notice something that makes you wonder whether one or more students are experiencing distress. You can also share some of the links and included resources with them. Everyone can learn from these resources as they are applicable to all.



Start with compassion

It's normal to wonder whether you can make a difference in the life of students when they may be going through difficult times that have an impact on their well-being.

You might be afraid of saying the wrong thing and feel ill-equipped to deal with some of the complex concerns you may encounter.

But people just want to feel that others care, so starting there is always a good place, and can result in positive outcomes.

Students have told the University they often aren't aware of where or how to get help. Some students feel isolated or alone. They might not realize that help is available or know how to connect with various supports.

University staff are well-positioned to listen and help to direct students to appropriate resources. While this guide is largely focused on helping students, it may also help you respond to and help others who are part of the University community – such as faculty members and staff. It may also point you to a service you may not have known about. The more we are aware of the services and supports that are available, the better we can care for ourselves and others. It's all part of being a caring university.

Our model of wellness care is summarized by four “Rs”: **Recognize**, **Respond**, **Refer**, and **Reflect** (Centre for Innovation in [Campus Mental Health](#)).



Recognize

The first R is simply to pay attention and recognize that there may be an issue.

You may notice signs that a student is going through a difficult time.

What a student may have mentioned to you or to others:

- medical and/or mental health concerns
- financial and/or food security concerns
- exposure to sexual violence
- experiences of self-harm
- suicidal thoughts
- problems with friends and/or family; or other concerns

What you may have observed:

- Above average absences. *Have they been missing classes lately?*
- Repeated requests for extended deadlines, difficulty with assignments and/or a decline in their academic performance. *Have they stopped handing in assignments or are their assignments incomplete?*
- Noticeable changes in appearance and/or behaviour. *Do they seem down? Were they engaged and suddenly seem to have disconnected from class or other activities? Have you noticed any physical or other changes in the student that may be cause for concern?*
- The student is expressing feelings of hopelessness, of being overwhelmed, is crying and/or tearful. *Have they mentioned to you that things have been hard for them lately, or that they're anxious or depressed and/or can't sleep?*

Useful tip: Pay attention to what a student's behaviour, demeanour, words, and actions may be communicating about their well-being. Ask students how they are doing. It may be hard to tell who is struggling. Showing that you care matters. If you are a professor, consider doing check-ins with any classes you teach, whether in-person or online. That's what the R in **Recognize** is about.

Respond

The second R stands for **Respond**. After you have recognized an issue, take the opportunity to show you care as you interact with the student. Make it clear that you are open to listening.

No one expects you to provide professional counselling services. That is why there are resources available on campus as well as externally. At the same time, everyone in a caring university community does have a role to play.

- Express that you care. *Ask non-judgmental questions.*
- Reach out or ask someone else (a teaching assistant if in the context of a course, for example) to reach out to the student if they have not contacted you.
- Listen actively to what the student is experiencing so they feel heard. *If a student is slow getting started, don't give up.*
- Consider offering assistance that may be in your control (for profs: extended deadlines, alternative assignments; for others: flexibility).
- Do not criticize, judge, or minimize the student's experience. *Be a positive presence.*
- Use active listening. *Allow the student to talk and allow for some silence for them to have the opportunity to communicate during the conversation.*
- Gently encourage the student to seek support if they seem open to it. *You can cut and paste some of the resources in this document and provide them to students.*
- If a student talks about an incident of sexual violence, please consult with the [Human Rights Office](#).
- Respect a student's right to not seek support. *Students respect the point of view of their professors and of advisors, but in the end, it's their choice.*

Useful tip: Here are a few examples of conversation starters (whether in-person, online or in writing).

- “I have noticed...”
- “How are things going for you?”
- “How can I help you to...”
- “Can you tell me about...”

Refer

Depending on what the student tells you, you may choose to **Refer** them to other supports or resources as noted below or consult the University of Ottawa health and wellness web site.

You have taken the important steps of recognizing the student may need and/or want help and have responded with compassion and care. You can help with referrals to resources that should be useful (see the next section), and ultimately enhance a student's well-being and success.

Useful tip #1 – In discussing other resources:

- Make it clear that you think there may be some resources that could be helpful and tell students what they are (see information in this guide).
- Remind students there is no obligation to contact these resources, but that they are there for them.
- Mention that you are suggesting other resources because they're a source of support to students beyond the classroom, and that they may find these helpful.

Here are some suggestions for starting the discussion on resources with a student:

- *What do you think might be helpful to you..."*
- *"The university's Health and Wellness website has lots of resources. May I send you some links?"*
- *"Can I suggest..."*
- *"Would you like some support with this situation?"*

Useful tip #2 – You are encouraged to follow-up with the student later on to see how they are doing.

In Emergency situations: Always ensure both you and the student are safe. If you feel a student may be in danger, please encourage them strongly to seek help immediately. If you are concerned the student may be violent towards themselves or others and/or you feel unsafe, take steps to ensure your own safety by calling Protection Services at 613-562-5411 (emergency) or 911.

Reflect

After the discussion or communication (in-person, by phone or online), check in with yourself to see how you are feeling. Sometimes it's hard to hear about what others are experiencing, so please practice self-care.

- What physical or emotional responses of your own, if any, do you notice?
- How do you feel about the discussion? *If you are feeling overwhelmed, sad or otherwise impacted here are some suggestions:*
 - Go for a walk
 - Reach out to someone you trust to talk about how you are feeling
 - If you think you may need confidential assistance to talk about the situation or your feelings, there are resources available to you.
- It's important to take care of yourself. In a caring community, everyone matters.

Here are a few resources:

LifeWorks: Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) – 24/7

1-844-880-9142

More resources are listed on the [University's Health and Wellness](#) page.

Resources

Here are a just a few situations you may encounter in your interactions with students and some of the resources you may refer them to. Encouraging students to seek help from professionals and other resources is usually a good course of action. Students may choose not to access support, and that's their choice. That said, the university has many internal resources to support students but also works actively with and is connected to a number of external community resources that it can draw upon to be of support to students. The student unions (UOSU and GSAÉD) at the University also offer a number of services of support to students.

Please note that the University has established an integrated [Student Health and Wellness Centre](#) focused on prevention, physical and mental health, as well as health promotion. The centre is exclusively open to University of Ottawa and Saint Paul University students. It is located at 801 King Edward Avenue.

Please note that some of these resources may not be available outside of regular working hours and on weekends/holidays. If there is someone in a crisis situation on campus during these times, please call Protection Services at 613-562-5411 (emergency) or dial 911.

Self-Harm, suicide or other high-risk concerns

A student or employee may exhibit behaviour that is destructive, harmful, aggressive, violent or threatening to themselves or others. Sometimes a student may disclose that they are having suicidal thoughts, are engaging in self-harm or are having thoughts of harming themselves or others. It is ok to ask students if they are experiencing suicidal thoughts. Voicing this question can demonstrate you care, helps alleviate stigma, and may provide some clarity around which resources to call upon or provide to the student.

This is an emergency. Call:

On-campus: Protection Services 24/7 – 613-562-5411 (Emergency)

Off-campus 24/7: 911

Mental Health (e.g., anxiety, depression or other issues)

This is the main web address for [counselling services](#):

Counselling services can also be contacted at couns@uOttawa.ca (not for emergencies)

The University has been working hard to make counselling services available more quickly, both in-person and virtually, to respond to the needs that students and other members of the university community have identified. While there is always room for improvement, there are misconceptions about waitlists and wait times for counselling that may persist. The counselling team is committed to responding to all students in a timely fashion. **Please encourage students to reach out for counselling support when they need it.**

The University also has a [Student Support team](#) that can assist in complex cases by providing case management services. You can refer a student (preferably with their knowledge), or the student can self-refer. Here is the link to information about the team, and a direct link to the [referral form](#).

If you refer a student to the Student Support team, you will be contacted by a coordinator, who may ask some clarifying questions to better understand the situation and will be available to answer questions about the service as well. The student support team can also be reached at studentsupport@uOttawa.ca

The Counselling team has created a [YouTube channel](#) to offer support to students on a variety of topics.

Sometimes students may want more informal assistance that does not include counselling. Here are a few options:

[Peer support](#)

[On-line support \(work through online materials\)](#)

[Well-being seminars](#) led by a University of Ottawa clinical psychologist

There are many more on-campus or online resources that can assist students. These range from mindfulness sessions to pet therapy. More information is available at the [Health and Wellness web site](#).

24/7 Resources

Students

[Allô J'écoute/Good2Talk](#) (for students) 1-866-925-5454

[Empower Me](#) - Mental Health resources available 24/7: 1-833-628-5589

Available for undergraduate students covered by the University of Ottawa Students' Union (UOSU) health plan. In addition, available to international students when abroad in 22 countries (see FAQ on the web site for details).

Graduate students

Through the Graduate Student's Association des étudiant.es diplômé.es (GSAÉD), graduate students have free access to the Student Support Program (SSP) to speak to a counsellor immediately at 1-855-649-8641 (from Canada or the United States). Students from other countries, please visit the [SSP web site](#) and type in University of Ottawa. Select the GSAÉD – Graduate Students' Association des étudiant.e.s diplômé.e.s. option from the drop-down menu. If you click on Worldwide Access Numbers, it will open a list of numbers by country.

Employees

Employee and Family Assistance Program 1-844-880-9142

External community resources

Ottawa Distress Centre (bilingual): in Ottawa and region, 613-238-3311 | in Gatineau and region, 1-866-676-1080

Association québécoise de prévention du suicide (bilingual): 1-866-APPELLE (this centralized number will connect you to the service for your region).

[Mental Health Crisis Line](#) (Ottawa and neighbouring counties) 1-866-996-0991

[Tel-Aide Outaouais](#) : Gatineau 819-775-3223; Ottawa 613-741-6433; Toll-free: 1-800-567-9699

[Other resources](#) are available.

Academic Concerns

For academic concerns (e.g., need for a deferral, to drop a course, talk about their program), please encourage students to reach out to their Faculty undergraduate or graduate studies office.

Financial, food security or other provision concerns

Financial Support

If you have been made aware of or have been in contact with a student in an urgent financial situation, emergency bursaries may be available. In such cases, you or they can reach out by email at loansandawards@uOttawa.ca or call 613-562-5734.

The Financial Aid office helps various faculties and services distribute bursaries and emergency funds. They can also refer students to other sources of assistance. Please be sure to inform students that any information about their personal finances is kept confidential and not shared with any other part of the University.

The University has many other sources of financial support for students. These include:

Emergency bursaries for urgent and emergent situations such as fire, theft, weather destruction of property, among others. Students will meet with a Financial Aid counsellor and be asked to provide documentation such as financial aid questionnaire (budget) and proof of the situation affecting their finances. Funds are transferred quickly via e-transfer directly to the student.

Financial aid counselling to discuss budgeting, government loan applications, student lines of credit or emergency funding is available in person at 3156 Desmarais Hall, by phone at 613-562-5734 (to make an appointment), or by email at loansandawards@uOttawa.ca.

Financial aid bursaries using the [online application system](#).

Food and daily living

It's hard to focus on studying if students are worried about being able to pay the rent or where their next meal will come from. Low income is a strong predictor of food insecurity, and studies suggest that up to 35% of students may suffer from moderate or severe food insecurity.

The [Free Store](#) on campus is a sustainable resource where students can access many items that have been donated free of charge.

The University of Ottawa Students' Union (UOSU) operates a [food cupboard](#) in association with the Ottawa Food Bank.

In addition, many communities have local food banks or other resources that students can also access. You can find out which one serves an area by going to these links:

[Ottawa and area](#) [Canada-wide](#)

As noted earlier, the University's Student Support team can also assist in complex cases that include financial concerns. Here are links to information [about the team](#) and to the [referral form](#). You can refer a student (preferably with their knowledge), or they can self-refer.

Sexual Violence

[University of Ottawa's policy on the prevention of sexual violence](#) outlines its commitment to a safe and healthy campus for work, for study and for campus community life for all members of the University community. It also outlines the University's commitment to provide support to those members of the University community directly affected by sexual violence.

Anyone who wishes to report an incident of sexual violence can do so by contacting the Human Rights Office and/or their local police service (in non-emergency situations). For urgent situations, call **Protection Services**: 141 Louis-Pasteur Street, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5. Telephone: 613-562-5499 or 613-562-5411 (emergency). E-mail: protection@uOttawa.ca or call 911.

Human Rights Office:

1 Stewart Street, Room 121, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5.

Telephone 613-562-5800, Ext. 5222 E-mail : respect@uOttawa.ca

The Human Rights Office of the University of Ottawa also has a web site with much useful [information on this topic](#). For those who may know someone who is a survivor of sexual violence and is looking for guidance.

[Resources for students and members of the community](#) impacted by sexual violence.

There is also a [brochure on sexual violence support and prevention](#) (pdf)

Harassment and Discrimination

All members of the University community, including students, staff and faculty members, should have a right to a learning and workplace environment that is respectful, safe, healthy and free from harassment and discrimination pursuant to the [University of Ottawa's Policy on the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination](#).

Concurrently, each member of the university community has a responsibility to ensure a respectful environment and adhere to the university policy.

The [Human Rights Office](#) (HRO) is a neutral and impartial office responsible for receiving and responding to formal and informal complaints related to human rights-related discrimination and harassment, personal and workplace harassment, and sexual violence, from all members of the university community. The HRO also provides education and training on these matters as well as offers guidance and consultation to all members of the community on these issues.

If you or someone you know is dealing with discrimination, harassment or sexual violence, please email the Human Rights Office (respect@uOttawa.ca).

Addictions

[Ottawa Public Health Listing of local mental health and substance use supports](#)

[General substance use resources](#)

Conclusion

By working together, we can ensure that the University is a caring community.

If you are interested in learning more about campus mental health and how you can respond to student and colleague needs, the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH) offers an excellent free online training module called [More Feet on the Ground](#).

Questions or comments about this guide can be directed to the University of Ottawa Advisor on Mental Health and Wellness by using the feedback form available on her [website](#). If you need help immediately please call Protection Services at 613-562-5411 or call 911.

Did you know?

Canada is the first country in the world to establish a [National Standard of Canada for Mental-Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students](#) —a set of flexible, voluntary guidelines to help post-secondary institutions support the mental health and well-being of their students. We all have a role to play!

Developed by the Working Group on Mental Health and Wellness Awareness and Promotion with and for Elizabeth Kristjansson, the University of Ottawa [Advisor on Mental Health and Wellness](#).