

# IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

## A GUIDE FOR FACULTY AND STAFF



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As a faculty or staff member, you are often best placed to notice students in crisis or distress. Your frequent interactions with individual students might make you particularly aware of certain behaviours that signal emotional distress, and you play an instrumental role in helping the student seek and receive the assistance needed.

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### Levels of Distress

An **EMERGENCY** means someone's life is in imminent danger.  
**Call 911, then York Security Services**

A **CRISIS** is a period of psychological disequilibrium arising from situational, developmental or socio-cultural sources and resulting in a temporary inability to cope. It may be experienced as a threat, a loss or an insurmountable obstacle. This highly distressing situation requires **urgent attention** – but it is not immediately life-threatening.

**Contact the Office of Student Community Relations (OSCR)**  
OR  
**Personal Counselling Services (PCS)**

For **NON-CRISIS** situations, even if a student is experiencing neither of these extreme forms of distress, they might still benefit from the various support services available on York campuses.

**For more resources, visit the Mental Health and Wellness at York website: [mhw.info.yorku.ca](http://mhw.info.yorku.ca)**

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**If you have immediate concerns about safety, call 911.**

For more information about crisis services, go to:  
[pcs.info.ca/in-case-of-crisis](http://pcs.info.ca/in-case-of-crisis)



# IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

## HOW BEST TO PROCEED

This tool is meant to help you determine whether or not a student is in distress and suggests next steps to follow for **emergency**, **crisis** and **non-crisis** situations.

### Is the student in distress?

- Has the student reported significant problems to you or are they seeking advice?
- Have you noticed signs of distress (e.g. increased anxiety, irritability or sadness; deterioration in quality of classroom attendance, participation or academic work; troubling changes in personal hygiene and appearance) or significant changes in behaviour or mood?
- Have other students, staff or faculty expressed significant concern to you about this student?

**YES**

Determine whether the situation is an **EMERGENCY** (urgent and immediate), a **CRISIS** (potentially urgent) or a **NON-CRISIS**. It is an emergency if:

- The student's behaviour is threatening or highly disruptive.
- The student makes serious threats.
- The student is incoherent or uncontrollable.
- The student is making direct or indirect reference to suicide.

### EMERGENCY

ACTIONS to take in **EMERGENCY** situations:

- If the student is on campus, dial 911 and then **York Security Services** at ext. 33333.
- If the student is off campus, dial 911.
- Inform your supervisor/the Dean's Office.

### CRISIS

ACTIONS to take in **CRISIS** situations requiring consultation:

- Call or bring the student to **Personal Counselling Services (PCS)**, N110 Bennett Centre for Student Services, 416-736-5297, M, W-F, 9 to 4:30pm, T, 9 to 7pm.  
or  
Call **York Security Services** at ext. 33333.  
or  
Call the **Office of Student Community Relations (OSCR)**, 416-736-5231.
- For the Glendon campus, call the **Accessibility, Well-Being and Counselling (AWC) Centre**, 416-487-6709, C 111A Glendon Hall, M-F, 9 to 5pm.  
or  
**Student Affairs**, 416-487-6716, or visit C112, York Hall.
- Inform your supervisor/the Dean's Office.

**NO**

No immediate action is required.  
Monitor the situation.

### NON-CRISIS

ACTIONS to take in **NON-CRISIS** situations:

- Listen, show concern, be non-judgmental.
- Ask questions to determine the information required or appropriate type of referral.
- Provide appropriate resources, e.g. for:
  - **Personal Counselling Services (PCS)**, N110 Bennett Centre for Student Services, 416-736-5297, M, W-F, 9 to 4:30pm, T, 9 to 7pm;
  - **Office of Student Community Relations (OSCR)**, 416-736-5231, [oscr@yorku.ca](mailto:oscr@yorku.ca);
  - **Mental Health and Wellness at York**, [mhw.info.yorku.ca](http://mhw.info.yorku.ca).
- For the Glendon campus, call the **Accessibility, Well-Being and Counselling (AWC) Centre**, 416-487-6709, C 111A Glendon Hall, M-F, 9 to 5pm.
- If the student is unwilling to accept a referral, respect the decision and encourage them to stay in contact with you.
- Inform your supervisor/the Dean's Office.

## AFTER HOURS

Students requiring assistance after hours should be referred to **Good2Talk**, the 24/7 Post-Secondary Student Helpline, at 1-866-925-5454.

# Responding

When dealing with a student potentially in distress, always take the time to carefully **OBSERVE**, **REFLECT** and **IDENTIFY** whether you think there is reason for concern, and **RESPOND** with calm.



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## Steps to take:

### 1. Acknowledge

- Speak with the student in person and in private (unless it feels unsafe to do so).
- Stay calm and listen carefully.
- Be specific about the behaviour you've noticed.
- Express your concern.

### 2. Inquire and Listen

- Try to understand the student's perspective without judgment.
- Take the student's concerns seriously. Don't dismiss or minimize.

### 3. Provide Information and Encouragement

- Provide the student with information about resources and offer to make appropriate referrals.
- Offer support, but be cautious about giving advice.
- Do not promise to keep information private or confidential.

### 4. Know Your Limits

- Don't feel it's your responsibility to solve the student's problem.
- Understand your limitations and get other people involved.

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## When a student says "no" to a referral:

### If it is **NOT AN EMERGENCY**:

- Respect the student's right to refuse counselling or other help.
- Do not take it personally; if appropriate, and if you feel comfortable, offer the student the possibility of staying in touch (but do not insist if they decline).
- Provide the student with takeaway information on possible resources.

# IN CASE OF LIFE-THREATENING SITUATIONS/CONCERNS FOR ONE'S OWN OR SOMEONE ELSE'S IMMEDIATE SAFETY

911 or York Security, ext. 33333 or 416-736-5333

## NON-LIFE-THREATENING STUDENT DISTRESS SITUATIONS

Call campus Security and/or a department listed below. For general safety information, visit [yorku.ca/safety](http://yorku.ca/safety).

<b>ILLNESS INJURY</b> (non-life-threatening)	<b>AGGRESSION/ THREAT TO SAFETY</b>	<b>EMOTIONAL/ MENTAL DISTRESS/ SUICIDAL THOUGHTS</b>	<b>DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS</b>	<b>SEXUAL ASSAULT</b>	<b>EMERGENCY HOUSING</b> (For students in danger of immediate or imminent crisis, emergency assistance may be available for those eligible.)	<b>EMERGENCY FUNDING</b> (For students in danger of immediate or imminent crisis, emergency assistance may be available for those eligible.)
<p><b>Keele campus:</b> <b>Appletree Medical Centre York Lanes</b> (walk-in clinic) 416-736-5525</p> <p><b>Glendon campus:</b> <b>Sunnybrook Hospital Emergency Room</b> 2075 Bayview Avenue</p>	<p><b>Security</b> <i>Urgent matters:</i> 416-736-5333 or ext. 33333 <i>Non-urgent matters:</i> 416-650-8000 or ext. 58000</p> <p><b>OSCR: Office of Student Community Relations</b> 416-736-5231 or ext. 55231 <a href="http://yorku.ca/oscr">yorku.ca/oscr</a></p>	<p><b>Personal Counselling Services (PCS)</b> 416-736-5297 <a href="http://pcs.info.yorku.ca">pcs.info.yorku.ca</a></p> <p><b>Accessibility, Well-Being and Counselling (AWC) Centre</b> 416-487-6709 <a href="http://glendon.yorku.ca/counselling">glendon.yorku.ca/counselling</a></p>	<p><b>Security</b> <i>Urgent matters:</i> 416-736-5333 or ext. 33333 <i>Non-urgent matters:</i> 416-650-8000 or ext. 58000</p> <p><b>OSCR: Office of Student Community Relations</b> 416-736-5231 or ext. 55231 <a href="http://yorku.ca/oscr">yorku.ca/oscr</a></p>	<p><b>Sexual Violence Response Office (SVRO)</b> 416-736-5211 <a href="http://yorku.ca/sexual-violence-response">yorku.ca/sexual-violence-response</a></p> <p><b>Sexual Assault Survivors' Support Line (SASSL)</b> 416-650-8056 <a href="http://yorku.ca/sassl">yorku.ca/sassl</a></p> <p><b>Toronto Rape Crisis Centre</b> 416-597-8808</p> <p><b>Good2Talk</b> 1-866-925-5454</p>	<p><b>OSCR: Office of Student Community Relations</b> 416-736-5231 or ext. 55231 <a href="http://yorku.ca/oscr">yorku.ca/oscr</a></p>	<p><b>Undergraduate: Registrarial Services</b> 416-872-9675</p> <p><b>Graduate: Office of the Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies</b> 416-736-2100, ext. 66682</p> <p><b>OSCR: Office of Student Community Relations</b> 416-736-5231 or ext. 55231 <a href="http://yorku.ca/oscr">yorku.ca/oscr</a></p>

For other City of Toronto resources, call 211 or visit [211toronto.ca](http://211toronto.ca).