

Responding to Students in Distress



Employee Guide

April 2021

Students face many challenges that may lead to distress

- Fear of failure to meet academic goals
- Financial or housing pressures
- Uncertainty about career or future
- Loneliness, isolation and relationship conflict
- Family caregiving commitments
- Barriers to education related to health or disability status
- Experiences of harassment or discrimination
- Increased severity of reported mental health concerns

How can we help?

- ✓ **RECOGNIZE** common signs of distress in post-secondary students
- ✓ **RESPOND** with care and compassion to a student's struggle
- ✓ **REFER** to BCIT Early Assist and other supports as needed
- ✓ **RECONNECT** with your student to check in after taking steps to help

Ways to respond effectively

- Responding in a timely and compassionate way to signs that a student is struggling is key to supporting their well-being as well as their academic success.
- Comment only on observable patterns and be direct about your concerns.
- Refrain from passing judgment, diagnosing, or drawing conclusions about a student's experience.
- Be authentic and empathetic, avoiding unrealistic sayings intended to "cheer them up".
- Be clear about the scope of your role. Let the student know you are happy to listen, but would like to put them in touch with those who have the skills and authority to provide appropriate support.
- Feel free to keep a personal record of your exchange with a struggling student, but make sure to keep any notes separate from a student's file or evaluations.

Examples of effective responses

Respect for privacy and confidentiality

"Let's find a quiet place to talk. Is now a good time?"

Direct honesty and authentic curiosity

"I've noticed that you've been missing class recently and I just want to check in with you and let you know support is available if you need it."

Validation and reassurance

"That sounds really difficult. I appreciate you telling me. Let's figure out the best way to support you."

In an emergency

RECOGNIZE	RESPOND AND REFER
<p>Student poses imminent risk to self or others and there is need for immediate emergency assistance.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student communicates specific threat or intent to kill self imminently ▪ Student threatens to harm others or is behaving violently in a manner that risks safety of others. ▪ Student abusing alcohol or other substances on campus ▪ Student in medical distress needing immediate attention 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make sure you are safe, then call 911. 2. Notify SSEM at 604.451.6856 so that they can provide immediate assistance and direct emergency services if they are arriving on campus. 3. Submit an Early Assist referral at bcit.ca/early-assist to ensure that the student receives follow-up support. Please note that Early Assist is not an emergency response service.

WHY EARLY ASSIST?

The Student Life Office receives and assesses all Early Assist referrals. If action is needed, the Student Life Office reaches out to the student and connects them with appropriate supports. While Early Assist is not for emergencies, submitting a referral after an emergency situation ensures that the Student Life Office can provide the student with any follow-up information they need.

High concern

RECOGNIZE	RESPOND AND REFER
<p>Student does not pose imminent risk to health and safety of self or others but requires urgent, same-day support.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student discloses experiencing a sexual assault or other trauma ▪ Student indicates suicidal thoughts without communication of an imminent plan or intent ▪ Difficulty coping in the absence of risk to self or others ▪ Highly disruptive behavior ▪ Impaired by substances while on campus ▪ Disorganized or incoherent thoughts, writing, or speech ▪ Neglects safety on worksite 	<p>Weekdays 8:30am – 4:30pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Early Assist: 604.451.6863/604.431.4972; ▪ Counselling & Student Development: Free, confidential, multi-session professional counselling for BCIT students at 604.432.8608. <p>All other days/times</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If unsure how to respond, call the Crisis Center of BC [1.800.784.2433] for consultation and appropriate referrals. If consultation indicates emergency action is required, call 911 then notify SSEM 604.451.6856). ▪ If still unclear about whether immediate support is required, call SSEM 604.451.6856]. ▪ Provide student with the following referrals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ BC Crisis Centre 24/7 [1.800.784.2433]; ▪ Here2Talk.ca for 24/7 phone or text counselling [1.877.857.3397]; ▪ BCIT Student Health/Counselling & Student Development 604.432.8608] ▪ After supporting the student in the moment, submit an Early Assist referral at bcit.ca/early-assist and let the student know so they will expect to hear from an Early Assist Case Manager. Follow up next business day at one of the above Weekday 8:30am to 4:30pm contacts.

STUDENT SUICIDALITY

All indications of suicidality must be taken seriously to ensure that students get the help they need. A student experiencing suicidal thoughts may or may not be at immediate risk of harming themselves, but always needs a compassionate, supportive and timely response. If you are unclear whether to call 911 and notify SSEM or refer to non-emergency supports, **seek consultation** as indicated under **Respond & Refer**.

Moderate concern

RECOGNIZE	RESPOND AND REFER
<p>A student is in distress and the employee is not concerned about immediate safety but observes that the student requires follow-up support within 2 business days.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sudden decline in performance ▪ Frequent absences ▪ Sudden change in behavior ▪ Poor hygiene ▪ Difficulty managing workload or meeting deadlines 	<p>Weekdays 8:30am – 4:30pm:</p> <p>Submit an Early Assist referral at bcit.ca/early-assist to ensure the student receives follow-up support. Let the student know that you have submitted the referral so that they will expect to hear from an Early Assist Case Manager.</p> <p>All other days/times:</p> <p>For same-day support, provide the following referrals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ BC Crisis Centre [1.800.784.2433]; ▪ Here2Talk.ca for 24/7 phone or text counselling [1.877.857.3397]; ▪ Be sure to submit an Early Assist referral at bcit.ca/early-assist.

Internal contacts

Service	Contact	Service	Contact
BCIT Safety, Security & Emergency Management	604.451.6856 bcit.ca/safetyandsecurity	Early Assist/ Student Life Office	604.451.6863 604.431.4972 early_assist@bcit.ca bcit.ca/earlyassist
Student Financial Aid & Awards	604.432.8555 bcit.ca/finaid	Indigenous Initiatives & Partnerships	604.432.8474 gathering_place@bcit.ca bcit.ca/indigenous
Counselling & Student Development	604.432.8608 bcit.ca/counselling	International Student Centre	604.432.8816 isc_info@bcit.ca bcit.ca/international
Student Health Services	604.432.8608 bcit.ca/health-services	BCITSA Advocacy	604.432.8279 advocacy@bcitsa.ca bcitsa.ca/advocacy
Accessibility Services	604.451.6963 accessibility@bcit.ca bcit.ca/accessibility	Office of Respect, Diversity & Inclusion	604.432.8409 respect@bcit.ca bcit.ca/harrassment

External contacts

Service	Contact	Service	Contact
Police, Fire, Ambulance	911	Suicide Prevention Hotline	1.800.784.2433
Crisis Center of BC [24/7]	1.800.784.2433	BC Mental Health Support Line	310.6789
Here2Talk.ca [24/7 counselling]	1.877.857.3397	VictimLinkBC	1.800.563.0808

Responding to students in distress — A flowchart for BCIT employees

