

IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING A PERSON IN DISTRESS

A Guide for Staff and Faculty Members

ustpaul.ca

223 Main Street, Ottawa ON
613-236-1393 | 1-800-637-6859



UNIVERSITÉ
SAINT·PAUL
UNIVERSITY

IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING A PERSON IN DISTRESS

Do you suspect a person (staff, faculty member or student) is in distress?

- Has the person reported significant problems to you or sought advice?
- Have you noticed signs of distress or significant changes in behaviour or mood?
- Is the person exhibiting behaviour that is erratic, aggressive or extremely emotional?
- Have staff, faculty members or students expressed concern to you about this person?

The situation is urgent when:

- **A person makes direct or indirect reference to suicide**
 - All references to committing suicide must be taken very seriously
 - Indirect references can include:
 - Expressed feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness or helplessness
 - Feelings that family or friends would be better off without them
 - Unreasonable feelings of guilt
- **There is a risk of harm to others**
 - Threats to others and disruptive behaviour include:
 - Verbal or non-verbal threats
 - Intimidating behaviour
 - Violent acts (to people or property)

NON-URGENT — WHAT TO DO

- Ask if the person needs help. Listen, show your concern and be non-judgmental.
- Ask questions that will help you determine what kind of assistance would be appropriate.
- If the person is a staff or faculty member, suggest they contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). If the person is a student, suggest they contact Counselling Services for Students for consultation, information, resources or a referral. The University of Ottawa Health Services can also be of great help for someone on our campus.
- If the person is willing to receive help but hesitant to call the EAP or Counselling Services for Students, suggest someone to accompany them in the process.
- If the person refuses your offer to help, respect their decision and encourage them to stay in touch with you.

URGENT — WHAT TO DO

If the person is on campus,
call Security Services.

613-236-9000

or call

extension 5555

IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING A PERSON IN DISTRESS

Saint Paul University is committed to ensuring the health and well-being of its staff, faculty members and students. We understand the importance of promoting good mental health in enabling everyone to achieve their full professional, social and academic potential.

We are often in a position to identify and assist people who may be experiencing emotional distress. This document is designed to help members of the University community recognize the signs of emotional distress and to provide guidelines on how to respond appropriately.

HOW TO IDENTIFY A PERSON IN DISTRESS

Signs to look for include:

- Stated need for help
- Changes in behaviour

(Changes in usual behaviour may indicate psychological distress.)

Examples include:

- Withdrawal from social interactions or academic work
- Disruptive behaviour, unexplained outbursts or irritability
- Noticeably rapid or slow speech

- Marked changes in mood

Examples include:

- Change in mood from one class to the next
- Expressed feelings of hopelessness or despair

- Obvious changes in appearance

Examples include:

- Noticeable weight gain or loss
- Disheveled appearance, poor hygiene
- Absence of facial expression

- Difficulty communicating or apparent distortion of reality

(This may indicate a severe psychological problem that requires assessment and treatment of the person by a professional.)

Examples include:

- Irrational conversations
- Disturbing material in academic assignments
- Suspiciousness, a constant feeling of being watched

- Significant changes in identity or relationships

Examples include:

- Changes in family circumstances or a break-up
- Illness or death of a family member or close friend

- Health concerns

(Health issues may impede staff or faculty members' job performance or students' progress, and increase stress levels.)

Examples include:

- Long-term illnesses
- Frequent short-term illnesses
- Eating disorders

- Serious academic concerns for students

Examples include:

- Missed, late or incomplete assignments
- Disorganized presentation of information
- Plagiarism, academic fraud or use of unauthorized resources

- Violence

Examples include:

- Recent experience involving assault or abuse
- Violence towards self or others

WHAT TO DO WHEN A PERSON IS IN DISTRESS

If you are concerned about a person, but you are unsure, uncomfortable or unable to intervene:

- **Contact** the appropriate office or service before acting (Security Services, EAP or Counselling Services for Students).
- **Notify** your supervisor of your concerns.

If you decide to approach a person you are concerned about, or if a person reaches out to you for help:

1. **Listen** carefully as the person describes the situation.
2. **Ask** questions to clarify whether you understand the person's specific needs.
3. **Acknowledge** and express concern.
4. **Offer hope** and reassure the person that things can get better.
5. **Discuss options and resources** available and suggest that the person make an appointment with the EAP, Counselling Services for Students or the University of Ottawa Health Services.
6. **Give printed information** from the services' website or write out the name and phone number of the services.
7. **Arrange a follow-up** with the person to show you care and determine whether the referral was effective.

If the person appears hesitant or reluctant to make use of services:

- Offer to contact the service yourself while the person is in your office.
- Offer to sit with the person during the initial phone call.
- Offer to accompany the person to the appointment, if appropriate and if you are comfortable doing so.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Those of us who encounter people in distress can experience a range of emotions based on our own unique experiences and attitudes towards mental health. We can feel a deep sense of satisfaction in trying to help, or we can experience frustration and anxiety. We may sometimes even feel threatened by events as they unfold.

If you experience exhaustion, sadness, anxiety, trouble sleeping or irritability, consider seeking support and counselling.

Free confidential assistance is available through the Saint Paul University Employee Assistance Program (EAP) on the Intranet:

[Human Resources -> Employee Benefits -> Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\) -> Sun Life RightDirections Brochure](#)

CONFIDENTIALITY

When you invite a person to discuss their concerns with you, it is important to be clear about the limits of your ability to keep information confidential. Even if a person insists, never promise absolute confidentiality. Rather, let them know that you will respect their privacy to the best of your ability, but that certain situations may require you to disclose information.

You should not withhold information about a person if:

- You are concerned for the person's physical safety.
- You are concerned for the safety of others.
- You believe the person is not competent to care for himself or herself.
- The person tells you something that involves an academic or criminal offence.
- You are concerned about a situation involving a minor (a person under the age of 18), including neglect or abuse.

Saint Paul University is committed to upholding the principles of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA).

In situations where a person engages in a behaviour that places them or others at risk, the University is committed to taking steps to protect the person as well as the larger community. If you are concerned about a person, it is important that you communicate your concerns to the appropriate office or service, such as **Security Services, EAP** or **Counselling Services for Students**, so that they may use their expertise and training to evaluate the situation and make recommendations to other professionals or services, as appropriate.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

SITUATION	ON CAMPUS	OFF CAMPUS
Suicide – Threat or Attempt	<p>SECURITY SERVICES (24/7) 613-236-9000 or call extension 5555</p> <p>COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR STUDENTS 613-700-6632 or 819-918-4731</p> <p>UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA HEALTH SERVICES CLINIC 613-564-3950</p>	EMERGENCY 911
Suicide – Suicidal Thoughts	<p>COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR STUDENTS 613-700-6632 or 819-918-4731</p> <p>UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA HEALTH SERVICES CLINIC 613-564-3950</p>	<p>CRISIS LINE (24/7)</p> <p>WITHIN OTTAWA 613-722-6914</p> <p>OUTSIDE OTTAWA 1-866-996-0991</p>
Emotional Crisis	<p>COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR STUDENTS 613-700-6632 or 819-918-4731</p> <p>UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA HEALTH SERVICES CLINIC 613-564-3950</p> <p>DISTRESS CENTRE – CRISIS RESPONSE (24/7) OTTAWA AND GATINEAU: 613-238-3311</p>	<p>CRISIS LINE (24/7)</p> <p>WITHIN OTTAWA 613-722-6914</p> <p>OUTSIDE OTTAWA 1-866-996-0991</p>
Sexual Assault	<p>SECURITY SERVICES (24/7) 613-236-9000 or call extension 5555</p> <p>COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR STUDENTS 613-700-6632 or 819-918-4731</p> <p>UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA HEALTH SERVICES CLINIC 613-564-3950</p>	<p>EMERGENCY 911</p> <p>THE OTTAWA HOSPITAL SEXUAL ASSAULT & PARTNER ABUSE CARE PROGRAM 613-798-5555 x13770</p> <p>OTTAWA RAPE CRISIS CENTRE 613-562-2334</p> <p>OTTAWA COALITION TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 613-237-1000</p>
Physical Assault/ Domestic Abuse	<p>SECURITY SERVICES (24/7) 613-236-9000 or call extension 5555</p> <p>COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR STUDENTS 613-700-6632 or 819-918-4731</p> <p>UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA HEALTH SERVICES CLINIC 613-564-3950</p>	<p>EMERGENCY 911</p> <p>ASSAULTED WOMEN’S HELPLINE 1-866-863-0511</p> <p>OTTAWA COALITION TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 613-237-1000</p>