



SUPPORTING A FRIEND IN DISTRESS



Canada's Capital University

carleton.ca/wellness

SUPPORTING A FRIEND

Friends are often the first contact when we are looking for help. It can be difficult to know how to support a friend when we aren't sure how to respond. Often we worry that we might make things worse by saying or doing the wrong thing.

Sometimes a friend just needs someone to listen and other times it is important to recognize when a situation is beyond your level of expertise.

1 RECOGNIZE

Any one of the following symptoms does not absolutely indicate serious distress. However, several signs and changes, which may be extreme or sudden, may point to potential mental health concerns.

Signs and Symptoms

Check in with your friend if you notice changes in any of the following:

- Emotional control
- Interactions with others
- Tired appearance
- Appetite/weight changes
- Isolation from friends/family
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Level of substance use

BE PROACTIVE

You are not obligated to keep secrets if it compromises safety. Trust your instincts if you sense your friend might be a harm to themselves or others and make sure you connect with someone who can help.

You aren't alone and you don't need to have all the answers!

If you need more help, you can contact:

- Health and Counseling Services
- Your Res Fellow or Res Manager
- Family, faculty or staff members
- Good2Talk
- The Crisis Line

Is the situation an emergency?

On-campus:
613-520-4444
4444 (from any on-campus phone)

Off-campus:
911

(Notify University Safety)

If uncertain, you can call the Crisis Line

613-722-6914

carleton.ca/wellness

2 RESPOND

If you notice any of these signs or changes, the next step is to let your friend know that you are there for them and would like to help. Try to find a time when your friend is available and comfortable, and be sure to find a private location.

Notice

Try to give your friend tangible examples, and if observing general personal changes, be gentle and explain why you are concerned.

"I've noticed you haven't been coming to the Caf lately and I am concerned because you usually love our group dinners."

"I've noticed you have been quiet when we hang out, is everything okay?"

"When you said _____, I thought that didn't sound like you and I'm concerned."

4 REFLECT

Your own safety and well-being are as important as that of the person in distress. Recognizing the limits of what you can do is an important part of taking care of yourself and your friend.

- Be honest with yourself about how much time and effort you are able to spend helping
- Reflect on your own needs and seek support for yourself
- Realize you cannot control how your friend will respond or make decisions for them

Reach out for help for yourself if you experience any of the following as a result of helping:

- Your grades are impacted
- You are sleep deprived
- Your thoughts are distracted
- You feel overly depended-on by your friend

3 REFER

Listen

Validate what your friend is going through. It is also okay for you to be nosy – probe your friend and show you are interested by asking questions.

"I cannot imagine what you are going through, but I am here for you."

"What else?"

"It sounds like you are frustrated with _____, is that right?"

Reassure

"I'm sorry you're going through this. This sounds really tough."

"Thank you for telling me."

"You are not alone – many people experience these same problems. We can figure out how you are going to get through this."

"What do you need right now?"
"I can recommend a few resources that others have used which could be helpful."
"This is important – which is why we need extra help."

Your friend may not want to talk, or may not access the resources that you suggest. It is important to respect their decision and point out that you are happy listen when they are ready. The only exception to this is when the situation is an emergency.

HOW TO REFER A FRIEND STRESSED

University life can be quite busy and stressful at times. Your friend may be showing some signs of distress that are concerning but they are able to identify and use healthy coping strategies. They are not at risk of harm to self or others.

They may be experiencing:

- Academic concerns
- Financial problems
- Social difficulties
- Health or personal problems
- Homesickness
- Mild sadness or anxiety
- Lack of support

Resources:

It can be helpful to connect your friend to the variety of support offered on campus. They may not be aware of all of the campus resources or may need help reaching out.

DISTRESSED

Your friend's usual coping strategies are no longer working. You may notice the signs of distress are more intense and they are having a difficult time functioning. They are not at risk of harm to self or others but professional support is required at this time.

They may be experiencing:

- Recent traumatic experience
- Deteriorating mental health
- Serious emotional difficulties
- Self-harm
- Bullying or harassment
- Lack of food/essentials
- Prolonged illness or injury

Resources:

Health and Counselling Services
613-520-6674

Residence Counselling
613-520-8061

Sexual Assault Support Services
613-520-5622

University Safety
613-520-3612

EMERGENCY

Your friend is actively planning suicide or talking about suicide. They pose an immediate threat of harm to self or others.

You see or hear:

Direct or indirect reference to suicide.

- "I've got a way out of this."
- "I just have some things to do."
- "I just need to end it all."

Demonstrating threatening, violent or destructive behaviour.

The situation feels unsafe.

Resources:

IMMEDIATE ACTION IS REQUIRED

On-campus:
University Safety - 613-520-4444

Off-campus:
Dial 9-1-1

On-Campus Resources

Health and Counselling Services
613-520-6674
carleton.ca/health

Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities
613-520-6608
carleton.ca/pmc

Sexual Assault Support Services
613-520-5622
carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support

From Intention to Action (FIT: Action)
613-520-1028
carleton.ca/fita

Academic Advising Centre
613-520-7850
carleton.ca/academicadvising

Awards and Financial Aid
613-520-3600
carleton.ca/awards

Career Services
613-520-6611
carleton.ca/careers

Centre for Indigenous Initiatives
613-520-5622
carleton.ca/indigenous

Centre for Student Academic Support
613-520-3822
carleton.ca/csas

Equity Services
613-520-5622
carleton.ca/equity

International Student Services Office
613-520-6600
carleton.ca/isso

Student Affairs
613-520-2573
carleton.ca/studentaffairs

The Crisis Line and Good2Talk can also provide you with free, confidential support if you are uncertain about how to help your friend or if you are concerned about leaving your friend alone.

The Crisis Line 613-722-6914 | Good2Talk 1-866-925-5454

If you are unsure what to do, you can also fill out a **Care Report** to notify the Office of Student Affairs:

carleton.ca/studentaffairs/care-report