



**Counselling Services**



# **WHEN TO BE CONCERNED, AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT**

A Guide to Identifying and Responding to Students in  
Distress

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## Introduction

Many people experience emotional distress at some point in their lives. Usually, this distress can be resolved by talking difficulties through with families and friends. Most students will cope well with the stresses of academic life, but may need more support.

It is important that these students are helped to engage with services appropriate to their needs.



This guide focuses on helping MSVU faculty and staff become better support persons for students in distress by fostering a community, where the mental health and well-being is a shared responsibility of all members of the campus community.

**The guide offers a supportive response to students in distress that aims to be humanizing, dignifying, and empowering.**

## What is Mental Health?

**Mental health and well-being are concepts that describe a quality that all human beings possess and experience differently. The Public Health Agency of Canada describes mental health as:**

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*The capacities of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections, and personal dignity.*

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**Mental health  
and well-  
being is a  
shared  
responsibility  
of all campus  
community  
members.**

## Recognizing a Student in Distress

**As a member of the MSVU community, you may at times notice a student that appears to be in distress.**

**Some of the possible indicators of distress may include:**

### **Academic Indicators**

- Increased absence from class
- Considering withdrawing from class or in jeopardy of failing
- Lack of participation
- Missed assignments, exams, or appointments
- Continual seeking of extensions
- Deterioration in quality/quantity of work
- Extreme disorganization
- Inconsistent performance

### **Behavioural & Emotional Indicators**

- Angry or hostile outbursts
- Difficulty concentrating
- More withdrawn or more animated than usual
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Crying or tearfulness
- Expressions of severe anxiety or irritability
- Shakiness, tremors, fidgeting, or pacing

### **Physical Indicators**

- Deterioration in personal hygiene
- Falling asleep in class repeatedly
- Noticeable cuts, bruises, or burns
- Frequent or chronic illness
- Disorganized, rapid or slurred speech
- Unusual inability to make eye contact
- Coming to class bleary-eyed, smelling of alcohol, or appearing intoxicated
- Statements about change in appetite or sleep

## Responding to a Student in Distress

### 1. APPROACH

It is OK to express concern. Be specific about the behaviour that worries you.

*"I've noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned about you."*

### 2. LISTEN

Listen non-judgmentally, and keep an open mind. Meet in a private place and give your undivided attention. Be patient.

*"Is there anything I can do to help you?"*

### 3. SUPPORT

Acknowledge their thoughts and feelings in a compassionate way. Offer hope. Reassure them you are concerned and want to help.

*"It sounds like you're feeling out of place."*

### 4. REFER

Provide student with resources. Offer to make the call and/or accompany them.

*"Would you like to call and book the appointment together while you are here with me?"*

Be open and honest with the student about the limits of your ability to help them. If the student appears to be in imminent danger of hurting themselves or others, consult **Campus Security** (902 457 6111) or call **Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team** (902 429 8167) or 911 immediately.

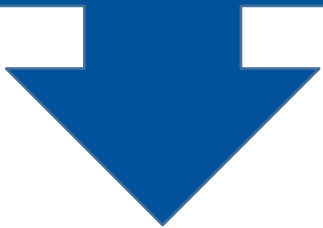
If the student discusses thoughts of harm to self or others, call **Counselling Services** for support (902 457 6567). Do not promise to keep threats to self or others a secret. Discuss campus resources. If the student is interested, help them make a counselling appointment.

## Situations Requiring Prompt Referral/Reporting

**Regardless of the circumstances or context, any reference to harming themselves or someone else must be taken seriously and a mental health professional should be contacted.**

### Direct or indirect reference to wanting to die by suicide

- Expressed feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, or hopelessness
- Expressed thoughts that the world, their family, and friends would be better off without them
- Expressed feelings of powerful guilt
- Expressed desire to die by suicide



**911**



**Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team**

902 429 8167  
1 888 429 8167 (toll-free)

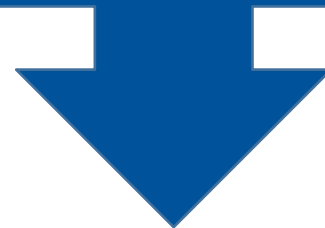


**QEII Emergency Department**

902 473 2043

### Threats and/or disruptive behaviour

- Any type of physical violence causing bodily harm to self or others
- Specific threats of violence or harm
- Student is incoherent
- Student cannot be calmed down



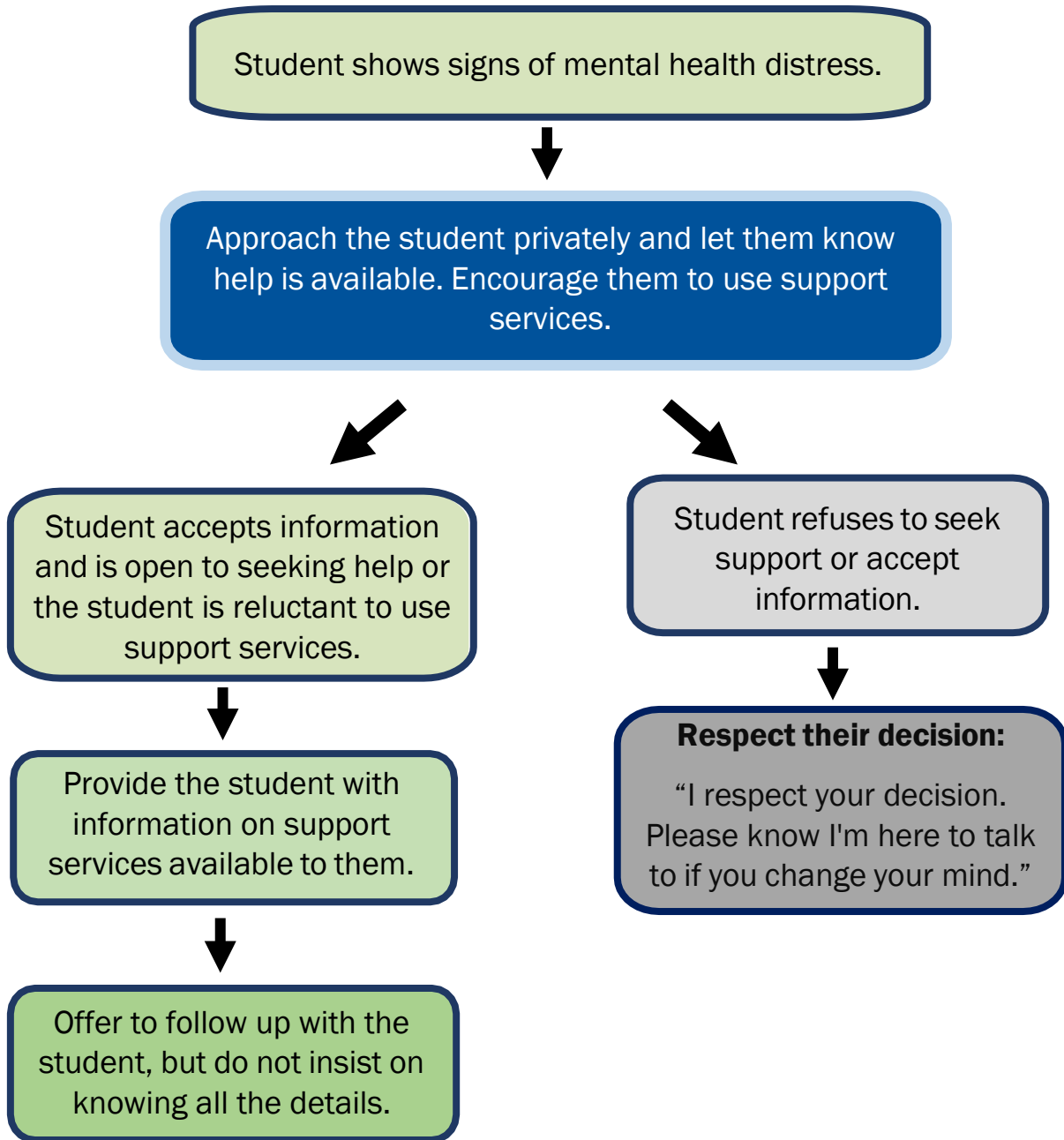
**911**



**MSVU Campus Security**

902 457 6111 (24/7)  
902 457 6412 (weekdays)

## Situations Not Requiring Prompt Referral/Reporting






Seeking help is a sign of strength and courage rather than weakness, but it can also be very scary and overwhelming. Keep this in mind when approaching a student. **If you're unsure about how to proceed, contact Counselling Services.**






## On-Campus Resources

### Academic Support




#### Accessibility Services

-  902 457 6567
-  [accessibilityservices@msvu.ca](mailto:accessibilityservices@msvu.ca)
-  EMF (Library), room 108



#### Centre for Academic Advising & Student Success

-  902 457 6657
-  [advising@msvu.ca](mailto:advising@msvu.ca)
-  Seton Academic Centre (SAC), room 303

#### Learning Strategist Services



-  902 457 6358
-  [learning.strategist@msvu.ca](mailto:learning.strategist@msvu.ca)
-  Seton Academic Centre (SAC), room 346

#### Writing Centre




-  [writing@msvu.ca](mailto:writing@msvu.ca)
-  EMF (Library), room 203

### Well-Being Support



#### Campus Security

-  902 457 6111 (emergency)
  -  902 457 6412
- These phone numbers are also listed on the back of student IDs.


#### Counselling Services

-  902 457 6567
-  [counselling@msvu.ca](mailto:counselling@msvu.ca)
-  EMF (Library), room 108

#### Health Services

-  902 457 6354 (option 0)
-  Assisi Hall, Second Floor

#### Peer Support

-  [peer.support@msvu.ca](mailto:peer.support@msvu.ca)

#### Policy Against Sexual Violence

-  [msvu.ca/sexualviolence](http://msvu.ca/sexualviolence)

## Community Resources

### 211 Nova Scotia

Phone	211
Website	<a href="http://ns.211.ca">ns.211.ca</a>

211 is a free, confidential information and referral service that can connect you to thousands of programs and services across Nova Scotia. Services include free, independent legal advice for sexual assault survivors. It is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

### Adsum House for Women and Children

Phone	902 423 5049
Website	<a href="http://adsumforwomen.org">adsumforwomen.org</a>

A support for women, children, transgender, non-binary, and genderqueer individuals who are experiencing periods of homelessness.

### Alice House

Phone	902 466 8459
Website	<a href="http://alicehouse.ca">alicehouse.ca</a>

Alice House provides safe second-stage housing and supportive counselling for women and children in Nova Scotia. Their programs support women and children in their recovery from intimate partner violence.

### Avalon Sexual Assault Centre

Phone	902 422 4240
Website	<a href="http://avaloncentre.ca">avaloncentre.ca</a>

Avalon is committed to confidential, non-judgmental and professional service. Their specialized therapeutic counselling program is available to women & trans/gender non- identified individuals 16 years and older, who have experienced a recent or historical sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse, and/or sexual harassment.

### Avalon Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program

Phone

902 425 0122

Website

<https://avaloncentre.ca/sexual-assault-nurse-examiner-sane-program/>

Some victims/survivors of a sexual assault want to ensure their physical and medical well-being after an immediate sexual assault. The Avalon Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program provides this care while ensuring that the victim/survivor's wants are respected.

### Bryony House

Phone

902 423 7183 (main line) or 902 422 7650 (distress line)

Website

[bryonyhouse.ca](http://bryonyhouse.ca)

Bryony House is a 24-bed transition shelter that assists those affected by intimate partner abuse. Their dedicated counsellors are there to answer the 24-hour distress line, provide individual/group supportive counselling, public education, advocacy and referrals. Each year, approximately 470 women and children stay with them.

### Halifax Sexual Health Centre

Phone

902 455 9656

Website

[hshc.ca](http://hshc.ca)

They offer a wide-range of clinical services, all provided by experienced nurses and doctors. Services include: STI testing, anonymous HIV testing, pregnancy tests, transgender health, free condoms and lube, and sexual health education.

### Laing House

Phone

902 425 9018

Website

[lainghouse.org](http://lainghouse.org)

Laing House is an organization that provides peer/social support and programs to youth aged 16-29 living with mental illness.

### Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team Phone Line

Phone

902 429 8167 or 1 888 429 8167 (toll free)

This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to support callers who present with suicidal thoughts, self-harming thoughts or behaviours, overwhelming anxiety, difficulty coping with distress, psychotic or distorted thinking, depression, substance abuse difficulties, or any other self-identified mental health concerns.

### Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions

Phone

1 855 922 1122

Website

[mha.nshealth.ca](http://mha.nshealth.ca)

Mental health and addictions professionals who provide support, programs, and services to Nova Scotians across the province.

### Phoenix Youth

Phone

902 422 3105

Website

[phoenixyouth.ca](http://phoenixyouth.ca)

Phoenix Youth Programs include housing support, advocacy, crisis intervention, counselling, parenting support, referral to community and internal resources, health services, financial advocacy, food, clothing, shower and laundry facilities, computer and phone access.

### prideHealth

Phone

902 487 0470

Website

[nshealth.ca/service-details/prideHealth](http://nshealth.ca/service-details/prideHealth)

prideHealth works to improve access to health services which are safe, coordinated, comprehensive, and culturally appropriate for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, Two-Spirited, intersex, queer, and questioning.

### SMART Recovery Nova Scotia

Phone

902 998 2015

Website

[smartrecoverynovascotia.org](http://smartrecoverynovascotia.org)

Self-Management And Recovery Training (SMART) is a global community of mutual-support groups. At meetings, participants help one another resolve problems with any addiction.

### South House

Phone

902 494 2432

Website

[southhousehalifax.org](http://southhousehalifax.org)

The South House is a student-funded, volunteer-driven resource centre that seeks to address and advocate for anti-oppression issues within a feminist framework. They aim to provide resources and referrals, as well as a safe space for people to organize.

### The Youth Project

Phone

902 429 5429

Website

[youthproject.ns.ca](http://youthproject.ns.ca)

The Youth Project is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to providing support and services to youth, 25 and under, around issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

## Online Resources

### Anxiety Canada

Website

[anxietycanada.com](http://anxietycanada.com)

Anxiety Canada offers resources and programs to help people better understand and manage anxiety, including a CBT app, online courses, and online group therapy.

### Eating Disorders NS

Website

[eatingdisordersns.ca](http://eatingdisordersns.ca)

Eating Disorders NS offers support at all stages of recovery. Services are available without a referral or a diagnosis and include counselling services, nutrition counselling, and peer support.

### Good2Talk NS

Phone

Call 1 833 292 3698 or text GOOD2TALKNS to 686868

Website

[good2talk.ca/novascotia](http://good2talk.ca/novascotia)

Good2Talk offers free, confidential support services to post-secondary students. By connecting with Good2Talk, post-secondary students in Nova Scotia can access professional counselling, volunteer crisis support and information and referrals about mental health services and supports on and off campus 24/7.

### Healthy Minds NS

Website

[healthymindsns.ca](http://healthymindsns.ca)

HealthyMindsNS is a suite of online mental health resources, available free to post-secondary students, to complement the mental health supports and services available on campuses.

## Hope for Wellness

Phone	1 855 242 3310
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Website	<a href="http://hopeforwellness.ca">hopeforwellness.ca</a>
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The Hope for Wellness Help Line offers immediate help to all Indigenous people across Canada. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to offer immediate support and crisis intervention. Phone and online chat are available.

## Therapy Assistance Online (TAO)

Website	<a href="http://taoconnect.org">taoconnect.org</a>
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TAO self-help is an online mental health library with interactive modules to help you understand and manage how you feel, think and act. You choose the modules you believe will help you feel well and live the life you choose.

## Togetherall

Website	<a href="http://togetherall.com">togetherall.com</a>
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Togetherall is a safe and anonymous, online peer community for your mental health, freely available 24/7 to all youth and young adults aged 16+, and post-secondary students in Nova Scotia.

## Wellness Together Canada

Phone	19 or older: Call 1 866 585 0445 or text WELLNESS to 741741 Under 19: Call 1 888 668 6810 or text WELLNESS to 686868
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Website	<a href="http://wellnesstogether.ca">wellnesstogether.ca</a>
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Mental health and substance use support for people in Canada and Canadians abroad. Always free and virtual, 24/7. Phone, text and online options are available.

## Resources for Supporters

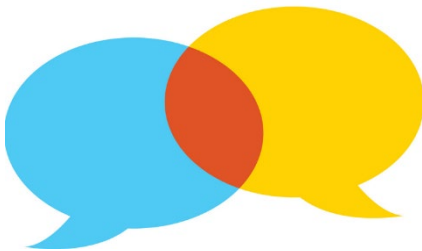
### Mental Health First Aid



[Mental Health First Aid Standard](#) (available virtually or face-to-face) teaches the support provided to a person who may be experiencing a decline in their mental well-being or a mental health crisis. Training is available throughout the year (at a cost) for **students, faculty and staff**.

Email [mhfa@msvu.ca](mailto:mhfa@msvu.ca) to inquire.

### Counsellor Consultation



**Students, faculty and staff** can contact Counselling Services if you're concerned about a student who is displaying signs of distress or concern. Through informal consultation, our team may be able to suggest possible intervention strategies.

Email [counselling@msvu.ca](mailto:counselling@msvu.ca) or call 902 457 6567 to request a meeting with a counsellor.

### Waves of Change



MSVU is committed to sexual violence prevention and providing a trauma-informed, survivor-centred response. **Students, faculty and staff** can participate in the Waves of Change bystander intervention training program, offered for free on campus, to learn more about sexual violence on campus and ways to address it.

Email [svpsa@msvu.ca](mailto:svpsa@msvu.ca) to inquire. Find the MSVU Policy Against Sexual Violence, along with other resources, at [msvu.ca/sexualviolence](http://msvu.ca/sexualviolence).