

Who is a Student in Difficulty?

A student in difficulty is any student who encounters major obstacles to the successful completion of their academic program.

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Students requiring immediate help because of life-threatening or severe psychological difficulties can be seen the same day during weekday office hours at:

Student Wellness Centre
Security Services

MUSC B101 **Ext. 27700**
CUC 201 **Ext. 88** (any university phone) or **905- 522-4135**

Caller should identify him/herself and tell reception they are dealing with a student in crisis and ask to speak to the person in charge. Accompany the student to the service, if appropriate.

AFTER HOURS EMERGENCIES

Contact McMaster Security Services at **Ext. 88** (any university phone) or call **905-522-4135**.

McMaster University appreciates the concern that faculty and staff have for the well being of students and values the role they play in identifying students who are in difficulty. Recognizing the signs of emotional distress and responding with interest and concern may be a critical factor in helping students resolve the problems that are interfering with their academic achievement. This folder, brought to you by the **Supporting Students in Difficulty Committee**, is designed to assist and support faculty and staff in this important function.

Ask for help when dealing with a student in difficulty

Inside this folder is helpful information that will assist you in making a good referral. You may consult with one of the campus offices listed on the back cover to sort out the relevant issues, explore alternative approaches and identify other resources. Ask for a consultation:

- If you are concerned about a student and unsure whether or not to intervene.
- If you are uncertain about how to respond to a student's request for help.
- If a student resists your efforts to assist/refer or you are uncomfortable with the situation

Faculty Support:

<http://wellness.mcmaster.ca/faculty>

If you have questions, concerns or suggestions about this folder, or would like additional copies, please contact the Student Wellness Centre, ext 27700.

HOW TO ASSIST A STUDENT IN DIFFICULTY: MAKING A GOOD REFERRAL

Staff and faculty are often in an excellent position to recognize behaviour that could signal that a student is in emotional distress and may need help. Being willing to acknowledge your concerns directly to the student can be an important factor in successful problem resolution for the student.

<p>1. Speak with student in person and in private (unless it feels unsafe to do so). Stay calm.</p>	<p>6. Point out that help is available, and that seeking help is a sign of strength and courage rather than a sign of weakness or failure.</p>
<p>2. Express concern without making generalizations or assumptions about the student. Be specific about the behaviour that concerns you. For example, <i>“I’ve noticed that you have been absent from class lately and I am concerned,”</i> rather than <i>“Where have you been lately? You should be more concerned about your grades.”</i></p>	<p>7. Research available resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Contact the Student Wellness Centre for recommendations on how to approach the situation; counsellors at the centre will be able to offer advice on how to proceed. b. Contact campus and community resources c. Ask colleagues or supervisors for help or ideas.
<p>3. Listen carefully and non-judgmentally to the student. Ask questions so you can clarify your understanding of their specific needs. Let the student know that absolute confidentiality cannot be promised, but you will respect their privacy to the best of your ability.</p>	<p>8. If the student appears hesitant or reluctant, you can help by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Informing the student that there is no charge for student services. b. Notifying the student that disclosure and records can only be released with their written permission, within the limits of the law. <p>Or help them with the appointment by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Offering to contact the resource for the student while they are still in your office. b. Offering to sit with the student while they make the initial contact call themselves. c. Accompanying the student to the appointment if appropriate and if you feel comfortable.
<p>4. Acknowledge the student’s thoughts and feelings in a sensitive, compassionate manner. Let the student know you understand what they are trying to communicate by reflecting back the essence of what they’ve said. (<i>“It sounds like you’re not used to such a big campus and you’re feeling out of things.”</i>)</p>	<p>9. Provide the student with information to take away. Make sure if you made an appointment, they have the contact name, number and location.</p>
<p>5. Offer hope, and reassure the student that things can get better. Be cautious about giving advice.</p>	<p>10. Offer to follow-up with the student to ensure the referrals were effective, but don’t insist on knowing what the student has done.</p>

When a student says “No” to a referral

If the student emphatically says “no”, then respect that decision. Except for emergencies, the option to accept or refuse assistance must be left up to the student. If they become defensive, don’t force the issue or trick them into going. Try and leave the door open for later reconsideration.


SITUATIONS REQUIRING IMMEDIATE REFERRAL

DIAL 88 FROM ANY UNIVERSITY PHONE OR CALL 905-522-4135

<p>1. DIRECT OR INDIRECT REFERENCE TO SUICIDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regardless of circumstance or context, any reference to committing suicide should be taken very seriously and a mental health professional should be consulted. • Indirect references to suicide may include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expressed feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, or helplessness • feelings that the world, family, friends would be better off without them • unreasonable feelings of guilt <p>In the event of an actual suicide attempt, immediately call McMaster Security (ext. 88 or 905-522-4135) to request assistance and/or an ambulance</p>	<p>THREATS AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervention varies with the severity of the offending behaviour. • Physical violence causing bodily harm and specific threats must be reported immediately to McMaster Security Services (ext. 88 or 905-522-4135). 	<p>DRUG AND ALCOHOL MISUSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the case of an apparent drug overdose or severe drug reaction, call McMaster Security Services (ext. 88 or 905-522-4135) for assistance and/or an ambulance. • If a student appears to have a pattern of substance use, it is important to attempt to refer the student for counselling. However, be sure to speak to the student only when they are sober.
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OTHER SITUATIONS OF CONCERN

<p>1. DISORDERED EATING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a student shares concerns regarding disruptive eating patterns such as excessive dieting, uncontrolled binge eating, and induced vomiting after eating, it is important that professional treatment be recommended. 	<p>2. ASSAULT & HARASSMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any issues related to sexual assault, harassment, physical or emotional abuse, stalking, or discrimination may require counselling. If cases are severe, report events to McMaster Security Services (905-525-9140 ext.24281) with consent from the student. 	<p>3. MARKED CHANGES IN MOOD OR BEHAVIOUR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in normal behaviour, including withdrawal from social interactions or academic work and notable changes in energy levels or appearance, are common signs of psychological distress and professional treatment is recommended. 	<p>4. DIFFICULTIES WITH COMMUNICATING AND/OR APPARENT DISTORTIONS OF REALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication troubles such as impaired speech and irrational conversation, or distortions of reality such as disturbing material in academic assignments, are all causes for concern and should be referred to the Student Wellness Centre (ext. 27700). 	<p>5. LEARNING AND ACADEMIC PROBLEMS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students, who are having trouble learning, are considering dropping out or transferring, or are in jeopardy of failing, may find assistance helpful in their decision-making.
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Counselling and Health	Academic Services	Legal and Conduct	Other	Community
<p>Student Wellness Centre MUSC B101 Ext 27700 http://wellness.mcmaster.ca wellness@mcmaster.ca</p> <p>Chaplaincy Centre MUSC 231 Ext 24207 http://www.mcmaster.ca/chaplain chaplain@mcmaster.ca.</p> <p>Queer Students Community Centre MUSC 221 Ext 27397 http://www.msumcmaster.ca/qsc qsc@msu.mcmaster.ca</p> <p>SHEC MUSC 202 Ext 22041 http://www.msumcmaster.ca/shec shec@msu.mcmaster.ca</p> <p>Peer Support Line (PSL) Ext 28888 www.msumcmaster.ca/peersupportline psl@msu.mcmaster.ca</p>	<p>Student Accessibility Services MUSC B107 Ext 28652 http://sas.mcmaster.ca sas@mcmaster.ca</p> <p>Student Success Centre GH110 Ext.24254 http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca</p> <p>Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships GH 120 Ext 24319 http://sfas.mcmaster.ca</p>	<p>Human Rights and Equity Services MUSC 212 Ext 27581 http://www.mcmaster.ca/hres hres@mcmaster.ca</p> <p>Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards GH 207 Ext 23845 http://studentconduct.mcmaster.ca</p> <p>Ombuds Office MUSC 210 Ext 24151 http://www.mcmaster.ca/ombuds ombuds@mcmaster.ca</p> <p>Security Services CUC 201 Ext 24281 Emergency: dial 88 or 905-522-4135 http://security.mcmaster.ca security@mcmaster.ca</p>	<p>Indigenous Studies Program HH103 Ext 27426 http://www.indigenous.mcmaster.ca indigenous.admin@mcmaster.ca</p> <p>International Student Services GH110 Ext 24748 http://iss.mcmaster.ca iss@mcmaster.ca</p> <p>Campus Food Bank McMaster Student Union Services MUSC 201 http://www.msumcmaster.ca/breadbin macbreadbin@msu.mcmaster.ca</p>	<p>Good2Talk, Post-Secondary Helpline 1-866-925-5454 Free, professional & anonymous counselling support</p> <p>COAST (Crisis Outreach and Support Team) Crisis Line 905-972-8338</p> <p>Ontario Drug and Alcohol Helpline 1-800-565-8603</p> <p>Sexual Assault Crisis/Support Line, Hamilton 905-525-4162</p> <p>Suicide 24 Hour Crisis Line 905-522-1477</p> <p>Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline 1-888-230-3505</p> <p>Ontario Mental Health Helpline 1-866-531-2600</p>
<p>Student Wellness Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal counselling; mental health support; therapeutic groups • Assessment and treatment of illness and injury; wellness resource materials <p>Chaplaincy Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community pastoral support with personal counselling and bereavement support groups <p>Queer Students Community Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student peer support and resources around sexual orientation/gender identity. <p>SHEC (The Student Health Education Centre)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McMaster Student Union peer based health education, resources and confidential support <p>Peer Support Line (PSL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McMaster Student Union peer based confidential phone line support 	<p>Student Accessibility Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability services, learning strategies and Assistive Technology support <p>Student Success Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic support and skills assistance, first generation student support services, career exploration, job search, service learning, volunteering <p>Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency funding, financial assistance, government loans, scholarships and work programs, 	<p>Human Rights and Equity Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation and support on issues related to harassment and discrimination, including sexual harassment <p>Student Code of Conduct and Community Standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes student rights and responsibilities through the administration of the Student Code of Conduct, Residence Code of Conduct and the Athletic Code of Conduct. <p>Ombuds Office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice for students, staff and faculty on options and processes available to solve academic and non-academic concerns. <p>Security Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation on issues of safety, protection of people and property in the McMaster community. 	<p>Indigenous Studies Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic and social counselling; assistance with employment and career opportunities; Aboriginal Elders; liaison with Aboriginal Organizations and the Six Nations/New Credit Territories. <p>International Student Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising services on issues related to international students and incoming exchange students (immigration, health insurance) as well as work and study abroad advising for Canadian outbound students. 	

General protocol for identifying and assisting students in distress

