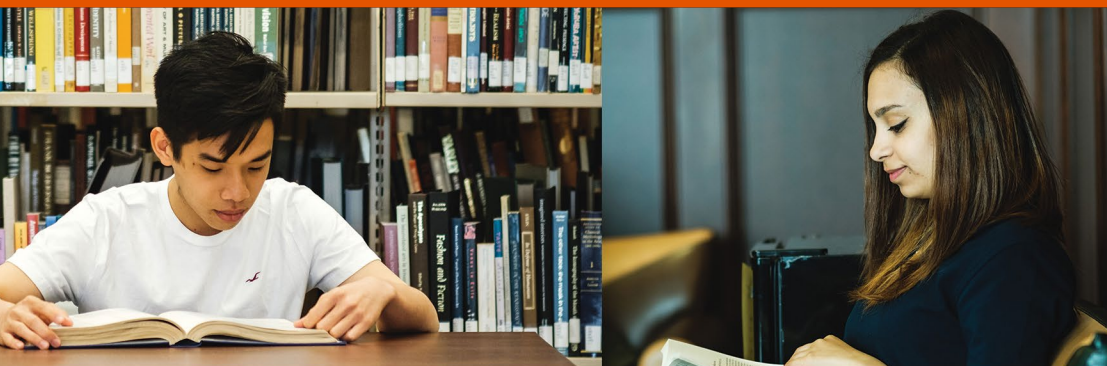




Cape  
Breton  
University

# When To Be Concerned and What To Do About It

A Guide to Identifying and Responding  
to Students in Distress



Health, Wellness and Safety Services

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

# ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES

## Counselling Services Max Bell Health and Counselling Centre

902-563-1359

healthservices@cbu.ca

## Jennifer Keeping Centre

902-563-1208

Marvin Harvey Building B101  
Monday to Friday 8:30am - 4pm

## Manager Security Services

902-563-1801

## CBU Campus Security

(24 hours a day-7 days a week)

902-578-2316

## Max Bell Health Centre

902-563-1359

## Human Rights and Diversity Officer

902-574-2350

scott\_thomas@cbu.ca

## CBU Peer Support Services

Students' Union Building

- Reception 902-563-1192
- Women's Centre 902-563-1471
- Union Pride and Ally Centre 902-563-1481
- International Student Centre email: su\_isc@cbu.ca

## IDENTIFYING a student in distress

### Changes in mood or behavior

- Withdrawal from social interactions or academic work
- Notable changes in energy levels or appearance
- High levels of irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in hygiene or dress
- Changes in relationships or social behavior (withdrawal, isolation, dependency)
- Unusual behaviour (unexplained crying, laughing to self, rapid speech, disorganized thinking, paranoia)

### Difficulty in communicating and/or distortions of reality

- Distortions of reality
- Communication difficulty (difficulty forming thoughts, completing sentences, irrational conversation)

### Learning and academic challenges

- Serious academic concerns
- Considering withdrawing from class
- In jeopardy of failing
- Changes in academic performance (deterioration in quality of work, frequently missed assignments and classes, excessive procrastination, avoidance of participation)

### Assault and/or harassment

- Sexual assault
- Harassment, bullying, physical or emotional abuse
- Stalking
- Discrimination

## RESPONDING to a student in distress

### APPROACH

- It is OK to express concern
- Be specific about the behaviour that worries you  
(example) "I've noticed you've been absent from class lately, and I'm concerned about you."

### LISTEN

- Listen non-judgmentally and keep an open mind
- Meet in a private place
- Be patient
- Give your undivided attention  
(example) "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

### SUPPORT

- Acknowledge their thoughts and feelings in a compassionate way
- Offer hope
- Reassure them that you are concerned and want to help  
(example) "It sounds like you're feeling out of place."

## REFER

- Provide student with resources
- Offer to make the call with the student and/or accompany student  
(example) "If you'd like, I can call and book the appointment for you while you are here with me"
- If referring to counselling services, fill out referral form in email or mail to CBU Clinical Social Worker.  
Be honest and open with the student about the limits of your ability to help them.

If the student appears to be in imminent danger of hurting his/herself or others, consult Campus Security (902-578-2316) or 911 immediately.

If the student discusses thoughts of harm to self or others, call the counsellor. Do not promise to keep threats to self or others a secret. Discuss campus resources. If the student is interested, help them make an appointment with Counselling Services.

Kognito, Free Health Simulation to increase mental health (aimed to assist staff and faculty by teaching them how to identify students in psychological distress, how to approach and discuss concerns, and make referrals).

<https://healthymindsns.kognito.com>

## SITUATIONS REQUIRING prompt referral/reporting

### 1. Direct or indirect reference to wanting to die/commit suicide

Regardless of the circumstances or context, ANY reference to wanting to die/commit suicide should be taken seriously and a mental health professional should be contacted.

- 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

### 2. Threats and/or disruptive behaviour

Document the events and contact Campus Security (902-578-2316) and/or 911

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

### 3. Duty to Report

Every individual in the province of Nova Scotia has a LEGAL obligation to report concerns of abuse or neglect of a child under the age of 19 in order to ensure children are protected from harm. Failure to report is a criminal offence.

Duty to Report Third Party Abuse (i.e. dating partner sexual assault): It is important to note that Duty to Report Third-Party Abuse ONLY applies to children under the age of sixteen. However, the individual must report if the alleged offender has access to children who in turn may be at risk.

## District offices of Community Services in Cape Breton Regional Municipality

**Cape Breton-Victoria District Office**  
Child Welfare, Suite 31, Provincial Building  
60 Prince Street, Sydney, NS B1P 5L1  
Phone: 902-563-3400 | Fax: 902-563-3660

**Glace Bay District Office - Child Welfare**  
2nd Floor, Senators' Place  
633 Main Street, Glace Bay, NS  
Phone: 902-842-4000 | Fax: 902-842-4091

**North Sydney District Office**  
Child Welfare 184 Commercial Street  
North Sydney, NS B2A 3Y7  
Phone: 902-794-5110 | Fax: 902-794-5171

**Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia**  
The Eskasoni office covers the Cape Breton communities  
1-800-263-8300

## REFERRING a student in distress

### Tips for making a good referral

Approach the student privately, inform them help is available and encourage them to use support services.

#### 1. Student is open to and accepts information or the student is reluctant to use support services.

- Provide the student with information on support services available to them.
- Offer to follow up with the student but do not insist on knowing what the student has done.

#### 2. Student refuses to seek support or accept information.

- Respect their decision: "I respect your decision, please know my door is always open if you change your mind."
- Seeking help is a sign of strength and courage rather than weakness but it also can be scary. Keep this in mind when approaching the student. If unsure about ways to proceed, contact a mental health professional in Counselling Services for more information and ways to provide further support.

## WHEN TO BE CONCERNED and what to do about it

### Possible Signs of Distress

- A change in students' behaviour and/or appearance...
- Confusion, disorientation, erratic behavior...
- Increased emotionality...
- Drop in academic performance...

### How to Respond

- Reach out and ASK!
- Listen with an open mind and with respect for privacy.
- Support and have compassion and empathy.
- Provide information on available FREE supports/services.

## OFF-CAMPUS RESOURCES

### Transition House (Willow House)

902-539-2945

(24 hours a day - 7 days per week)  
Willow House provides emergency shelter for emotionally and/or physically abused women and their children.

### Nova Scotia Health Authority Mental Health & Addictions

Mental Health 902-567-7951  
Addictions 902-563-2583  
CaperBase@Access808  
902-539-7233

### Nova Scotia Mental Health Crisis Line

1-888-429-8167

(24 hours per day - 7 days per week)

### For non-emergency health information and services and help to quit tobacco call 811

### Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner

(SANE) Program Coordinator

902-567-0393

sanecoordinator.ewc@bellaliant.net

### Good2Talk, Post-Secondary Student Help Line

1-833-292-3698

(24 hours per day - 7 days per week)