

Guidelines for Supporting a Student in Distress

Tool for Teaching Staff



Identify, Interact, and Refer: the 3 Key Step

As a member of the teaching staff, you play a key role in supporting students experiencing psychological distress. Not only does your frequent and direct contact with them allow you to witness it, but some students may also confide in you because of your role as a model and support figure. By adopting a caring and open attitude, you can encourage students to talk about their difficulties and seek help.

This document presents information to help you recognize the signs of psychological distress in students, support them and refer them to appropriate resources. Tools from Station SME designed for members of teaching staff are also provided.

The information presented on the following pages is taken from the TÉLUQ University's training module ***Comment interagir avec une personne qui semble en détresse psychologique.***

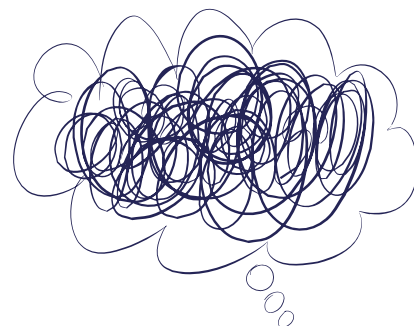
This self-paced 25-minute training is free of charge.



1 Identify | Recognizing Signs of Distress

Distress manifests itself in different ways. While some signs may seem obvious, others are more subtle, and it helps to pay attention to changes or fluctuations to recognize them. They may be physical, cognitive, emotional or behavioral in nature. For example:

- Appearance of unusual physical signs
- Sudden drop in performance
- Lack of hygiene
- Repeated absences
- Expression of distorted perceptions of reality
- Mood changes



Without drawing hasty conclusions, you can also notice signals of distress in a remote learning context. Examples include:

Video

- Camera always turned off
- Disorganized or inappropriate physical environment



Email

- Excessive use of punctuation or capital letters
- Disjointed or confusing comments
- Sudden interruption of communication



Audio

- Noisy environment
- Long silences or sudden interruptions
- Unusual tone or speech rate



In all cases, to clarify your doubts and concerns, do not hesitate to talk with the student. If they refuse to open up, without insisting, you can still mention that you remain available if they ever want to talk.

2

Interact | Initiating and guiding a conversation with an attitude that fosters trust

To interact with the student and take action to help, you can:

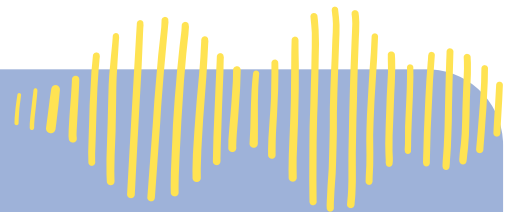
1- Start the conversation

- *You've lost your usual smile these past few days. Are you okay?*
- *What's going on? You seem upset right now?*
- *This may not be my place, but I've noticed you don't seem quite the same lately. Would you like to talk about it?*

2 - Share your concerns and seek advice from a trusted person or professional resource

Once the conversation is started, there are different strategies or attitudes you can use to keep it going. Depending on the situation, you may choose to:

- Let the student speak freely to build trust.
- Ask questions to encourage them to describe the situation or how they are feeling.
- Guide the discussion to help them identify possible actions to take



Concrete examples

- Maintain eye contact
- Show signs of active listening (e.g., nodding, verbal validation)
- Use silence to give space and encourage the student to speak
- At the right moment, rephrase what you've understood
- Breathe and stay calm during the conversation
- Avoid denying or invalidating the student's emotions or perceptions
- Be empathetic while maintaining emotional distance

3

Refer | Concluding a conversation gently and guiding the person toward support resources

To guide the student toward the resources they need, you can:

- Give them the name and contact information of an organization. If the student seems disoriented or embarrassed, offer to make the first contact with them.
- Ask them to follow up with you about their actions, if circumstances allow. This shows that you are not just brushing them off, and that you take their situation seriously.
- If you feel uncertain, don't try to handle it alone. Talk with a trusted person or professional about the actions you have taken or are considering.



Key sentences to use:

- *I take your situation seriously, and since I'm not an expert in counseling, I feel a bit limited in what I can do. Would you like me to find resources that could support you?*
- *Based on what you've shared, I think it might be helpful to consult with specialists. Do you know of any resources? Would you like us to explore options together?*
- *Thank you for your trust. It's not easy to open up. Please don't hesitate to come back to me if you need to. Here's a list of resources in the region if you'd like confidential, professional support.*
- *I feel you may not be comfortable calling, would you like me to stay with you while you call? Would you like me to call to introduce you? Then I can hand over the line to you.*



For Further Reading...



Station SME is a website that brings together information and tools on everything related to student mental health in higher education. This site highlights credible content on the subject and provides simplified access to a variety of knowledge tailored to the needs of the college and university community, including members of teaching staff.

A video series where students talk about their academic pathways and the challenges they faced



A video series on pedagogical practices that support mental health



A selection of tools on pedagogical practices



Refer to Support Services



To learn about the services available to students at your institution

To learn about emergency services to contact if immediate support is needed



Take preventive action: Share the Station SME!

- Add a reference to the Station SME in your syllabus.
- Share this video with your students in class to introduce them to the Station SME.

