

3 STEPS TO ASSISTING COLLEAGUES IN DISTRESS

WORKPLACE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

In your role as an Okanagan College employee, you may be the first person to see signs that a colleague is in distress, or they may come to you specifically for help. Use this guide to familiarize yourself with common signs of distress, and the steps you can take to offer assistance.

1. Recognize signs of distress

Signs and symptoms of distress can range depending on the mental and emotional state of your colleague. They could be experiencing a general mental health issue, a high level of distress to an imminent risk of harm. See page 2 for common signs.

2. Respond with concern and empathy

It's okay to be uncertain about how to respond. You don't need to have all the answers. Being there to support your colleagues is often the most valuable thing that you can do.

- If possible, move to a discrete and appropriate environment.
- Express concern and be specific about the signs and behaviours you've noticed – e.g., "I've noticed you don't seem like yourself at work lately."
- Listen actively, ask open ended questions, and help them feel heard and understood.

3. Refer to available resources

Your role is not to diagnose or treat, but you can share that confidential help is available. Early intervention plays a key role in creating healthy and respectful workplaces. Help make them aware of the range of support services available such as Employee and Family Assistance (EFAP) LifeWorks Program: 1-888-307-0590

If a colleague does not want help:

Respect their decision. Accepting assistance must be left up to the individual, except in emergencies. If they change their mind, they can access resources in the future.

Note for managers and supervisors:

If you've observed concerning changes in behaviour that are impacting the workplace, the College may have a legal duty to inquire to ensure that a mental health issue requiring accommodation is supported. Please reach out to HR for support and advice on how best to conduct the inquiry.

Contacts:

Human Resources: humanresources@okanagan.bc.ca

Employee and Family Assistance LifeWorks Program: 1-888-307-0590



IF YOU SEE



CONNECT TO THESE RESOURCES

IMMINENT RISK OF HARM

Examples:

- Active thoughts of suicide, with a plan or suicide attempt.
- Behaviour that is violent, destructive, aggressive or threatening to self or others.
- Colleague is confused, hallucinating or has trouble remaining conscious.



"I am concerned about my colleague's immediate safety, or the safety of others."

IMMEDIATE STEPS:

1. Call 911
2. Call Campus Security: 250-862-5401
3. Contact Human Resources
humanresources@okanagan.bc.ca

HIGH LEVEL OF DISTRESS

Examples:

- Deterioration in personal appearance and hygiene.
- Significant impairment trying to complete daily tasks.
- Increased interpersonal conflict and anger.
- Expressions of severe hopelessness or references to suicide.
- Substance use concerns.
- Loss of touch with reality/severely disorganized thinking.
- Physical health concerns.



"I am concerned about some recent behaviour that is out of character for one of my colleagues."

RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS:

- **Employee and Family Assistance (EFAP) LifeWorks Program:** 1-888-307-0590 (free and confidential 24/7)
- **Interior Health Mental Health and Substance Use Services:** 250-868-7788 (11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.) or Kelowna General Hospital 250-862-4000
- **Crisis Centre:** 1-800-784-2433, crisiscentre.bc.ca
- **Here2Talk.ca:** 1-877-857-3397

GENERAL MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM

Examples:

- Low or irritable mood with change in energy, appetite, sleep, and/or concentration, which is impacting daily functioning.
- Increased absenteeism and/or tardiness.
- Persistent restlessness, worry, obsessions, agitation, irrationality, racing thoughts, panic attacks.
- Seemingly withdrawn and/or avoiding interaction.
- Flashbacks to a traumatic event, intrusive memories and thoughts.
- Interpersonal conflict.
- Lack of social support.



"I am concerned about the general well-being of one of my colleagues. I'm not sure if it is serious, but I would like to offer them some support."

RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS:

- **OC Employee and Family Assistance Program:** 1-800-387-4765 or login.lifeworks.com
- **OC Human Resources:** okanagan.bc.ca/human-resources
- **Indigenous Mental Health Counselling and Crisis Intervention:** 1-855-242-3310, hopeforwellness.ca
- **HealthlinkBC:** 811 or visit healthlinkbc.ca