

# RECOGNIZE & RESPOND to a Student in Crisis

A guide for faculty and residents in UBC's MD Undergraduate Program

This guide was developed to help identify and differentiate the severity of a student's distress and enable you to guide them to the most appropriate resources and supports. When a student is in crisis, it is important to immediately link them to resources that can help in the moment. Your role is to respond with assistance or recommendations on where they can find support, and not to solve the student's issue(s) on your own.

## Let's get started:

Recognize and respond to a CRISIS or URGENT CONCERN  
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Familiarize yourself with resources  
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## Crisis

**When students need immediate help.**

### RECOGNIZE the indicators of a student in crisis

- Expresses thoughts or ideas of suicide or self-harm
- Presents an acute risk to others (e.g. seriously threatens others or becomes violent)
- Presents an acute health issue or distress that requires removal from the learning (including clinical) environments

### RESPOND to the student or their situation by taking immediate action

- Notify the student that you have urgent concerns
- Consider the type of crisis and consider **calling 911** if needed

#### When student is onsite:

- **Health emergencies in a hospital:** accompany them to the ER.
- **Mental health emergencies in the community:** call the [local crisis service](#). If you cannot wait for or reach them, **call 911**.

#### When student is offsite/not with you:

- If possible, note the student location to communicate to emergency services
- **Health emergencies:** **call 911** and relay the student's address
- **Mental health emergencies:** call the [crisis mobile response unit](#) and relay the student's address

When able, call or email [STUDENT AFFAIRS](#)\* and the [REGIONAL ASSOCIATE DEAN](#) at your campus for support, planning, and debriefing.

**\*STUDENT AFFAIRS is arm's length from the MD program, and preserves the student's confidentiality, barring certain exceptional circumstances (access with CWL). If you reach out for assistance, we will do our best to get back to you within 48 hours, during work hours.**

# Urgent Concern

## RECOGNIZE the indicators of a student in crisis

- Expresses worthlessness or hopelessness
- Shows a serious decline in academic performance
- Shows changes in
  - ⇒ Attendance, participation or difficulty in how they interact with others
  - ⇒ Demeanour or mood (e.g. decreased empathy, tearful or sad, easy to anger)
  - ⇒ Energy levels (e.g. fatigue, sleep difficulties)
  - ⇒ Significant change in appearance and hygiene

## RESPOND to the student or their situation by building awareness of Student Affairs, supports, and resources

### Encourage the student to:

- Identify the next steps they want to take
- Connect directly with [STUDENT AFFAIRS](#) at their site
- Seek counselling at [STUDENT SERVICES](#), University Counselling, or the [Physician Help Program \(PHP\)](#)
- Seek support from other sources (e.g. peers, family, friends, their care provider)

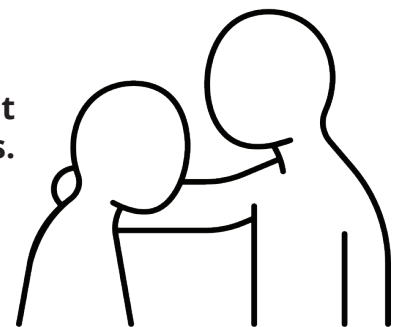
If applicable, send students online resources listed in this guide's [RESOURCES](#) section. If the student agrees, you can offer to connect them with Student Affairs via email introduction.

*If you require support or anticipate challenges, contact the [REGIONAL ASSOCIATE DEAN](#) at your site and [STUDENT AFFAIRS](#).*

## Unsure of how to manage the situation?

First, ensure the student is not in crisis (see the above "[Recognize](#)" section under "Crisis"). Then consult [Student Affairs](#) for further guidance.

**The goal is to support medical students through a difficult situation with compassion and the appropriate resources.**



## When approaching students in distress...

- Do so at a convenient and private time (in a CRISIS, approach immediately)
- Explain what your role is and why you are approaching them
- Express concern and be specific about what you observed/noticed
- Avoid judgmental phrases as those in stressful situations can be emotionally sensitive
- Be clear you are NOT asking about their personal life, health information or diagnosis (confidential)

### Respond with EMPATHY



- Try to understand the student's point of view or interpretation of the situation
- Give students the opportunity to clarify and express their needs
- Do not dismiss or minimize their concerns
- Acknowledge that stress and seeking assistance are normal parts of school/training

### If a student DOES NOT WANT HELP



- Respect this decision, unless it is an emergency
- Do not force or pressure them into going to a contact or resource
- Leave them with an open-invitation to visit the resources if they ever change their mind



**Listen actively and respond to show the student they are being heard.**

## Being prepared for a student in crisis

A situation can emerge in many different ways, and though we cannot prepare for every possibility we may encounter, we need to be prepared to respond to a medical student who may be manifesting signs of distress or coming to you for help. Medical students are often navigating multiple stressors related to personal life events, relationships, and medical training experiences, such as:

- being away from home
- academic pressures
- competition
- financial challenges
- interpersonal strains
- ethical and moral dilemmas
- career decisions
- illness
- lack of sleep
- patient mortality
- exposure to patients experiencing complex health difficulties
- pressure to put patients first

Students studying in a university setting can experience many mental health challenges (manifesting for the first time), such as depression, anxiety, addiction, and other disorders. Students may have difficulty coping with these stressors, but studies show that students who feel supported report lower levels of distress.

Students may not seek help independently due to stigma in medical education, the potential for privacy breaches, and the possibility of negatively impacting their career trajectories. Approaching students with a clear intention to support them without judgement can provide a safer context to seek help, and help build their resilience down the line.

In a Canadian study, undergraduate medical students were 33.2% above normal psychological distress, and 23.3% were considered a burnout risk.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>McLuckie A, Matheson KM, Landers AL, Landine J, Novick J, Barrett T, Dimitropoulos G. *The relationship between psychological distress and perception of emotional support in medical students and residents and implications for educational institutions. Academic Psychiatry. 2018 Feb;42(1):41-7.*

## Resources - Please consult (and refer students to) these links for additional resources.

**UBC Student Affairs Website** | [md.studentaffairs@ubc.ca](mailto:md.studentaffairs@ubc.ca)

Provides contacts and more information on resources, such as counselling, student wellness, mindfulness, mental health, apps and other interactive resources. Visit the [Entrada community](#) (access with [CWL](#)).

### Crisis Supports (Health & Mental Health)

**E-Comm 911** | Agency that supplies emergency communications for British Columbia. Provides guidance on when to call 911 and a list of non-emergency numbers and online reporting tools for individual districts.

**Crisis Centre** | Suicide Hotline [1-800-784-2433](tel:1-800-784-2433) (Anywhere in BC) | Offers immediate access to barrier-free, non-judgmental, confidential support and follow-up through 24/7 phone lines and online services.

### Site-specific Crisis Centers

The acronyms represent UBC's medical programs in the Vancouver-Fraser (VFMP), Southern (SMP), Island (IMP), and North (NMP) regions of British Columbia.

**VFMP** **[VGH Access & Assessment Centre \(ACC\)](#)**  
[604-675-3700](tel:604-675-3700) | Offers help during non-life-threatening mental health and/or substance use issues.

**SMP** **[Interior Crisis Line Network](#)**  
[1-888-353-2273](tel:1-888-353-2273) Crisis line available 24/7. Responders may refer individuals to appropriate community or professional resources.

**IMP** **[Integrated Mobile Crisis Response Team \(IMCRT\)](#)**  
[1-888-494-388](tel:1-888-494-388) (Vancouver Island Crisis Line) Provides a rapid, mobile, community-based response to those in crisis. When calling the crisis line, ask for IMCRT.

**NMP** **[Northern BC Crisis Line](#)**  
[250-563-1214](tel:250-563-1214) or [1-888-562-1214](tel:1-888-562-1214) | A safe, confidential and non-judgmental crisis line available 24/7.

**[Prince George Urgent and Primary Care Centre](#)** | [250-645-6900](tel:250-645-6900)

**Physician Health Program (PHP)** | [1-800-663-6729](tel:1-800-663-6729) | Confidential 24/7 support for physicians and medical learners for mental health, substance use, life transitions, burnout, concerns from colleagues, and services such as counselling, psychiatrists, and family physicians.

**KUU-US Crisis Support Lines** | [1-800-588-8717](tel:1-800-588-8717) | This crisis lines is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and offers culturally safe support for Indigenous people, by Indigenous people. Crisis line operators listen and provide referrals to both cultural and western support systems and monitor at-risk individuals to support them through crises. KUU-US means "people" in Nuu-chah-nulth.

**Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office (VPRO)** | A confidential place for those who have experienced, or been impacted by, any form of sexual or gender-based violence, harassment, or harm, regardless of where or when it took place. They provide information and support for those considering, or currently navigating, reporting to the police or to UBC.

**Student Mistreatment Website** | A help page where you can report mistreatment (anonymously or otherwise), view key contacts, and access supportive resources.

## Mental Health and Wellness Resources

**[UBC Early Alert Program](#)** | Allows faculty, staff, and teaching assistants to quickly identify and submit concerns about students so coordinated support is provided.

**[UBC Student Assistance Program \(SAP\)](#)** | [1-833-590-1328](tel:1-833-590-1328) | A free, 24/7 wellness resource for students. Services include personal counselling, life coaching, group programs and more based on your needs. UBC SAP can also help with a wide range of concerns to support mental, emotional, physical and financial health.

**[UBC Counselling Services](tel:604-822-3811)** | [604-822-3811](tel:604-822-3811) | Students seek support through Counselling Services for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, this might include requests for support with decision-making, navigating family and social relationships, or major life transitions.

**[Student Health Services](tel:604-822-7011)** | [604-822-7011](tel:604-822-7011) | Offers a wide range of health assessments and treatments provided by doctors, nurse practitioners, and nurses. Student Health Services appointments are being offered to students within British Columbia (BC), by phone, video, or in person.

**[Wellness Initiatives Network](#)** | A student-run go-to resource for wellness clubs and initiatives in the UBC medical student body, aimed at fostering your well-being.

**[Canadian Federation of Medical Students \(CFMS\) Student Affairs](#)** | Wellness resources which included [SafeSpaces](#), a group peer support program for medical students.

**[Campus Lightbox](#)** | A guide to all UBC mental health resources.

**[UBC Centre for Accessibility](tel:604-822-5844)** | [604-822-5844](tel:604-822-5844) | Provides support for disability-related accommodations.

**[The Green Folder \(UBC Vancouver Campus\)](#)** | A campus-based guide faculty and staff can use to know what to look for, say, and do to assist UBC students in distress. Be advised this resource is aimed at all Vancouver campus students and is not specific to the Faculty of Medicine or health professions education.

## Additional Training Available

**[Suicide Awareness & Intervention Training \(SAIT\)](#)** | A free introductory course for UBC students, faculty, and staff. Part 1 is a 90-minute asynchronous, on-demand online module detailing key concepts for suicide prevention in the UBC context. Participants will learn skills to help someone who is having thoughts of suicide by having a conversation with them and working with them to identify appropriate resources. A synchronous Part 2 practice and discussion session is also available once the module is completed.

Any feedback or questions regarding these guidelines may be sent to: [md.studentaffairs@ubc.ca](mailto:md.studentaffairs@ubc.ca)