



HELPING STUDENTS COPE WITH TRAUMATIC EVENTS

As members of our St. Thomas community, faculty and staff play a valuable role in supporting our students and our community manage difficult situations. Traumatic situations can impact a student's functioning, especially the capacity to succeed in the classroom. Students can be impacted by traumatic events, loss (friends/family, other students, or faculty), acts of violence both nationally and locally, racial trauma, or struggles with their own mental health or other life difficulties.

As faculty and staff, you are an important part of the St Thomas community of care. Depending on your connection with students, you may be the first person they turn to when experiencing emotional challenges. You can help support students as they navigate traumatic situations by simply *being aware*, *providing care*, and *facilitating connections* to campus resources.

AWARENESS

Recognize distress:

The following are common emotional, behavioral, physical, or cognitive indicators of distress, especially when they represent a significant change from prior behavior in a student.

- Withdrawn or increased isolation
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Loss of interest or motivation
- Low energy or fatigue
- Declining or poor performance and preparation in academics
- Repeated absences, tardiness, or cancelling class
- Multiple requests for extensions
- Avoiding participating in staff meetings, lectures, or labs
- Concerning content in assignments and/or presentations
- Dominating discussions or excessively anxious when called upon
- Poor hygiene or changes in appearance
- Confused speech or behavior
- Expressions of being overwhelmed or indirect expressions of asking for help

PROVIDING CARE

Guidelines for talking with students

- Simplify the focus of these interactions and think of it as an opportunity to connect with the student. This opportunity can focus on expression of care and support.
- Pay attention to how you are engaging the student (consider physical communication, friendly face and tone, and open-ended questions and use listening skills).
- Be sure to allow enough time, privacy, and follow up when speaking to a student.
- Listening skills including summarizing to ensure understanding, asking questions, paraphrasing, and good eye contact.



- Focus on specific observations that are behavioral in nature, and express concern.
 - "I've noticed you have missed class lately; I am worried about you and want to help"
- Avoid "why" questions and be patient. When in doubt simply listen. You might be the first person this student is opening up to about their concerns.
- Know and establish boundaries of what you can offer within your role.
- Recognize and speak to potential barriers to seeking support.

CONNECTION

Strategies for making a referral:

- Encourage: Discuss fears about seeking service, services available on campus and community, and benefit of seeking services.
- Consider cultural differences both your own and the students, e.g., language, positions of power and marginalization when talking with a student.
- Students often face a variety of barriers to seeking care including stigma or embarrassment, a strong preference for self-reliance, difficulty recognizing own symptoms or severity, or a view that "others need or deserve it more."
- Promote positive messaging to address barriers including that all students deserve support and a chance to be successful, most students feel that counseling was helpful and would refer a friend to the Center for Well-Being or other campus resources and normalize help-seeking behavior.
- Provide resource information: Share contact information and location of resources with the student. Share what you know about types of services, that they are free, and different ways to connect with resources.
- Help connect students with services by helping them make the call, walking them over to the relevant department or service, or giving them the contact number.
- Consult with others when you are unsure or need support (Dean of Students, Center for Well-Being, Title IX).