



# STUDENTS IN DISTRESS AND THE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION TEAM (B.I.T)

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## Purpose

Instructors are often the first people in the college to have a fulsome view on students interacting in individual and group learning environments. The College community seeks to supports students in engaging positively in the learning environments. It is important for everyone in the learning environment to have a basic understanding of distress, what distress may look like, actions we can take, and the role of the Behavior Intervention Team at Assiniboine.

## Background

The Assiniboine Behavior Intervention Team provides support and guidance in responding to worrisome behavior. Maintaining a safe and healthy College environment depends on members of the College community identifying and communicating incidents of worrisome behaviour(s). **Early identification** of a concern allows College officials to evaluate the circumstances, make recommendations to avoid or minimize harm to the person or others and reach out to a person if appropriate. Noticing the behaviour(s) of a person is an essential element of campus safety and the responsibility of all members of the College community. Any concerns raised by persons, staff or affiliates of the College concerning person behaviour will be taken seriously.

The College recognizes that distinguishing between exceptional creativity or quirky behaviour in some cases, and genuinely worrisome behaviour in other cases, can be difficult. Strict definitions of conduct or behaviour do not always lend themselves to assessing, and achieving a full understanding of, a situation or behaviour.

The threshold for reporting to B.I.T. is purposefully low. You do not need to assess the behavior. Instead discuss the concern with your manager and file a report.(If this is an emergency call 911. Reporting will come after.) An Incident form can be found in the shared drive 'S'- College Information-Safety and Health drive in the forms folder.

## How To

The Three Rs Framework – **recognize, respond, refer** – is an important way that we can support students.

### Recognize

The first R is recognize. How do we recognize when someone is distressed and struggling? Thinking about your students and any times you might have been concerned about them, what are some signs you have noticed that they may be experiencing distress, which we define as more than predictable day-to-day stress? What did you notice?

#### **The main sign is a change in a student's presentation**

Some possible signs that a student is not doing well include:

#### Academic signs

- Significant decline in the quality or quantity of classroom/research work
- Change in attendance
- Repeated lateness, missed appointments or deadlines
- Missed assignments or exams

#### Emotional signs

- Exaggerated emotional response (e.g., intense anger, sobbing, persistent worry)
- Overly confident, enthusiastic, scattered, chaotic
- Absence of emotion – appearing flat, disengaged
- Lack of motivation or interest

#### Physical signs

- Falling asleep in class
- Noticeable decline in hygiene or looking unkempt
- Significant change in energy level
- Appearing under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol
- Visible bruises, cuts, or injuries

#### Behavioural signs

- Describing difficult circumstances or experiences (e.g., loss, conflict, trauma, assault)
- Ranting emails
- Disregard of policy, direction, rules or authority
- Peer reports of concerns about, or discomfort with, a student

## Respond

- Give the student your complete attention. Listen without judgment and let them talk without interruption.
- Acknowledge the student's thoughts and feelings with compassion and empathy.
- Try using an "I" statement to start a conversation to express your concern. For example, "I've noticed that you haven't handed in the last two assignments and have missed a lot of classes lately, and I'm concerned."
- Repeat their statements to clarify and ensure that you understand what the issues are. For example, you could say, "I want to be sure I understand what you are saying. Is this what you meant?"
- Let them know you are concerned and want to help them find the right resources.
- You don't need to "fix" the student, and you are not expected to act as the counsellor. You can assist many students simply by listening and referring them for further help.

## Refer

Often a few minutes of effective listening are enough to help a student feel cared about. If their distress is more significant and they are open to accessing more support, there are several services that can help. Knowing what these services are and how to contact them will help you in your role.

- [Accessibility and Disability Services](#) supports students to apply for accommodation to courses, programs, facilities and services.
- [Student Success Advisors](#) help students manage personal, academic, and life concerns. Additional [Student Supports](#) are also available.
- [Wellness Advisor](#). The Wellness Student Success Advisor supports students experiencing complex needs to find resources and supports. Instructors can contact the Wellness Advisor if they have a student they are concerned about and they unsure what to do and/or refer students directly to the Wellness Advisor.
- Campus Security helps coordinate responses to student emergencies and crises. If you call 911, call security as well, security can help first responders locate you.
  - Victoria Avenue East Campus: 204.725.8746<sup>1</sup>
  - North Hill Campus: 204.725.8747
  - Parkland Campus 204.622.2222 (ext 6559)
- [Indigenous](#) Cultural Centres offer programs, mentorship, and a gathering place.
- [International Student Services](#) help students with issues, study and work permits, and visa applications.
- [Learning Curve](#) provide learning strategies and services, coordinate academic accommodations for students, and act as a resource to work with the university community.
- [Financial aid](#) helps students needing financial support for their education.

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<sup>1</sup> This work, "Students in distress and the behavior intervention team (B.I.T)," is a derivative of Capacity to Connect: Supporting Students' Mental Health and Wellness by Gemma Armstrong; Michelle Daoust; Ycha Gil; Albert Seinen; Faye Shedletzky; Jewell Gillies; Barbara Johnston; and Liz Warwick used under CC 4.0. "Students in distress and the behavior intervention team (B.I.T)" is licensed under CC BY 4.0 by Assiniboine Community College