

# 3 STEPS TO ASSISTING COLLEAGUES IN DISTRESS

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## 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](mailto:humanresources@okanagan.bc.ca)

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



