

Building Bridges to Support Mental Health

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by **Holly Cybulski, Professor in the School of Media and in the Teaching & Learning Centre, and Sherri Parkins, Counsellor in Accessible Learning Services and Professor in the Teaching & Learning Centre**

With so many commitments (family, job, school, etc.), academic deadlines, and of course, navigating these challenging global times, our students' proverbial plates are full. Many of our colleagues may also relate to the demands of daily life, and the toll it can take on our capacity to be resilient and thrive. In May 2020, a nationwide poll by [The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#) found that 70% of students reported feeling stressed, anxious, or isolated. A formerly collaborative, participatory person may become withdrawn, distracted, missing deadlines or disengaged, and frankly, just not themselves. Perhaps, they are just having a bad day, or even a bad week. They could be struggling with their mental health, but do not know to ask, how to ask, who to ask for help, or even how to begin the journey to heal. Some may also hesitate in exploring support for fear of being stigmatized, judged, or rejected.

More than ever, our students may need support in many ways, beyond the classroom environment or faculty expertise, to aid not only in their academic success but personal growth, too. We wish to help, but where do they begin? How do we begin? If you are asking yourself these questions, you have already begun to help through identification for the need for help and beginning the conversation.

["More Feet on the Ground"](#) is an initiative of the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. They provide four steps to supporting a student who may be experiencing a mental health issue. Let's see how these steps can bridge students to support and open the channels of communication.

1) Recognize

If you are concerned about a student, you have already taken this step. You have recognized that something is concerning, and you want to support. Perhaps you noticed something physically has declined, academically their performance has waned, you notice something

concerning behaviorally or are concerned for their or other's safety, and you might even consider this an emergency. Listen to those instincts and respond.

2) Respond

If you are concerned about the safety of a student or others, you can connect directly to emergency services. You could call Campus Security at 416.491.5050 ext. 22565 or email seneca.security@senecacollege.ca. You can also call 911. When in doubt, it is important to speak with an expert.

Checking in via an email or an invitation to chat can be the next step to bridging to support. Ask if they would like to talk. An invitation to a conversation can be a powerful tool. You can start with open ended questions like, "How are things going for you"? If you feel comfortable and need to be more direct, you can explore the changes you have noticed and your concerns for their well-being, expressing that you wish to help. Please be mindful of language, avoiding assumptions, but don't be concerned about overstepping boundaries; you won't be adopting the role of a counsellor; you're showing that you care!

3) Refer

Referring students to supports can be so helpful! It's okay to explain that you have limited knowledge about what to do next, but that you want to help and explain how sometimes just talking to a professional may help find a new path through their expert lens. Seneca's [Personal Counselling and Accessible Learning Services](#) offers one-to-one counseling for students. Students can [email](#) or call 416 491 5050 ext. 22900 to set up an appointment.

Not everyone is comfortable talking with someone from Seneca, so consider adding these resources to your Learn@Seneca course:

- [Good to Talk](#)
- Mental Health Helpline: call 1.866.531.2600
- [WeConnect](#): (Use access code senecaco when creating an account)

4) Reflect

Now it's time to check in with yourself! Being concerned about a student's mental health can be emotionally draining. De-stress with a colleague or friend while maintaining confidentiality. You may wish to speak to your own medical practitioner. Did you know that [Seneca's Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) offers 24/7 support. Taking care of your own mental health is important too!

If you are interested in learning more about Mental Health, you may want to consider taking the "[More Feet on the Ground](#)" course. Upon completion you can even apply for a certificate.

References

The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, The Impact of Covid-19 On Post-secondary Institutions (2020) https://campusmentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CICMH_COVID-19_Impact_Infosheet_EN.pdf

The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, More Feet on the Ground, Retrieved Jan 2022, <https://morefeetontheground.ca/>

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