

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.

- x Withdrawn or increased isolation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

PROVIDING CARE

Guidelines for talking with students

- x 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.
- x Pay attention to how you are engaging the student (consider physical communication, friendly face and tone, and open-ended questions and use listening skills).
- x Be sure to allow enough time, privacy, and follow up when speaking to a student.
- x Listening skills including summarizing to ensure understanding, asking questions, paraphrasing, and good eye contact.

