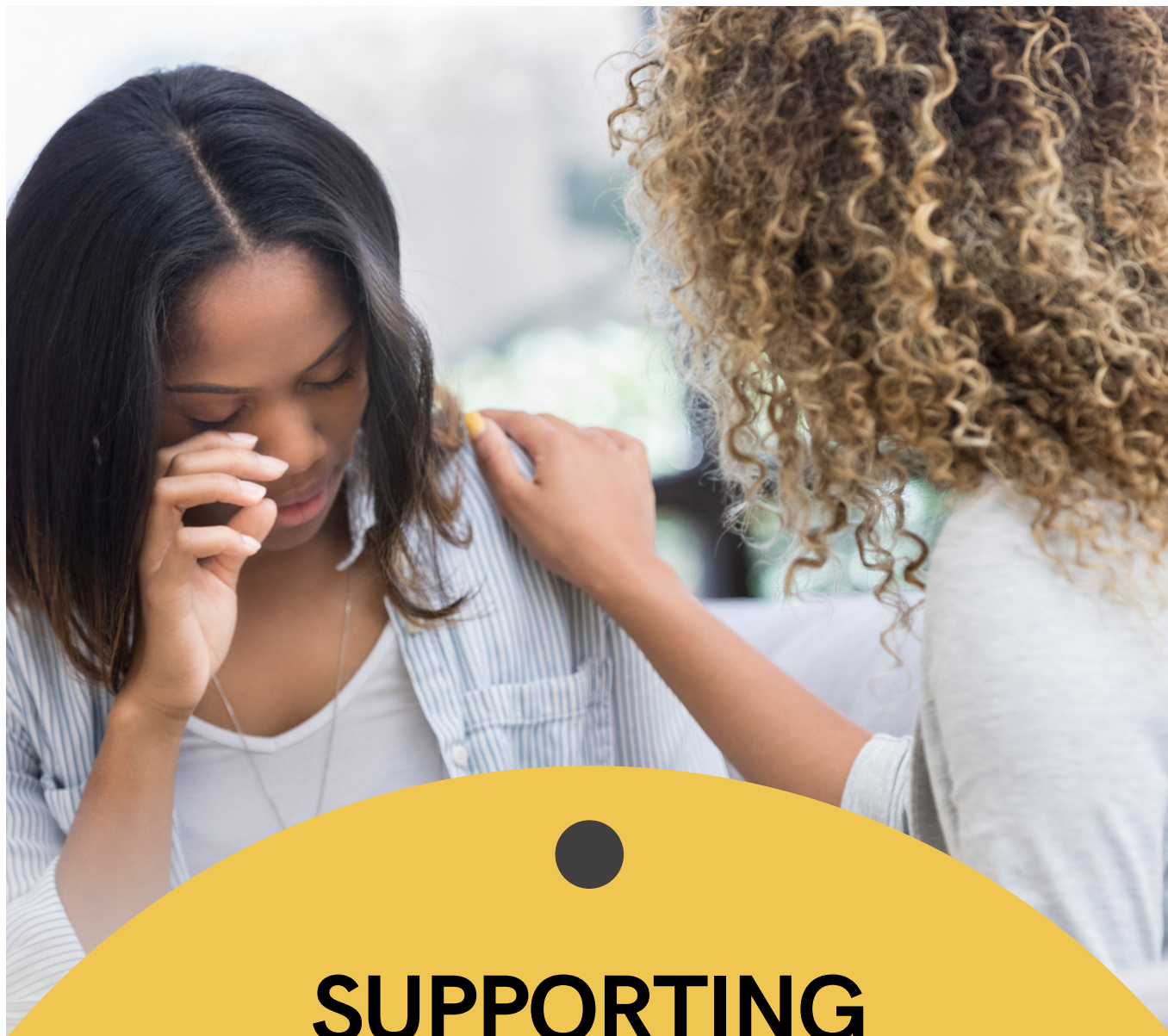




In partnership with

**Scholars Program**



# **SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS**

***A GUIDE FOR NON-CLINICIANS***

# Introduction

Welcome and thank you for all the work you do to support students! We recognise that while many of you may not be mental health clinicians, the work that you do often contributes to the wellness of students. With this in mind, the purpose of this document is to provide guidance and tips on how best to respond to and support students experiencing distress. We recognise that each situation is unique and can have many root causes. While this guide is not meant to address all the concerns that may be associated with students in distress, our hope is that it can offer a good place to start.



# 1. RECOGNISE

## "A stone that has been made visible cannot damage a hoe." - Rwandan Proverb

*Learn to recognise the sign of distress*

### ACADEMIC SIGNS

- Missing classes or extracurriculars
- Not turning in assignments
- Sudden decline in quality of work
- Not responding to outreach from faculty and staff

### PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Reporting ongoing concerns with physical ailments
- Excessive use of alcohol or drugs

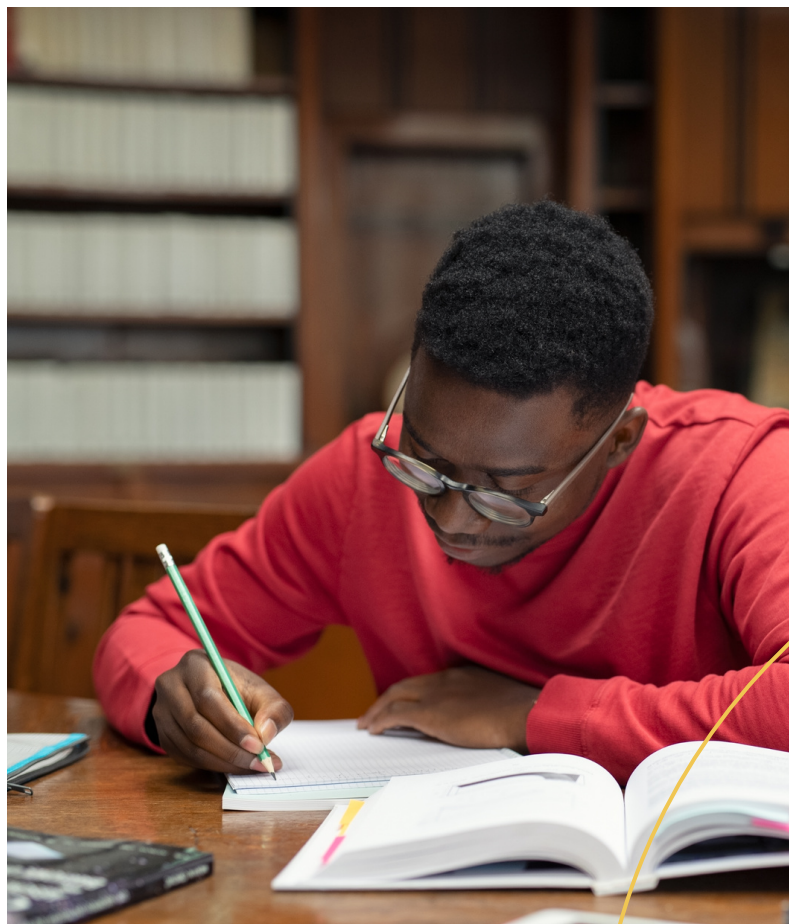


## EMOTIONAL SIGNS

- Excessive crying
- Self-isolation
- Lack of engagement with peers
- Self-disclosure of personal distress

## SIGNS THAT REQUIRE IMMEDIATE ATTENTION (INDICATING HIGH RISK OF HARM OCCURRING)

- The student discloses they are being stalked, abused, or harassed
- The student expresses hostility towards others (verbal or physical)
- The student expresses statements about desire to harm self



## 2. ENGAGE

# "The youth can walk fast, but the elder knows the road." - African Proverb

*Guidelines for how best to respond when a student  
discloses signs of distress*

- Avoid being judgemental
- Avoid blaming or shaming
- Do not minimise student's concerns
- Honour confidentiality
- Ask for the student's consent prior to making decisions on behalf of the student
- Ask questions, do not jump to conclusions
- Avoid labelling students as having specific mental illnesses
- Remain calm when talking to the student and asking questions



## 3. SUPPORT

**"Ubuntu is about a community coming together to help one another."**

*How can you best support the student?*

- Encourage the student to seek help at the university counselling centre if you have one at your institution
- Explore resources with students and encourage the student to reach out to resources already existing that may be helpful for them (e.g. family, friends, peers, religious groups, student groups, etc.)
- Consider other resources/offices on campus that may be helpful
- Consider other mental health providers and organisations outside of the university setting and in your community that may be helpful
- Make a plan to follow up with the student to ensure they are able to connect to the supports you have recommended



## **\*SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HIGH RISK DISTRESS:**

- When possible, remain with the student until they are able to access emergency services
- Scenarios that may require you to break confidentiality are ones where the student poses an immediate danger to themselves or another person
- You may have to engage with emergency services if a student is at risk regardless of the student's consent
- Ask other colleagues for help as you support the student
- Remain kind, gentle, and sensitive to the student's needs

