# Scenarios for Practice and Discussion

*These scenarios are of students in distress who need support. Working with a partner, choose one or two of the scenarios and either role play or discuss what you would say to these students.*

## 1. Student who’s struggling to balance studies with caring for their child

Alex is a single parent who is going to school full-time and is unable to find reliable daycare. The daycare on campus is full and Alex is on a waitlist; all the other community daycares are also full. Alex’s daughter, Gemma, is a toddler, and Alex is wary of leaving her with a stranger. Alex has no family in the area, and friends are unable to help as they either work or go to school themselves. With final exams coming up, Alex is having trouble finding time to study and feels options are extremely limited or non-existent. Alex tells you they have been trying to study while Gemma sleeps but cannot keep it up for much longer because they are feeling so sleep deprived. Alex looks unkempt and has dark circles under their eyes; they look like they are about to cry and seem very stressed.

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## 2. Student who’s genderqueer and just gone through a bad breakup

You have been paired up with Leslie on a semester-long project in one of your classes. Leslie is upfront about being genderqueer and asks you to use the pronouns they/them. Leslie is enthusiastic, shows up to all the meetings, and completes their portion of the work on time. However, as the semester progresses, Leslie begins missing meetings, is harder to get hold of, and is either late with their contributions or the work is subpar compared with their earlier submissions. When you ask if everything is okay, Leslie admits they are going through a bad breakup and is having a hard time handling it. They are having difficulty concentrating on their work, they aren’t sleeping well, and they are drinking a little more than usual. Leslie tells you they are thinking about dropping out and don’t know what to do.

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## 3. Indigenous student triggered by lesson content

You are in class when the instructor begins talking about Canada’s residential school system and the abuse and forced assimilation of Indigenous children. As the lesson closes and students begin to pack up, you notice that a usually gregarious Indigenous student is sitting quietly and appears to be wiping tears from their eyes. When you approach the student, they tell you that their grandmother was in a residential school and they found the lesson very triggering.

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## 4. Homeless student misses study group

You are part of a study group that has been meeting regularly through the semester. Recently, one member’s attendance has become sporadic. When they do show up, their appearance is dishevelled, and they seem to have a hard time concentrating. When you ask them about this, they confide that they have been evicted from their apartment and must live in their car for a few weeks until they can afford a deposit on a new place. They explain that it’s hard to find a quiet and comfortable place to study or sleep, and their coursework has suffered as a result. They also tell you that they feel a lot of stress and shame about the situation.

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## 5. Transgender student who needs support with a culturally unsafe instructor

Alexa, a transgender student, approaches you after a LGBTQ2S+ meetup on campus. She tells you that one of her instructors refuses to call her by her name, stating that “preferred names” are optional as per school policy. Occasionally, the instructor will use Alexa’s name, but will self-edit it; for example, calling her “Alex” instead of “Alexa.” The student feels disrespected and humiliated by her instructor during class, so if she does attend class she sits in the back and doesn’t participate very much. She explains to you that she needs to do well in the course so she can get into the program she wants. She expresses feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and frustration during this interaction.

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## 6. Engineering student who appears anxious and rushes out of class

Your classmate usually sits at the very back of your engineering class and keeps to themselves. Today they arrive late, and you notice them taking one of the remaining seats at the busy centre of the lecture hall. Other classmates are engaged in loud conversations with one another. Your classmate appears to become anxious. You notice them frantically shuffling their body. As additional classmates fill up the remaining seats, your classmate hastily grabs their belongings and runs out of the class, sweating profusely. You decide to follow them out of class to see how they’re doing. When you talk to them, they tell you that they were just anxious and needed to get out of the room to relax.

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## 7. International student who is not able to pay fees

An international student you know from classes is not able to pay all their fees for the semester. The student tells you that they didn’t get any kind of financial aid. They discussed their situation with their parents, but they are not able to send money because their business was shut down during the pandemic. The student is really upset and appears to be on the verge of tears when they talk to you. They are worried they’ll have to drop out and say they feel helpless and very stressed.

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## 8. International student feeling overwhelmed by academic and work commitments

Salem arrived in Canada three months ago and is struggling with absorbing school material in English. Salem has to work after classes to support their family, so there is no time for extra tutoring or study club. Because of late-night shifts, they are having trouble keeping a consistent sleep schedule and preparing meals for the week. Salem explains to you that they have a midterm exam coming up. Salem discloses to you that in their culture, grades play a large role in defining one’s self-worth and social status—and this exam is no exception. They are visibly distressed, their eyes swollen with dark circles underneath, and they mention their lack of appetite and lack of communication with their loved ones.

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## 9. Student worried about failing a course and disappointing their family

Cobie is the first member of their family to attend a post-secondary program, and their parents and grandparents have invested most of their money in their education. Cobie has come up to you, as a teacher’s assistant, in a panicked way after class. They explain that they just got their mark back for an assignment, and they failed it and are unable to improve their mark. They will likely fail the class because of how much the paper was worth. The student is clearly panicking, and is displaying frantic behaviours like pacing, speaking rapidly, and fidgeting with their hands, and is on the verge of crying. They say that they feel guilty for wasting their parents’ and grandparents’ money and are embarrassed to tell them that they failed on the paper. They say they feel helpless and stuck, with no way out of the situation.

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## 10. Student triggered by an instructor’s comments about weight and body image

Your friend Blue, who is recovering from an eating disorder, just ran out of class because of triggering course content. Blue is non-binary, queer, bi-racial, and neurodivergent. In class, the instructor was discussing nutrition, body image, and healthy eating when they made an implicitly offensive comment about weight and body mass index. This triggered Blue, causing them to run out of the classroom. You also leave class to check on them, and you find them pacing up and down the hallway, scratching their arms, and tugging at their shirt to pull it away from their body.

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## 11. Student struggling to balance academic pressures with their social life

A student shows up to class after not coming for a couple of weeks. As everyone is packing up their bags at the end of class, you approach the student, who looks tired, is not wearing appropriate clothing for the cold weather outside, and looks like they may not have showered in a while. After talking privately with you in the empty classroom for a few minutes, the student discloses that they are hungover from a weekend of drinking. The student is clammy, sweaty, and breathing quickly. The student continues to tell you that they don’t want to be in school, but they’re under a lot of pressure from their family to be there. The student tells you that the only part of school they enjoy is the social aspect.

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