**HANDOUT 2.1**

# 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.*

## Scenario 1: Acquaintance grieving over death of their sibling

You’re waiting at the bus stop near campus when you notice another student who you’ve taken a few classes with. You don’t know them very well, but you enjoyed working on a group project with them once. You remember hearing that this student was fundraising to help pay for expenses related to their sibling’s cancer treatments last year. You go up to them and ask how they are. They start to say “fine” but then their face crumples and tears fill their eyes. They tell you that their sibling passed away. They say that their family is devastated, and nothing will ever be the same again. Then they tell you that they feel bad for their parents but think they might join their sibling. Just then the bus arrives.

## Scenario 2: Friend struggling and drinking heavily after a breakup

You’re on your way to a campus party when you notice a friend standing around, staring at the counselling office. You know this friend has been drinking more heavily and frequently recently because you’ve been to the bar with him a couple times. You invite him to the party, but he refuses, saying his ex-girlfriend will be there. You know they recently broke up. You ask him how he’s doing with that, and he shrugs and looks away. He says he just has to “man up.” As he goes to turn away you hear him mutter, “She’ll be sorry when I’m gone.”

## Scenario 3: Online student struggling and overwhelmed

You are taking an online course that requires weekly postings and are placed in small groups of four for the semester. You get to know the students in your group through online posts and replies. After a few weeks, you notice that one of your classmates hasn’t posted for a while and when they finally do, they admit they have been struggling, are having a hard time keeping up, and are overwhelmed; they feel it is pointless to go on. You are unsure if they are referring to the class or whether they are talking about suicide.

## Scenario 4: Close friend struggling with depression and self-harming

You visit a close friend in their home one weekend. You know this friend has a history of depression and self-harm but has been doing well lately. On entering their apartment you realize that they have not done the dishes, cleaned up after themselves, or done any household duties in what seems like a while. You also notice that your friend seems distracted and looks like they have not slept in days. After settling into a conversation, they disclose to you that their depression has gotten really bad lately, and they are ashamed and afraid. They are getting impatient with themselves, swinging in and out of depression and having it consume all of their life. Your friend tells you that they can’t do this anymore and they don’t see any point in continuing if it is just going to be like the rest of their life.

## Scenario 5: An Indigenous student overwhelmed by a suicide in their family

An Indigenous student you are friends with is visibly upset. They disclose that a close relative has just died by suicide, and they are overwhelmed with feelings of grief and helplessness. They want to be home with their family and community, but they also have upcoming projects due in many of their courses. They express feelings of hopelessness and say, “I don’t think I can cope with this. I think it would be easier to just end it.”

## Scenario 6: Friend who has been harassed online and is in distress

You notice that a friend is being harassed online, so you reach out and meet them after class. You haven’t seen this person for a while and you notice that they have lost a lot of weight, their hair is thin, and they look frail. You don’t mention the online comments, but you do tell them that if they needed anything you would be there to support them. A few weeks later, the same friend calls you crying and in distress. They open up to you about what has been going on online. They tell you that they’ve received a lot of negative comments on their posts. It first started with comments about their body, but lately they’ve been receiving anonymous direct messages from people telling them to kill themselves. Your friend says that at first the comments did not bother them that much, but it is starting to get to them. They say, “I can’t keep going on like this. Maybe those people online are right: I should just end it.”

## Scenario 7: International student who is under a lot of stress and is self-harming

An international student you know from a few classes seems upset. They tell you that they had been sharing a basement suite with three other students, but the roommates have recently all moved out. They can’t afford the rent and are about to become homeless. They tell you that the landlord has been entering the suite without permission and just threatened to seize all of their possessions in lieu of the rent that is now due. Your classmate explains that their family cannot afford to send more money for better housing and that they don’t want to embarrass them by asking for help. They say they feel helpless and trapped. They also mention that they have been harming themselves and show you fresh cuts along the inside of their forearm. The cuts are slim and do not appear very deep, but they are not bandaged. Your classmate also expresses feelings of hopelessness and despair during the interaction.

## Scenario 8: Former classmate whose partying is out of control

You attend a party in your old neighbourhood after returning from a semester at college. You arrive at the party, and you see that everyone’s attention is focused on one individual. You recognize this person from your high school class. This person is loudly bragging about their escapades from the previous night and boasting to everyone about how they “don’t give a f\*\*k.” You remember them differently; they were not nearly as boisterous. Later in the night you overhear your former classmate tell others that they “don’t care if they die.” You also hear them talk about driving to another party when this party is over. Once the guests disperse, you decide to sit next to your old classmate. They don’t recognize you and ask if you have brought more drinks. You remind them of who you are. They remember and attempt to pull themselves together. You talk briefly. They mention that they have gone through a bad breakup. They say they don’t really care; they just want to party.

## Scenario 9: Transgender student facing systemic discrimination and racism

Blake, a transgender student, discloses to you that he had been bullied in his program for being a non-white transgender (trans) man. His instructor was belittling him repeatedly and had given him a failing grade in the practicum. When Blake reported the situation to the director of the department, the director suspended Blake indefinitely from the program, stating, “Maybe this program isn’t right for you; perhaps you should try a program that supports people like you.” Blake feels disrespected, humiliated, and ashamed of his gender identity and ethnicity. He explains that he keeps running into incidents like this. While you’re talking to Blake, you observe that he’s having trouble thinking clearly, and is at times tearful and shaking, frequently staring past you without saying anything. He expresses feelings of low self-worth, loneliness, despair, hopelessness, and anger, stating, “I don’t have any friends anymore because I’m such a loser. I wish I could be comfortable being female, so I don’t have to be this… I hate being trans! Why couldn’t I be born in the right body so people would accept me, maybe even love me? I didn’t choose this! I just want to be normal… I’m done with life. I can’t do this anymore.”

## Scenario 10: Friend who feels responsible for another student’s suicide

Your non-binary friend, Jamie, discloses to you that a transgender student they had been helping at school recently killed himself. You notice they look tired and have lost weight, their hair is unkempt, and they smell a little musty. Jamie discloses to you that they felt remorse, guilt, and regret because they had spoken to this student the day before he died, and they did not think to ask if he was okay or was thinking about suicide. Jamie explains that the student had been bullied and discriminated against by his instructor because of his ethnicity and gender identity and expression, and he was suspended indefinitely from the program when he advocated for himself. Jamie had been working with this student by attending meetings with him and providing support. Jamie states, “I did everything I could … and then I heard that he had killed himself. It’s all my fault! I should’ve done more. Why do bad people always win? What’s the point of all this hard work if nothing ever changes? Why is this world so unfair? Why won’t anyone do anything about this?”

Scenarios 1 and 2 by Jenny Guide, Scenario 3 by Dagmar Devine, Scenarios 4 and 6 by Calla Smith, Scenarios 5 and 7 by Jewell Gilles, Scenario 8 by Hamza Islam, Scenarios 9 and 10 by Arica Hsu. ([CC BY 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/))