

TAKE 5 TAKEAWAYS

How To Support a Learner in Distress Identifying and Acting on Signs of Struggle

Below are five things you can do as an educator to identify struggling learners and appropriately act on concerns to support them and encourage social-emotional health.

1 BE ON THE LOOKOUT

- Keep your eyes open for signs of mental distress in your students
- Depressive symptoms occur in 28% of medical students and residents
- Burnout occurs in 45% of these same subgroups

2 RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

- Watch for mood swings, sadness, irritability, and social isolation
- Recognize changes in behavior including, but not limited to, personal hygiene, grooming, and lack of motivation
- Note depression-related symptoms such as recklessness, sloppiness, or giving away possessions

3 TRUST YOUR GUT

- Follow your intuition when concerned about a learner
- Avoid dismissing your concerns
- If you think something might be troubling your student, don't hesitate to ask

4 ASK THE QUESTIONS

- Speak up. Assume you are the only one who will reach out
- Be direct with learners when red flag behaviors are present
- Asking them about their emotional health is the most helpful thing you can do

5 REACT TO THE ANSWER

- Provide support to any learner who expresses difficulties
- Do not minimize their problems or feelings
- Take on the role of encourager, not a clinical role of assessment, diagnosis, and referral