

Tips for Supporting and Working with Students During the COVID-19 Crisis: For MIT Faculty, Instructors, and Staff

Developed by student support professionals in the Office of the Vice Chancellor and the Division of Student Life

Introduction

This is a difficult time for all of us but, not surprisingly, many of you have told us that the wellbeing of our students during this crisis—and at all times—has been at the top of your mind.

As MIT moves academic activities online in the coming days, *all of you* can play a pivotal role in creating community and supporting our students. Your important relationship to students can help them feel more connected to MIT and to each other. Creating community in our virtualized world will be absolutely essential as the time away from our physical campus extends for our students. In addition, your knowledge of their academic progress can also serve as a vital wellbeing indicator.

Maintaining our social networks will be important as we adjust to this new (hopefully, temporary) normal. It will also be important to remain vigilant about those who are struggling. If you notice that a student is seemingly disengaged—not submitting work, missing an exam, or otherwise not responding to you—please let us know. You may consider reaching out to them virtually. The reasons could range from something structural, such as internet connectivity issues, to something more serious, such as emotional distress.

Whatever the cause, we want to know who is struggling so we can help.

Advice and Tips

We are pleased to offer advice and tips on providing direct support to a student in distress and hope the thoughts below serve as a starting point for maintaining connections to students from a distance. For success, we need everyone to do their part in building community, encouraging students to connect with each other and, as much as possible, helping students to cope with challenging circumstances.

1. **Communicate empathy** during this unprecedented time. Each student is experiencing the crisis differently, and worry is a normal response. Reach out to your students by email, phone, Zoom, WebEx, or Slack. Ask them questions about where they are living and how the COVID-19 is affecting their lives.

2. **Stay connected.** Schedule regular virtual meetings. Continuity helps everyone stay connected and provides valuable structure. Ask your students if they are having any challenges with online learning platforms. Each time you meet, carve out time to check in with students about how they are doing. Just asking will mean a lot to them.
3. **Remind students that MIT supports are still available to them.** Continue referring them to [resources](#), particularly if you have concerns about their health, living conditions, or wellbeing.
4. **Encourage students to [create new, structured daily routines](#)** that include time for exercise, regular meals, sleep, academics, and socializing virtually with friends and peers.
5. **Set clear expectations and deliverables for students while they are working remotely.** Establish timelines and weekly or biweekly milestones. Encouraging thinking beyond the moment offers hope and reminds us that this situation is temporary. Encourage students to envision their future--what would they like to do when the crisis passes? Help them draft plans they can work on with you and other faculty and staff.
6. **Don't worry alone.** If you feel concerned about a student's well being—especially a student who is not responding to you—let MIT support professionals know (see contact information below). We can help with outreach or brainstorming.
7. **Set aside time to take care of yourself.** “Compassion fatigue” can set in during a crisis. If you are kind to yourself—through breaks from work, a good diet, exercise, and sleep—you can be a better support for students.

MIT Resources

MIT support resources have transitioned to virtual platforms and are available now. All of the support offices are closely connected and will get the student to the right group for help on a platform that's convenient for them (e.g., phone, email, Zoom, WebEx).

You don't have to figure out the best ways to help students on your own, as support offices are here to help *you*, too. It doesn't matter which office you turn to as we are constantly communicating with each other.

- A good place to start is [GradSupport](#) (for graduate student concerns) and [Student Support Services](#) (for undergraduate concerns).
- You can connect to GradSupport by emailing gradsupport@mit.edu or calling 617-253-4860.
- You can connect to S3 by emailing s3-support@mit.edu or calling 617-253-4861.

- MIT will continue to offer all of its [resources](#), including [Student Mental Health and Counseling](#). You can call and talk through any concern you have at any time.

In an Emergency. If you have a serious concern about a student's wellbeing, the [CARE Team](#) can help right away. The CARE Team will perform virtual wellbeing checks to make sure a student is engaged and not feeling overwhelmed. Anyone can contact the CARE Team with concern about a student by emailing careteam@mit.edu or calling 617-253-CARE (2273). You can also contact the Dean on Call or MIT Police by calling 617-253-1212.

As President Reif said in a [recent message to our community](#), "I have immense confidence in our continued ability to respond with selflessness, foresight, compassion and kindness." Student support staff are here to help you respond selflessly, thoughtfully, compassionately, and kindly to our students."