

International students



Definition

Students who immigrated to Quebec to pursue college or university studies. They may or may not intend to begin their career and establish themselves long term in Quebec after their studies.

Why adapt your approach?

When international students continue their studies in a new society, they have to adapt to a different sociocultural and educational environment. While these students may encounter certain obstacles when seeking help, many resources are available to support their well-being.

Integration and academic pressure

Change of educational, social, and cultural context in a period of identity construction:

- Stress related to integration (e.g., employment, housing, cultural norms, language, discrimination, racism, etc.)
- New teaching methods, evaluation criteria, types of relationships with faculty and fellow students, etc.
- Distance from or loss of social network along with the necessity of building a new one
- Negative perceptions of international students in the host society

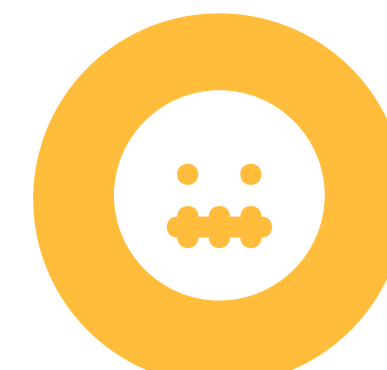
Academic stress while being far from their support network:

- Academic failures are critical moments
- Pressure related to family expectations or the expectations of those who are financing the studies
- Maladaptive perfectionism (self-worth is connected to academic success)
- Impact of academic failures on their migration status and plans to establish themselves long term in the new community

Status restricts access to employment

High cost of studies

Life experiences sometimes marked by **violence or grief**



Help-seeking

Lower likelihood of seeking help, particularly from psychosocial or mental health services

Fear that sharing their distress or requesting services will negatively affect their migration status

Stigma related to mental health issues and suicide

Poor mental health and psychosocial literacy

Feeling of being a burden on their family and/or the host society

Limited health insurance coverage

Little use of adaptive problem-solving strategies (due to age or to sociocultural norms that value accepting the situation rather than sharing their distress)

Recommended practices

These practices apply within the context of institutions of higher education. Those recommended for the general student population also apply to students from immigrant backgrounds. The following additional considerations should be taken into account when supporting this particular group of students.

Understand the intersectionality of different aspects of the person's identity (e.g., age, ethnic origin, migration status, sexual orientation, gender identity, social class, disability).

Provide information about the experiences of international students in Quebec before students leave their country of origin (e.g., information sheets, pre-departure kits, webinars). Adaptation requires preparation, and having realistic expectations helps prevent disappointment.

Provide information about psychosocial and mental health services (e.g., locations, costs, opening hours, confidentiality, languages) as well as on mental health itself before arrival, on arrival or during orientation, and throughout the academic year (e.g., during and after exams).

Create connections with the local student community with integration activities, buddy programs, or mentorship programs. This helps strengthen a sense of belonging and social support.

Facilitate connections between international students and local community resources (e.g., organizations, places of worship, peer support groups, sports activities).

Identify and formalize connections with informal or off-campus support resources (e.g., suicide prevention centres, crisis centres) used by international students.

Involve international students in the development of prevention, awareness, and information strategies and tools.

Include international students in establishing and maintaining suicide prevention networks, which are composed of non-professional individuals (students and staff members) who are trained to identify and refer individuals exhibiting vulnerabilities and signs related to suicidality.

Include individuals who provide academic support in suicide prevention networks. Individuals who encounter students who are failing academically can contribute to identifying signs of distress.

Adapt staff training and services within the educational institution to meet the needs of international students.

Raise awareness among staff and faculty who supervise graduate students about issues related to migration status. Graduate studies are often marked by delays that may significantly affect migration status renewal (e.g., thesis revisions, thesis committee selection, etc.).

Provide culturally adapted services, taking into account language, stigma, different concepts of mental and social health, as well as the protective effect of moral disapproval of suicide, etc. Having ethnoculturally diverse staff also contributes to providing adapted services.

In awareness-raising efforts, highlight shared aspects of the international study experience rather than cultural differences, unless a community has been shown to have a higher vulnerability to suicide.

Support problem-solving strategies development. Encourage students to seek educational support, set realistic goals and expectations for themselves, and report any treatment perceived as unjust or discriminatory, etc.

Prepare tailored postvention protocols in the event of a suicide within the student population (e.g., crisis management, use of interpreters to communicate with families, supporting families upon arrival, offering support and follow-up services for students and staff, etc.).

Identify the individual's priority needs and help them address those needs (e.g., housing, food insecurity, finances, transportation, physical or mental health). For some, academic success may take precedence over mental health. Addressing these priorities can serve as an entry point for offering broader support, including mental health.

Identify structural barriers to seeking help, such as limitations of health insurance plans, perceived discrimination, or inadequate services.

Address the individual's social determinants of health to alleviate their stress or distress. Supporting them in meeting their financial, food, housing, transportation, or other needs may help restore hope.