



California Community Colleges



Part 1

Beyond the Breaking Point: Supporting Students Through Distress and Crisis

Presenter: Monique Mendoza, PhD

March 10, 2026 | 10:00 AM PST

Let's start connecting...



At the end of our hour together, what would you like to walk away with?

For example: a strategy, a question answered, or a tool you can use.

Add your name, title/role, and college in the chat.

Before We Begin



Chat and Q&A: Please utilize the chat or Q&A function to ask questions throughout.



Closed Captioning (CC): Closed captions are available. Click on the (CC) button to read live captions.



Meeting Materials: Slides and any follow up materials will be provided following the presentation.



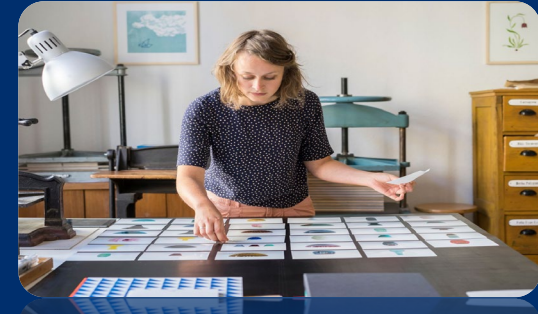
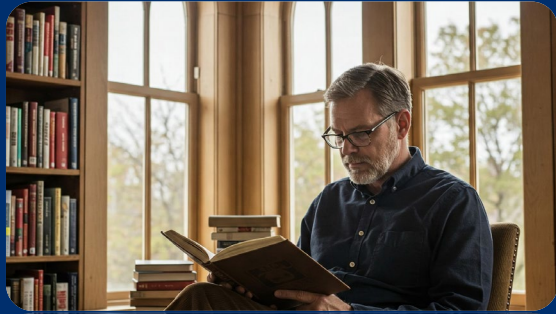
Recording: We are recording today's session, and the recording will be made available on the website in the coming weeks.

Meet our speaker: **Dr. Monique Mendoza**



- Former Director of Behavioral Intervention Teams across multiple sectors including Higher Education, healthcare, and government
- Subject Matter Expert in Threat Management and Workplace Violence Prevention
- Licensed Psychologist in California for 12+ years
- Organizational Consultant focused on building threat management teams and institutionalizing safe initiatives

Learning Objectives

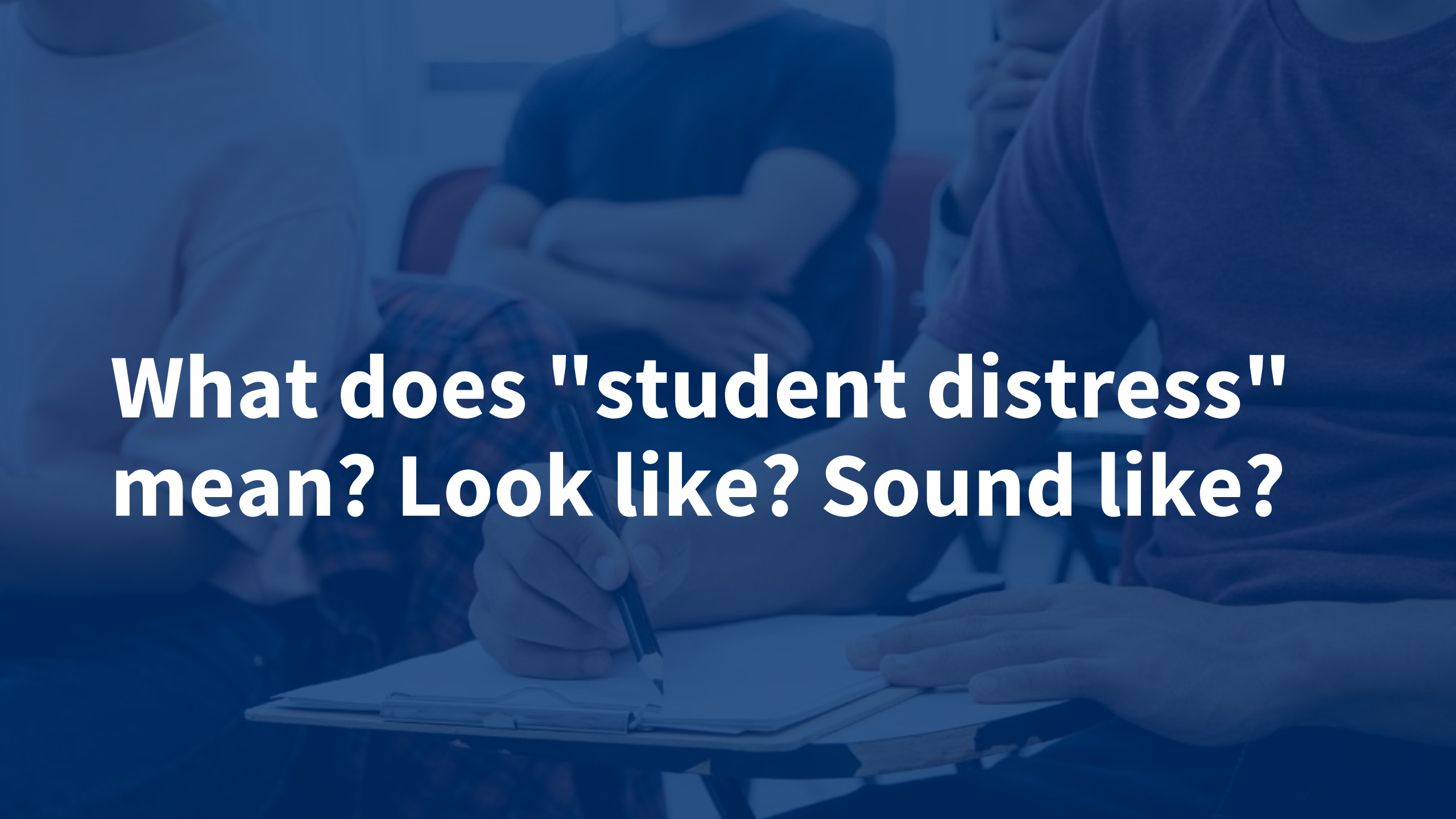


Recognize the difference between a student who is stressed, struggling, and in crisis and know how to respond to each.

Apply communication strategies that open the door for students to ask for help.

Know when a situation needs immediate attention, and what your next step is when it does.

Connect students to the right support without making the referral feel like an exit.



What does "student distress" mean? Look like? Sound like?

A young woman with long, wavy hair and a backpack is looking down at a stack of papers in a classroom. The background shows a whiteboard and a desk. The entire image has a blue overlay.

Enter In The Chat:

What's one challenge you've faced when supporting distressed students?

Distress Tolerance

The *perceived capacity* and the *behavioral act* to withstand negative emotional and/or other aversive states elicited by some type of stressor.

(Zvolensky et al., 2010)

What's impacting distress tolerance for college students?

- In Spring 2025, 71% of students surveyed reported experiencing mental health challenges. (ACHA, 2025)
- Lonely students are nearly 4x more likely to experience severe psychological distress. (ACHA, 2025)
- Rural community college students face an additional layer: distance from resources, and cultures where asking for help carries real social cost.

What's impacting distress tolerance for college students?

The suicide rate among 13- to 30-year-olds is growing fastest among Black people, White Hispanics, and Asians/Pacific Islanders (KFF, 2026)

More than 40% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth (Trevor Project, 2024)



College as a Resilience Strategy

- Enrollment in college as a protective factor.
- Resilient students with positive coping strategies are able to bounce back from academic challenges.
- Access to multiple academic, health resources and meaningful connections.



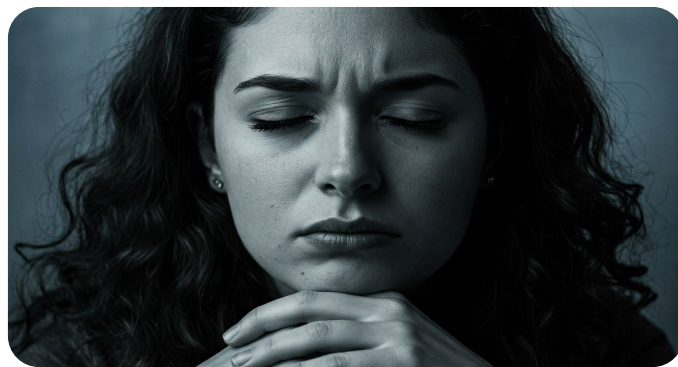


Acute crisis:

Imminent risk, concrete plan, access to means, timeline for action.

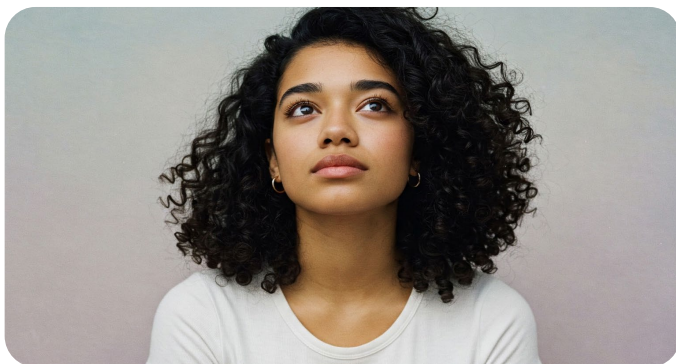
Chronic ideation:

Recurring thoughts without immediate intent to act.



Low-level ideation:

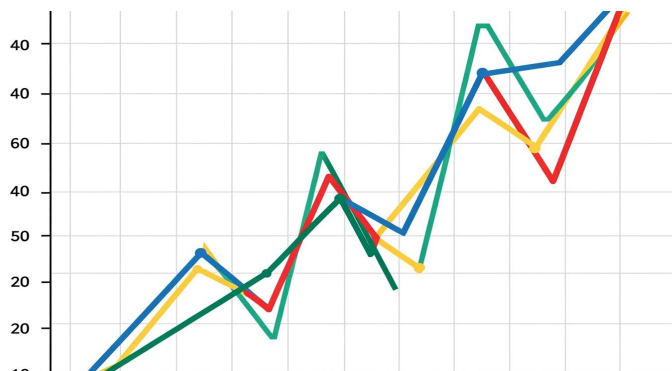
Passive thoughts like "I wouldn't mind if I didn't wake up tomorrow."



Chronic/low-level ideation can fluctuate in intensity over time.

Approximately one in five college students will experience suicidal thoughts at some point during their college years.

(Liu, 2019)



What We Miss:

Positive and Negative Symptoms

Positive symptoms (easier to notice)	Negative symptoms (easier to miss)
Crying, agitation, expressing hopelessness	Withdrawal, going quiet, seeming "fine"
Direct statements about not wanting to be here	Flatness, declining invitations, reduced output
Visible distress in class or office hours	High functioning on the outside, collapsing privately

Enter In The Chat:

In your day-to-day interactions with students, what's the biggest change you've noticed in how they handle stress and emotional challenges compared to a few years ago?

Staff/Faculty as Support Resources

- Creating a supportive campus culture
- Defining appropriate boundaries
- Understanding the limits of your role
- Building a network of support rather than being the sole helper
- Fostering distress tolerance skills in our academic and social contexts



When Helping Gets In The Way

What we intend	What students sometimes experience
"You need to talk to a counselor right now."	Panic. The problem just got bigger than they thought.
"I'm sure it's not as bad as it feels."	You didn't hear me. I won't try again.
"I'm required to report this."	I should have stayed quiet.
"Have you tried the wellness center?"	A door closing, not opening.



Reactions to disclosures of suicidal ideation are normal.

Noticing our physiological response.

Recognize your personal boundaries and limits.

Individual strategies for taking care of yourself when engaging with a distressed student.



Understanding your own reactions and managing them professionally

Zoom Poll Question

When a student discloses emotional distress, which response do you find most challenging to navigate? (Select one)

- Finding the right words that validate without minimizing
- Asking directly about suicide while maintaining support
- Deciding when to involve campus resources
- Managing my own emotions while staying professional
- Knowing how to follow up appropriately
- Other (share in chat)

Moving beyond basic listening skills



Instead of...

You sound really stressed.

Try

I hear that you're feeling like things can't get better. These feelings can change with support, and I'd like to explore what might help make tomorrow feel more manageable.



You already know more than you think

What we keep adding	What actually moves the needle
Another training. Another framework. Another acronym.	One conversation done well.
More resources on the referral list.	Knowing which one to call and why.
Longer protocols.	A shorter pause before you respond.

Moving beyond basic listening skills



Instead of...

Things will get better.

Try

Many students have felt what you've felt and found ways through it. The pain you're feeling now is real, but with support, others have found that these intense feelings can become more manageable.



Making the Link to Support with Urgency and Care

Name your concern

What you're describing worries me.

I'm concerned about what you've shared, and I want to make sure you have support.

Make the connection

Let's talk about connecting with the counseling center.

Give them the next step

I can walk you over or we can call together right now.

Name why it matters

This isn't something you have to figure out alone.

Close with appreciation

Thank you for trusting me with these concerns.

A group of students in a classroom setting. In the foreground, a student with curly hair is looking at a smartphone held by another student. To the right, a student wearing a red beanie and glasses is smiling. The background shows other students and a bright window.

Zoom Poll Question:
What **institutional barriers** exist that *prevent* students from **seeking help**?

Build Your Connection Plan Before You Need It

Campus Health Center

Hours, location, intake process, wait times

Student Resources/ Peer Support

Opportunities to reduce loneliness and increase connection.

Trusted Resources

Who have I agreed to contact

Community Crisis Resources and hotlines

With a reminder of how to access these resources.



New Message



To | Samuel Garcia- Pathway Resource Center

January 14 2026, 8:15 PM

Cc Bcc

Subject Re: Stop by next week's study sesh!

Hi Sam,

As you know, I've been trying to complete my capstone project this semester. I also didn't turn in the analysis paper that was due yesterday. I've been trying to work on it, but I just can't focus on anything right now and it's not like me. I've shared with you a little about how I've been taking care of my sister's health. Now, everything feels pointless. I keep thinking about how I'm probably going to fail this class anyway, and maybe I'm not cut out for college at all.

I just can't keep on track. When will this all end?

Now, I'm worried about Spring Finals that start next month. Do you really think the study session is even for someone like me when I'm so far behind? I'm buried in work and I'll probably be the most helpless student there.

Thanks tho.

Lani Marquez

Key Takeaways

For Yourself

You're a critical bridge to professional help, while modeling healthy boundary setting.

For Your Colleagues

Shared language across roles saves lives. Find one person this week to practice with.

For Your Students

The response they remember most is the one that made them feel like they weren't a problem to be solved.

*Power
OF
Words*

References & Resources

References

- **Liu, C. H., Stevens, C., Wong, S. H., Yasui, M., & Chen, J. A. (2019).** The prevalence and predictors of mental health diagnoses and suicidal behavior in college students: Implications for addressing disparities in service use. *Depression and Anxiety*, 36(1), 8–17.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22830>
- **KFF. (2025).** *Suicide deaths: National trends and variation by demographics and states.*
<https://www.kff.org/mental-health/suicide-deaths-national-trends-and-variation-by-demographics-and-states/>
- **The Trevor Project. (2024).** *2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People.*
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- [American College Health Association. \(2025\). American College Health Association–National College Health Assessment III: Undergraduate Student Reference Group Executive Summary, Spring 2025. Silver Spring, MD: ACHA.](#)
- [Active Minds. \(2024\). Loneliness, Resilience, and Mental Health.](#)

References & Resources

Resources

- Fassbinder, E., Schweiger, U., Martius, D., Brand-de Wilde, O., & Arntz, A. (2016). Emotion regulation in schema therapy and dialectical behavior therapy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1373. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01373>
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- The Dorm. (n.d.). *Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) for young adults in college*. <https://thedorm.com/blog/dialectical-behavior-therapy-dbt-young-adults-college/>
- Building Cultural Responsiveness in Mobile Crisis Teams Series - S5: Children, Youth, and Families. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYtFrUB0u3w>

Part 2: Applying the Approach

Tuesday, March 24 | 1:00 – 2:00 pm PT

Participants will explore:

- Strengthening coordinated responses to student distress
- Applying strategies across different campus roles
- Tools and practices that support effective intervention

Register for Part 2

https://bit.ly/BreakingPoint_ApplyingtheApproach

We look forward to having you with us.



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<https://www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org/>



California Community Colleges

Thank you!

For any questions or concerns related to the content of these webinars, please email cccsmh@cars-rp.org

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