HELPING DISTRESSED STUDENTS
A GUIDE FOR UNIVERSITY STAFF

The health and welfare of all members of the University is everyone’s concern. This guide gives you advice on dealing with both crises and more everyday situations.

It is important to be prepared for emergencies, but be aware they occur very rarely and that expert help is available.

YOU CAN:
- Listen
- Give the student time to talk
- Be sympathetic and not dismissive
- Understand the situation from his/her point of view
- Make appropriate referrals
- Help the student to feel contained

YOU CAN’T:
- Solve all the students’ problems
- Take responsibility for his/her emotional state or actions

THIS GUIDE WILL:

1. Help you to recognise when a student may be in difficulty.

2. Provide advice to help you respond/refer appropriately and efficiently.

3. Remind you of the sources of support within the University.

4. Raise awareness of issues relating to student mental health.
**IS THERE A PROBLEM?**

**TRUSTING YOUR JUDGEMENT**

**Is the student’s behaviour causing concern?**

- The student is telling you there is a problem.
- There is something unusual or unpredictable about the student’s behaviour that makes you uneasy.

**How does the student seem?**

- Agitated
- Dulled
- Behaving erratically
- Changing mood/behaviour
- Panicky
- Poor concentration
- Sad/miserable/tearful
- Smelling of alcohol/cannabis
- Talking incoherently
- Tense/irritable
- Very loud/disinhibited
- Withdrawn/very quiet

**Is there other information?**

- The student declared a mental health problem.
- Housemates or staff are telling you something about the student that indicates a problem.

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**Is this different from your previous experience of this person?**

- You might see a significant change in appearance (e.g. weight change, decline in personal hygiene).
- Behaviours may have changed (e.g. staying in bed all day, work handed in late, not attending classes, avoiding going out).

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**Do you need more information from the student?**

- How does he/she feel?
- Is there something wrong?
- Has there been a similar experience in the past?

**Do you need more information from other staff?**

- Has anyone else noticed a problem?
- How is the student functioning academically?

**Would it be helpful to consult with someone else?**

- Your colleagues.
- Line manager/senior colleague.
- Student Support Services (see page 4).
WHAT YOU SHOULD DO
IN NON-URGENT SITUATIONS

The situation is not urgent if there is no immediate risk to the student, or others, although the student may be:

- Bereaved
- Depressed, anxious, generally
- Having unexplained study or money problems
- Homesick, lonely and isolated
- Having problems with relationships
- Suffering from low self-esteem

If the student will accept help:

Decide who is the best person to help.

If you feel you could help the student ensure that:

- You have the time and/or skill.
- It does not conflict with your role.
- You are able to:
  - Listen to the student’s concerns
  - Offer practical advice
  - Provide reassurance
  - Show your concern by following up your conversation at another time

If the student will not accept help:

You can make it clear that you will help if the student changes his/her mind.

Seek advice from Student Services (see page 4).

You can monitor the situation.

You should alert the student’s Adviser of Studies or other relevant person, about continuing concerns.

In all situations:

Debrief by talking the situation through with a colleague or the Counselling & Psychological Services. Make a record of your concerns and inform others as appropriate.
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WHAT SORT OF SUPPORT DOES THE STUDENT NEED?

Support issues arise from mental health problem.

There is a clear health problem.

The student told you directly about a specific problem, e.g.
- Alcohol/drugs
- Bereavement
- Eating disorder
- Relationship breakdown

The student is very worried about academic matters.

There is a persistent study problem.

The student has financial problems.

The student needs to talk things through with someone who will provide a listening ear.

The issue might be related to student being from overseas.

Disability Services

GP or Health Service

Counselling & Psychological Services

School

Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service

SRC Advice Centre

Accommodation Services

Interfaith Chaplain

International Student Support

The student is concerned about his/her use of alcohol and drugs.

The student:
- Avoids starting or finishing work
- Experiences panic attacks or extreme anxiety
- Has perfectionist tendencies
- Works unrealistic hours

The problem is due to loss of motivation or difficulty concentrating.

Symptoms could be:
- Signs of depression
- Low mood/energy
- Difficulty sleeping
- General loss of interest/concentration
- Loss of self-confidence
- Tiredness

There is a problem of discrimination, harassment or complaint.

There is a problem related to accommodation.

The student needs are related to religion or spirituality.

MORE INFORMATION:

- See the MyGlasgow Students site: www.glasgow.ac.uk/students
- Contact the Student Services Enquiry Team (SSET) on +44 (0) 141 330 7000

REMEMBER: Friends and family can be a source of support!
WHAT YOU SHOULD DO IN URGENT SITUATIONS

The situation is urgent if you believe or are given information that the student may be at risk of harm to him/herself or others. You are concerned for one or more of the following reasons. The student:

- May be at risk of serious self-harm
- Is violent or threatening violence to people or property
- Has completely stopped functioning
- Seems very disorientated and out of touch with reality

In these circumstances the University Crisis Team helps provide central support for these situations.

ACCESSING CRISIS TEAM:

Phone Security: +44 (0) 141 330 4444 (during and out of office hours).

Have as much information to hand about the situation as possible. If the situation is immediately life threatening, call the emergency services.

BENEFICIAL INFORMATION TO COLLECT:

- Name and registration number of student
- Where do they stay – address and phone details
- Contact details of any family or friends to help support
- GP’s name and practice
- Details of the incident and any other relevant information: Has it happened before? Are they on any medication? Have they registered with the Counselling or Disability Services?

ALSO, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- Try to stay calm
- Whenever possible make sure you have back-up available
- Engage with the student if possible
- Prioritise your own safety and that of others at the scene
- Ensure to debrief by talking the situation through with a colleague or with someone in the Counselling & Psychological Services
### Identifying sources of support:

It is not always possible to know what the best source of support might be. The student may have more than one problem, or the initial problem may not be the most central.

If in doubt about the available or most suitable services, contact the Student Services Enquiry Team.

If you think the student is in crisis, phone: +44 (0) 141 330 4444

### If you offer support yourself, you must ensure that:

- You have sufficient within the context of your other commitments to do this.
- It does not conflict with other aspects of your role.

Remember: you are not solely responsible for the student’s emotional state

### Confidentiality:

- Do not disclose personal information about students to anyone outside the University, including parents, without the student’s explicit consent.
- If parents wish to contact the student, you can offer to forward a communication or tell the student they have been in touch.

- Treat personal information about students with discretion.
- Do not promise absolute confidentiality and advise the student that you may have to consult a colleague.

The Counselling & Psychological Services offer a confidential consultation service to all staff who may wish to discuss their concerns about a student in difficulty.
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KEY CONTACTS: INTERNAL

STUDENT SERVICES ENQUIRY TEAM (SSET)

If in doubt contact the Student Services Enquiry Team (SSET) in non-urgent situations.

Level 2, The Fraser Building
University Avenue
Glasgow G12 8QQ

Telephone: +44 (0) 141 330 7000
Email: studentservices@glasgow.ac.uk
Web: www.glasgow.ac.uk/sset

COUNSELLING & PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

During office hours this Service will provide a priority response if a student is in a mental health crisis and/or staff need advice.

67 Southpark Avenue
Glasgow G12 8LE

Telephone: + 44 (0) 141 330 4528
Email: studentcounselling@glasgow.ac.uk
Web: www.glasgow.ac.uk/counselling

CRISIS TEAM

Contact the Team if you think a student is in crisis and are unsure what to do.

Phone Security: +44 (0) 141 330 4444 (during and out of office hours).

Have as much information to hand about the situation as possible.
If the situation is immediately life threatening, call the emergency services.