HELPING STUDENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES
Helping students with mental health and emotional difficulties

The purpose of this guide ................................................................. 3
Introduction ..................................................................................... 3
How do you know there is a problem? .............................................. 4
Responding to non-emergency situations ........................................... 5
Responding to emergencies ............................................................... 6
Help for staff in supporting students ............................................... 7
Recording what has happened ......................................................... 8
Contact lists:
Within Canterbury Christ Church University .......................... 9
Local support services in Canterbury and Thanet .................... 10
National helplines ................................................................. 11
The purpose of this guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information on how to recognise when students are possibly experiencing distress caused by mental health or emotional difficulties. An easy-to-follow flow chart will direct you to the best course of action, according to the type of situation you are dealing with and whether or not the student will accept your help (see page 4). Advice on responding to an emergency situation is on page 6.

Introduction

It is estimated\(^1\) that one in every four adults will experience diagnosable mental health difficulties in any one year, in addition to sufferers of emotional difficulties. Student Counselling Services and Student Mental Health Services nationally have noted a significant increase in students coming forward for help. Common disorders include depression, anxiety and eating disorders. Anxiety disorders include: panic (with or without agoraphobia); PTSD; OCD; generalised anxiety disorder; social anxiety. It is likely, therefore, that academic staff will be teaching students with such conditions and that students will be living with or studying alongside other students with such conditions. From time to time staff may encounter students who are severely unwell and although such students are sometimes a danger to themselves, they are rarely so to others.

Some students who come to study here will have existing mental health or emotional difficulties but many choose not to declare this. Others may develop a difficulty or illness during the course of their studies.

Finding out what to do in situations where we are supporting a student with mental health difficulties is important for all of us but it is also important to recognise our limitations when offering support and to know when to refer to the appropriate services. Not everyone will be confident to offer support in this area but listening to students in distress or informing them about where they can obtain help is valuable.

Although students have the right to confidentiality under most circumstances, this guide will inform you about when it may be necessary to over-ride this right in order to prevent serious harm to themselves or others.

In this document you will also find advice on identifying and responding to students who have mental health difficulties or are exhibiting signs of emotional distress, together with other useful information on supporting students and guidance on recording what has happened. If you wish to discuss your involvement with a student or find out more about the services on offer, then please contact the Senior Counsellor, Rob Brown and/or the Mental Health Advisor, Lynne Bennett.

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How do you know there is a problem?

There is rarely one single indicator of difficulty. The following checklist suggest possible changes which, in combination, could indicate that a student has a problem.

- Is the student’s behaviour causing concern?
  - Missing classes?
  - Is there anything odd or unpredictable about the student’s behaviour that makes you feel uneasy?
  - Anxious or constantly seeking reassurance?
  - Failing to complete coursework, doing too much / too little?

- How does the student seem?
  - Unexpected tearfulness?
  - Tense / irritable?
  - Sad / miserable?
  - Unkempt?
  - Smelling of alcohol / cannabis?
  - Withdrawn or very quiet?
  - Flat?
  - Agitated?
  - Very loud / uninhibited?
  - Talking incoherently?
  - Evidence of or reporting of self-harm?

- Is there other information?
  - What is the student telling you about what is going on?
  - Have other staff voiced concerns?
  - Are family, friends or housemates suggesting there’s a problem?

- Is this different from your previous experience of this student?
  - Is there a significant change in appearance (weight change, decline in personal hygiene etc)?
  - Has there been a noticeable decline in student’s academic performance?

Do you need more information from the student?

- How does s/he feel?
- Has something happened?
- Has there been a problem in the past?

Do you need more information from others?

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

Would it be helpful to consult with someone else? You can do this without identifying the student.

- Should you talk to another member of staff, your Head of Department or line manager?
- Student Health & Wellbeing can help you by talking through the issue.

What should you do next?
Responding to non-emergency situations

Is the problem URGENT?
Do you think that
- The student may be at risk of harm
  - To him/herself
  - From others
  - To others
- The student is seriously physically ill?

If the student WILL accept your help:
- If you are seriously worried, see the emergency procedures on page 6.
- Help the student make an urgent appointment with own GP.
- Reassure them that help is available.
- Refer the student to Student Health and Wellbeing (or if out of hours, contact Emergency Services and inform Security).
- Give contact sheet of other help available (see below).

If the student WILL NOT accept your help:
- Note situation carefully (see below) and seek advice from Student Health and Wellbeing (if out of hours, contact Emergency Services and inform Security)
- Give referral information/contact list (see below).

Could you help the student?
- Do you know whom you should contact for advice?
- Does the student consent to your help?

Offer appropriate support
This might include:
- Listening to the student’s concerns.
- Offering practical advice.
- Showing your concern by following up the conversation another time.
- Referring to Student Health and Wellbeing.
- Giving contact sheet.
Beware of getting out of your depth or of taking on too much.

With the student’s knowledge, REFER them to appropriate person/team/organisation
- If you are clear about the help the student requires then provide the student with the appropriate information.
- If you are unsure what help the student requires, seek further advice (see contact list) and pass this on to the student.
- Refer them, with their agreement, to Student Health and Wellbeing via Cause for Care and Concern

If the student does not want any help, make a detailed note of your concerns for the record and discuss with Student Health and Wellbeing staff.

NB. You may find it helpful to talk through your own emotional responses around the impact of the experience. Student Health and Wellbeing can offer this confidential support.
Responding to Emergencies

Very occasionally, students exhibit behaviour that gives rise to considerable concern.

Is there evidence of a suicide attempt (e.g. overdose)?

- Call an ambulance by dialling 999 and inform the Security Team that you have done so (ext: 2111).
- Keep pills, bottles to show ambulance crew.
- Inform the Head of Student Health and Wellbeing (ext: 3647) after you have dealt with the immediate situation.

Is there any perceived immediate risk of physical violence to themselves or others?

- Call 999 and ask for Police and Ambulance.
- Inform the Security Team on ext 2355

Is there any perceived immediate risk of physical violence to themselves or others?

- Do they have a plan and intend to carry it out?
- Is the student at significant risk or immediate risk from others?

Is there extreme or bizarre behaviour which might indicate a serious mental illness?

- Preferably having obtained the student’s permission or at least with their knowledge, contact the following
  - Student’s GP Surgery
  - Or call an ambulance and inform the Security Team.

See “Responding to non-emergency situations” on Page 5

Inform Head of Student Health and Wellbeing at earliest opportunity, giving student’s name and programme (and student ID no. if possible).
Help for staff in supporting students

Staff may encounter students with mental health difficulties who exhibit behaviour that is difficult to deal with. There may be anger, resentment, intense distress, disinterest in solving the problem, panic or passivity. You may feel frustration, anger or distress yourself. Here are some guidelines to help you to deal with the situation, the feelings of the student and your own feelings.

- Do not take responsibility for resolving a student’s mental health problems or emotional difficulties. This can be achieved by recognising that there are other people and support agencies available to help when you refer the student. This will help prevent the student from becoming dependent on you.

- When dealing with anger, keep reminding yourself not to take it personally. Remember to protect yourself from physical danger if you feel that there is any risk of this.

- Try to relax by breathing deeply and by tensing then releasing your muscles. If you stay calm and acknowledge that the other person is feeling angry, this will help them to calm down too.

- Do not respond to their anger by raising your voice or by arguing back. Do not try to stare someone out as this can often exacerbate the situation and is not helpful in trying to address matters.

- Try not to join the student in their distress. You should show empathy but also demonstrate that you are capable of listening and then assisting them. This can be very reassuring for someone in distress.

- Remember that you do not have to resolve the problem there and then. Your aim is more likely to be to contain the situation and to prevent escalation.

- When possible try to reach an agreement with the student at the end of the meeting as to what is going to happen next. You may need to write this down for them, as they may forget the details of any future meetings arranged or action they are meant to take (especially if they have been very emotional during their meeting with you).

- It is easy to get caught up in someone else’s distress or anger. Keeping your distance and remaining separate from the student is the most effective way to help them (and to contain the situation).
Recording what has happened - Incident Reporting Proforma

It is important to make a formal record of your encounter or meeting with a distressed student. Please use the following proforma to do this and then refer to the instructions for staff on disclosure of information concerning ‘disabled’ students on the Disability Advice Service web pages, to assist you to decide what to do next. These can be found on:

http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/support/student-support-services/disability-advice/information-for-staff-members.asp

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of encounter with student / event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Address (if known)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other contact details (e.g. email or phone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relevant information if known (such as programme of study)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief description of the event / meeting / situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please include where and at what time you met, and whether other people were present, giving their names if necessary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please list your actions (e.g. listened and gave reassurance, phoned friend, called GP, called South East Health, etc)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| If you referred the student to another agency or other office / member of staff within the University, please give details |

| Your name and contact details |


Useful Contacts within the University

When calling from an external telephone, dial 01227 and 78 before the following extension numbers, or, when indicated, 86.

Department of Student Health and Wellbeing

Head of Student Health and Wellbeing         Karen James              ext 3647

Counselling/Mental Health

Student Counselling Service                  Rob Brown                 ext 3434
Jill Wiffen, Erna Evans, Susan Wyles, John Marriott, Leigh Riley     ext 3056 (86)

Mental Health Advisor                        Lynne Bennett             ext 2630

Secretary to Mental Health Advisor and Counsellors Mary Devroey ext 3056 (86)

Disability Advice Team

Manager Student Disability Advice Team       Margaret Scott            ext 2842

Student Advisors Dyslexia and Neurodiversity Maggie Gurr     ext 2748
Jolene Svoboda                               ext 3057 (86)
Laura Duffy                                  ext 2576

Secretary to Disability Advisors             Tristan Ireson-Howells    ext 2576

Other contacts within Department of Student Health and Wellbeing

Student Support Officer                      Yasmin Ghandour           ext 2803

International Student Advisor               Laura Spencer              ext 2675

Student Financial Support Administrators     Rachel Ing                ext 3160
(via Switchboard only)
Nigel Wilson                                ext 2783
Tricia Hutchinson                           ext 3428 (86)

Other Contacts outside Student Health and Wellbeing

Accommodation and Housing Welfare            Amanda Browne             ext 2737

Chaplains                                   Rev Jeremy Law            ext 2747
Rev Dave Stroud                              ext 2538
Rev Sally Womersley                          ext 2139

Students Union (Welfare and Education)       ext 2817

Security                                    ext 2355

i-zone                                      ext 2222
Local Support Services

South East Health (www.southeasthealth.com) provide out-of-hours medical services for when GP surgeries are closed. If out of hours medical assistance is needed, you must first contact the surgery who will provide you with a recorded message and contact options for you to ring.

This applies to students at Canterbury, Broadstairs, Tunbridge Wells and Medway.

Support Services in Canterbury and Thanet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Telephone Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police Station:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury Police Station</td>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>01227 762055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margate</td>
<td></td>
<td>01843 231055</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Margate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>East Kent Alcohol Service</td>
<td></td>
<td>01227 453635</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citizens Advice Bureau</td>
<td></td>
<td>01227 452762</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td></td>
<td>01843 225973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margate</td>
<td></td>
<td>01843 383760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medway (Gillingham)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruse – Bereavement Care</td>
<td></td>
<td>0845 6030024</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canterbury &amp; Thanet</td>
<td></td>
<td>020 8304 5245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medway (Sittingbourne)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>KCA Talking Therapies (Mental</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Health service)</td>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>03000 120012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thanet</td>
<td></td>
<td>01843 293844</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medway</td>
<td></td>
<td>01634 406087</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Planning Clinic</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(pregnancy &amp; contraception</td>
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<td>01227 597033</td>
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<tr>
<td>advice)</td>
<td></td>
<td>01843 255315</td>
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<tr>
<td>(pregnancy &amp; contraception</td>
<td></td>
<td>01634 335100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advice)</td>
<td>Broadstairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medway (Rochester)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELATE – Relationship counselling</td>
<td></td>
<td>01227 766094</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Gate (G.U.M.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>01227 783120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent &amp; Canterbury Hospital</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victim Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>0845 3030900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological and Psychiatric Support Services (PSICON)</td>
<td>01227 479902</td>
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<tr>
<td>University Medical Centre at Kent University – Psychological Therapies</td>
<td>01227 469338</td>
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### National Helplines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NHS Direct</td>
<td>111</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcoholics Anonymous</td>
<td>0845 769 7555</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIND</td>
<td>0300 123 3393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saneline (6pm – 11pm)</td>
<td>0845 7678000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Lesbian &amp; Gay Switchboard</td>
<td>0300 330 0630 (10am – 11pm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Health Line</td>
<td>0300 123 7123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>03000 41 91 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samaritans</td>
<td>08457 90 90 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning Point alcohol and drug services (Canterbury, Thanet, Medway)</td>
<td>0300 123 1186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Panic - Anxiety helpline (10am - 10pm)</td>
<td>0800 138 8889</td>
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### Useful Websites

- **Frank**  [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)  
  Substance misuse information website.

- **Mind**  [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)  
  Mental health information website.

- **www.nhs.uk**  
  NHS Choices website. Useful source of information about local and national health, disability and support services.