

Supporting our students' mental wellbeing

A guide for staff

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Acknowledgements

Student Experience Team at Anglia Ruskin University

Anglia Ruskin University Code of Practice for
Mental Health

Mental Health Foundation

MIND

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Gareth Cronin, 'Dealing with Students in Emotional
Distress: A Guide for Staff', City College Norwich

Key contact numbers:

Associate Director of Student Affairs,
Counselling, Student Support Services
Anglia Ruskin University

Tel: 0845 196 2298 / 2598 (Cambridge)
0845 196 4240 / 4242 (Chelmsford)

Web: www.anglia.ac.uk/teachinclusive

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Offering support

With support from their families, friends, and from University staff, most students cope well with life in higher education. However, the pressures of leaving home, getting used to independent study, money worries, separation from friends and family and concerns about 'fitting in' can all contribute to students experiencing emotional distress at some point during their time with us. Some of our students will need more support than others to enable them to get through and some will require professional help to manage their emotional distress or a period of mental ill-health.

One in four of us will experience mental health difficulties over the course of our lives and it's likely that you will encounter friends and family, students and colleagues, who have mental health difficulties from time to time.

This guide is intended to help you speak with and assist students who may have mental health difficulties or enduring emotional distress. It can be worrying or feel embarrassing to approach someone who you think is unwell and difficult to know when to seek further help or pass your concerns on. These guidelines should help you to support students who are distressed, but also identify those who might need additional help from our specialist Student Support Services.

Worried about a student?

Often students are able to find someone to talk to about their difficulties, perhaps a friend, Tutor, Residential Assistant, Chaplain or another member of staff they feel comfortable with. However, students do not always ask for help and you may detect other signs that all is not well. If you suspect that a student may be experiencing mental health difficulties and / or emotional distress, it may be useful for you to consider the questions above on page 2 (Recognising students in distress).

If the answers to any of the questions give you cause for concern, talk to your line manager and contact the Associate Director of Student Affairs for Cambridge on ext: 2298 / 2598 or for Chelmsford on ext: 4240 / 4278, in confidence, for advice on how to deal with the situation and how the student might best be supported. However, until the student is able to access support from an Adviser or Counsellor, the following guidance may be useful.

Recognising students in distress

- Have there been any significant changes in the student's appearance? (e.g. weight loss / gain, decline in personal hygiene)
- Does the student smell any different? (e.g. does he or she regularly smell of alcohol or cannabis)
- How does the student sound? (e.g. flat, agitated, very quiet, very loud)
- Has the mood of the student recently changed a lot from your previous experiences with him or her? (e.g. moods very up and down, miserable, tired a lot)
- Have others (house mates, friends, other colleagues) expressed concern about the student?
- Have there been recent changes in the student's behaviour, his or her approach to study and / or sociability? (e.g. doing too much work, not socialising as much as usual, withdrawn, not attending lectures or meeting deadlines)
- How long has the student been feeling or behaving like this? Everyone can have bad days, but it is when days turn into weeks or months that there may be a problem.

Approaching a student who may be experiencing distress

If you're worried about a student don't avoid the situation or feel embarrassed or awkward about approaching him or her. You are unlikely to make the situation worse and most students appreciate our concern. Before you approach the student, however, you might want to talk discreetly to colleagues to see if your worries are shared, but don't reach any conclusions until you have spoken with the student. Express your concerns in private to the student and, most importantly of all, be prepared to listen. Any information provided by the student must be treated as confidential unless the student gives consent for it to be shared with others or you believe there is a serious and / or immediate risk to the safety of the student or those around him or her.

Sometimes you may be approached by a student who is worried about someone in his or her group, a friend or a house mate. Students are often worried that their friend or colleague will be angry that they have approached a member of staff about their concerns and that this will damage their relationship. Reassure them that sharing their worries is a responsible and caring thing to do. However, if the situation sounds serious or urgent, explain that you have an obligation to share the information they have given you, in order to ensure the safety of the student they have spoken to you about, or others around them. Contact the Associate Director of Student Affairs for Cambridge on ext: 2298 / 2598 or for Chelmsford on ext: 4240 / 4278. See page 5 for further information on dealing with an urgent situation.

Talking to students about other students

In this situation you need to talk through the student's concerns and listen carefully for evidence of any of the signs listed above (Recognising students in distress). Ask the student what recent changes he or she has observed and how long these have been going on for. Check whether others share these concerns. Remember that being with someone who is experiencing mental health difficulties or enduring emotional distress can be very tough and that the student may also need support. Ensure the student has contact information for Student Support Services,

the Chaplaincy or the Student Union (SU) Advice Service and make contact on his or her behalf, if he or she is happy for you to do so. Encourage the student to get support, but also to consider sharing his or her concerns for the friend, house mate or colleague with Student Support. Remind him or her that it is possible for Student Support to make contact with a student, without identifying who contacted the Service. The SU Advice Service will not contact a student in this way.

In most circumstances you should treat any information that students share with you as confidential, unless they give you permission to pass specific details on to others within the University who may be able to help them. However, there are circumstances when release of sensitive information without a student's consent is acceptable:

1. When there is an immediate and serious threat to personal safety;
2. When there is an immediate and serious threat to the safety of others;
3. When there is a legal requirement to disclose information (e.g. where there is a substantial chance that non-disclosure would be likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime).

What happens if a student refuses help?

If the student is not ready to talk about his or her problem, or to admit that there is one, it could be counter-productive to try to force the issue. It might be better to back off, but to extend an open invitation to come back and talk to you in the future. However, an urgent problem should be dealt with (see page 5). Students might admit that they have a problem, but be reluctant to seek professional help. This could be for a number of reasons. They might feel that the problem is

not serious enough; that they should be able to cope on their own; that they would have to reveal information about themselves which they would prefer to keep private; or they might have concerns about confidentiality.

Key contact numbers:

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Worried about a student's mental wellbeing?

Think about how you know there is a problem:

- Has the student told you?
- Have other students or staff voiced their concerns?
- Have you noticed significant and sustained changes in a student's appearance, mood, behaviour and / or academic performance?

If you can answer **YES** to any of the above

If you are happy to and you can do so safely, try to talk to the student privately about your concerns. Don't feel you have to provide answers or give advice. It's unlikely you'll make things worse, but don't take on responsibility outside your role

If you can't talk to the student or the student refuses help

Respect the right of the student not to discuss the problem or seek further help

Offer an open invitation to come back and talk to you

Speak to your line manager and contact Student Support Services for further advice. In an emergency contact emergency services on (9) 999 and then notify Security on ext: 6666

Last, supporting students can be very demanding. Take care of yourself and get support to talk things through.

If the student wants to talk about his or her difficulties

Listen to what he or she has to say – giving time to listen can really help

If the situation is EITHER urgent or serious and you are still concerned about the student

Out of office hours contact:
Security:
0845 196 2368 (Cambridge)
0845 196 3628 (Chelmsford)

External Contacts

Samaritans: 08457 909090
Emergency service: (9) 999
Employee Support Helpline:
Freefone: 0800 068 6729
Minicom: 0800 731 0302

Useful Websites:

www.studentsinmind.org.uk
www.studentdepression.co.uk
www.mentalhealth.org.uk
www.mind.org.uk

Internal Contacts

Associate Director of Student Affairs, Counselling, Student Support Services:
0845 196 2298 / 2598 (Cambridge)
0845 196 4240 / 4242 (Chelmsford)
www.anglia.ac.uk/teachinclusive

Sometimes it is difficult to identify a source of help that is acceptable to the student. Try to give several possible options: Student Support Services offer counselling and mentoring, the Student Advisers can help with academic queries and problems, the Chaplaincy is open for all staff and students, and the SU has an Advice Service.





What if...?

A student refuses help?

- Reassure the student that anything said to his or her GP, a Student Support Adviser or a Counsellor will remain confidential
- Reinforce that no problem is too small to take to Student Support and that there are people around Anglia Ruskin who want to help
- Suggest that he or she talks to the Students' Union Advice Service or to a Chaplain, if he or she would find it easier

A problem is serious or urgent?

How you respond to any situation will depend on your personal assessment of the seriousness and urgency of the situation. The safety of the student and of those around them is always paramount and this should help you decide whether a situation is urgent and what should be done about it.

Most students who have mental health difficulties do not pose any threat to themselves or others, but it is important to recognise scenarios that should be treated as significant cause for concern. For example, a student may seem to be out of touch with reality and not functioning normally, but not necessarily threatening any physical harm to him or herself or others. Managing situations like this is always difficult because of the anxiety that it could develop into an emergency at any moment...

If in doubt it is always better to seek advice.

A student is missing?

Contact the Associate Deans for Cambridge / Chelmsford. In addition, the University Secretary should always be notified if the police have been informed that a student is missing. Staff should always seek advice before contacting the police.

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In an emergency

- If students threaten to harm themselves, try to gain their consent to contact Student Support Services and / or their GP. Remember, if there is a risk of physical harm, it is acceptable to breach confidentiality, although whenever possible you should tell the student that you have decided to do so.
- If the threat is immediate or involves others, contact the emergency services on (9) 999 and then notify Security on ext: 6666 to tell them that you have done this.
- If you contact emergency services, please notify Student Support Services as soon as possible after the event so that they can offer support and contact the student's Adviser.
- Try to encourage the student to remain where he or she is until further help arrives.
- For emergencies outside normal working hours, contact Security on: Cambridge: 0845 196 2368 Chelmsford: 0845 196 3628
- Look after your own wellbeing and ensure that you are not at risk of harm. Don't be afraid to ask for support in dealing with a student from colleagues, your line manager, Student Support Services or Security. Remember that you may also need additional support and time to talk things through after a difficult encounter with a student. Talk to your line manager or contact a Counsellor in Student Support. Counselling support for staff is also available through the Personal Support Service on the Employee Support Helpline: Freefone 0800 068 6729 Minicom 0800 731 0302

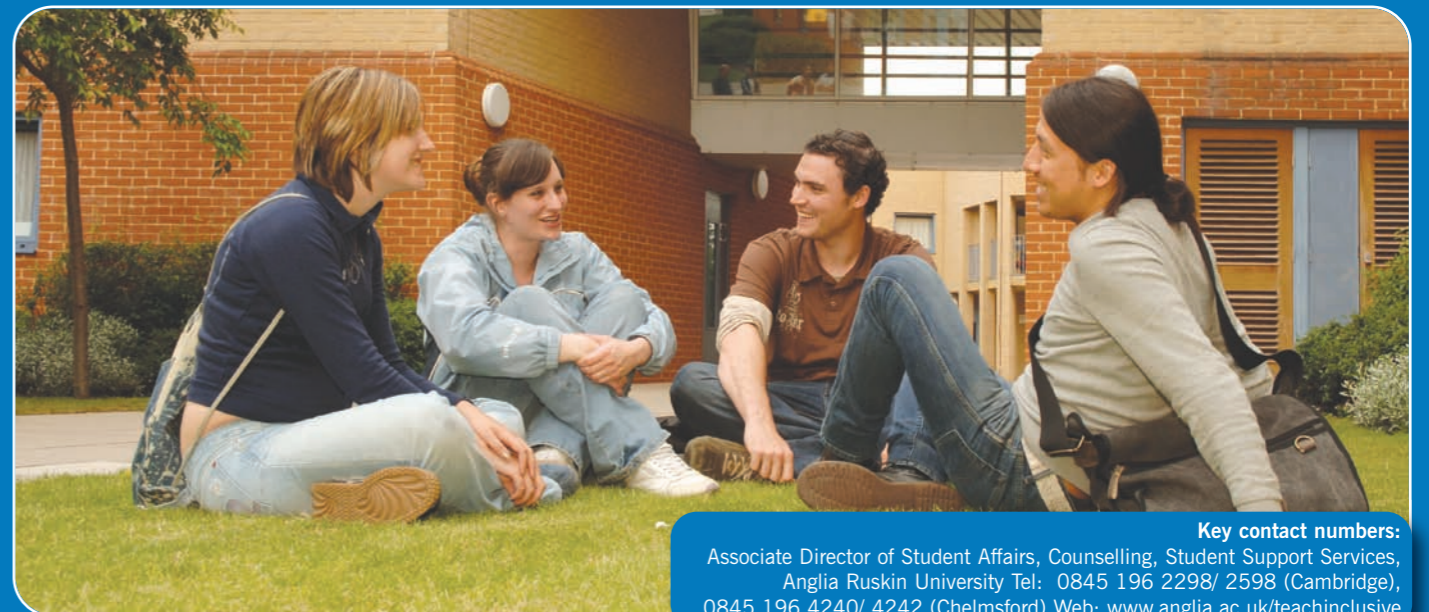
Further information

For further information see the Anglia Ruskin University Code of Practice on Mental Health 2006, which can be found on the Staff Homepage of ANET. See also the 'Referral Checklist for Staff' and the staff area of our inclusive learning and teaching website at: www.anglia.ac.uk/teachinclusive

At Anglia Ruskin University we hope to provide a quality learning experience for all our students. However, today's students may encounter multiple stress factors which can have an adverse impact on their mental health, wellbeing and can affect their studies. Students as a group are particularly vulnerable to developing mental health difficulties. Unfortunately there is a lot of stigma surrounding mental health in our society and this can make it very difficult for students experiencing difficulties to come forward and ask for help. There are many sources of support available in our University and it is important to be aware of how we can ensure that students can access this support, whatever their problem. Sometimes, just being available, providing a listening ear at the right time,

enquiring after a student's wellbeing or highlighting a source of support can make all the difference in preventing a problem from getting out of hand.

It is vital that staff stay informed as to the available systems of support and also ensure that they themselves can access support if confronted with a distressing situation or student in crisis. By gaining more knowledge and awareness about mental health issues, we can all play a valuable role in positively shaping attitudes towards mental health in our own institution and beyond. This includes considering the language and terminology we use in relation to mental health and challenging any negative attitudes or stereotypes we may encounter in daily life. All University staff have a positive role to play in overcoming fear and ignorance and working towards an aware, 'emotionally literate' organisation where all of our students can have a successful, enjoyable learning experience and achieve their potential.



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