



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

**GUIDANCE FOR STAFF ON
SUPPORTING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING
MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES**



Student Support Services

STUDENT AND ACADEMIC SERVICES

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

COUNSELLING HEALTH & WELLBEING

GUIDANCE FOR STAFF ON SUPPORTING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

1. Introduction

The University is committed to supporting those students facing mental health difficulties, whether temporary or more longstanding, to enable them to participate fully in the life of the University community.

Some students will arrive at university with pre-existing mental health problems, either declared and or undeclared, whilst others will develop problems for the first time whilst they are studying with us.

These guidelines recognise that there are limits to the extent of the support which can be provided within the University. Some students may already be accessing support outside the University via the NHS; yet others will be referred by the Counselling, Health & Well-Being Service to appropriate community-based resources outside the University. However, these guidelines set out some general procedures and protocols that can be followed by any member of staff who is concerned that a student has mental health difficulties, and may be in need of support.

It is important to note that whilst the University is committed to providing a supportive environment, it is not a mental health facility, nor is it a therapeutic community, and it would not be in students' best interests if it behaved as such.

2. General Principles

2.1 No individual staff member should ever assume sole responsibility for addressing a student's mental health problems. The University has a well-established and professional Counselling, Health & Well-being Service with expertise in assessing and supporting students with mental health difficulties, and referral to this central support service must always be the preferred first option.

2.2 Almost all the people working and studying at the University are 18 or over, and as such are adults. They have the right to make their own decisions, including behaving in ways which others may consider inappropriate or foolish. It can be a considerable challenge to find a way to balance these two opposing principles so that we support personal autonomy whilst exercising duty of care. However, it should be noted that the University does not act *in loco parentis*.

2.3 University staff should never give out their personal email or telephone details or engage in 'non-academic related' discussions with students outside of normal office hours.

3. Non-Urgent causes for concern

3.1 In the course of your everyday activities you may develop concerns about a student, and it is important that when this happens you address the problem directly and broach the subject with them. Typical signs that someone may be in difficulty may include:

- The student telling you or someone else that s/he has a problem.
- Changes in the standard of work.
- Drop off in attendance.
- Significant changes in appearance such as loss or gain of weight, deterioration of personal hygiene or signs of sleeplessness.
- Change of mood from previous experience of him or her – for example, very loud, manic behaviour or very withdrawn.
- Talk or evidence of self-harming behaviour, such as arm cutting.
- Other people, such as friends, housemates, relatives expressing concern to you.

3.2 If you simply ask the student how they are this may provide them with an opportunity to discuss their concerns with you. The situation may only require empathetic listening. Remember:

- Consider where/ when/ and how to approach the topic.
- Be specific about the reasons for your concern. Being vague or indirect is unlikely to be helpful.
- Listen carefully. Please note that the aim is not to solve the problem but to understand the situation or dilemma from the individual's perspective.
- Be clear about the boundaries of your role. Remember you are not a counsellor or a therapist, and professional central services will be better equipped to help.
- If the student indicates that they are experiencing mental health difficulties it can be useful to check whether they are already seeing a GP, Counsellor or Psychiatrist about it. Check also if they have been in contact with the University's Disability and/or Counselling, Health & Wellbeing Service.
- If you feel the need to refer the student to one of the University's specialist support services, try to persuade the student to self-refer, or obtain the student's consent to do so on their behalf. If the student is actually with you, you can telephone on their behalf and then hand the 'phone over to them.
- All students who are referred to Counselling, Health & Wellbeing will be assessed by a professionally trained and qualified Counsellor who will make a judgement on the most appropriate course of action for supporting the student. This may include a recommendation to attend group work sessions rather than access one-to-one counselling.
- Waiting times for assessment are minimal. Once the initial assessment has been made students are managed according to severity of need/ risk. Some students will have to go onto a waiting list to see a Counsellor, but they will be always be offered/ advised of alternative types of support whilst waiting.
- If the student does not provide consent, you can still discuss your concerns, provided you take care to avoid revealing the identity of the student, by ringing to speak to one of the University's Counsellors at 'ten to the hour'. **Contact telephone number is ext 3493**

- The student may not always identify that they have a problem, or may not want to acknowledge it. Whilst it may not be appropriate to insist upon such acknowledgement you should equally try to avoid humouring the student by pretending to agree that there is no problem when it is evident there is one.
- If the student is not ready to accept help or talk about their problem you must respect this. If it is not an emergency situation, it is important to give the student some time to think things over, so offer them the opportunity to come back and see you in the future. If you are still concerned about a student who has refused help, ring for further advice from one of the Counsellors in the Counselling, Health & Well-being Service, as outlined above, and log your concern with your Head of Department.

3.3 In terms of the types of support offered to students with mental health problems, the Counsellors and Mental Health Adviser, (based within the Counselling, Health & Wellbeing Service) deal primarily with assessment, referral, and support related to the mental health problem itself, with the Mental Health Adviser providing a liaison function with external support services. If a student has a long standing mental health problem which is classed as a 'disability' as described by the Equality act 2010, you can also refer the student to the University's Disability Service. The Disability Service will clarify if the mental health problem can be classed as a disability and will address the implications of this within the teaching, learning and assessment context, and produce a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) outlining appropriate reasonable adjustments for the student. Both the Counselling, Health & Wellbeing and Disability Services work closely together in support of students with mental health problems, and will cross- refer students whenever necessary.

4. Dealing with confidentiality issues.

- Students should be advised that any information they give will be treated with respect and will only be passed on to those who need to know. The student should always be asked to give consent before information is shared. Their consent must be informed, so the student needs to be told why there is a need to disclose information, who will have access to it, and the consequences of both giving or withholding their consent. The only exception to this is in a crisis situation where there is concern that the student may be a danger to themselves or others.
- Should consent be withheld written confirmation should always be sought from the student. If this is withheld, make a note that you have tried to gain consent and the student has refused.
- As a general principle, if the student refuses or does not give consent and exceptional disclosure conditions do not prevail, then information should not be shared, although you can share your concerns with one of the Counsellors, on an anonymous basis, as outlined above
- Occasionally a staff member may be contacted by concerned parents. The University's position is that personal information cannot be disclosed to parents without the consent of the student, although it may be appropriate to respond sympathetically and agree to pass on the parent's concern to the student.

5. Handling crisis situations

5.1 Most of the time the steps outlined above will be sufficient. Occasionally, however, the student concerned may reach a point of crisis.

5.2 A crisis situation occurs when a student's feelings have become outside their control. These emotions might express themselves in a number of ways, for example talking about

suicide, exhibiting aggressive tendencies towards others or themselves, losing touch with reality and exhibiting erratic behaviour.

5.3 In all crisis situations ensuring your safety and that of others, including the person involved, is paramount. With this in mind, some of the following actions or behaviours may be useful.

- Do not avoid the situation or pretend nothing is wrong.
- Try to remain calm and approach the student in a sympathetic, understanding and non-threatening manner – in many cases, calm behaviour by others is all that is required to manage the situation successfully.
- If there are other students and staff about, calmly ask them to leave the area.
- Ensure appropriate people are contacted. This could include the Head of Counselling, Health & Wellbeing and/ or other senior managers such as your Head of Department or Director of Student Support Services.
- If a student is/ becomes severely disorientated or dangerous to themselves or others, call **Emergency Services immediately on 999**. Also call **University Security on ext 2222** for emergency support.
- If the situation is less urgent and it is within office hours, contact the Counselling, Health & Wellbeing Service for advice on **ext 3493**. Out of hours, contact University Security on **ext 2222**.
- If the student is calm enough, tell them “ I am really concerned and I am going to give your details to the Counselling, Health & Wellbeing Service’ who will then contact you.” Advise the student to contact their GP or go to the Accident & Emergency Department at their local hospital. It will usually be Manchester Royal infirmary in Manchester **0161 276 4147** or Leighton Hospital in Crewe **01270 255 141**. If necessary call Counselling, Health & Wellbeing or Security for advice, which may include ordering a taxi to take them to hospital
- If you refer someone to hospital, inform the Counselling, Health & Wellbeing Service as the Mental Health Adviser will then liaise and follow this up with colleagues in the NHS.
- Remember too that students can contact the Samaritans on 116 123 (free-call, 24 hours a day.)
- For students within Greater Manchester ‘The Sanctuary’ provides a crisis support line during the day 6 am – 8 pm and provides a safe haven through the night from 8 pm to 6 am. Contact number 0300 003 7029.

Rita Lewin

Director of Student Support Services

13/4/2016

Student informs you/ You notice they may be experiencing mental health problems

No

Do they present an immediate threat of harm to themselves or others?

Yes

Listen carefully to them. Check if they are already in touch with their GP/ other medical professionals and if they have been in contact with the University's Counselling, Well Being and/ or Disability Services.

Remain calm and approach student in a sympathetic and non-threatening manner.

If not, try to persuade student to self-refer or obtain consent to do so on their behalf.

If the student is/ becomes severely disorientated or dangerous to themselves or others, **call emergency services on 999 and also call University security on Ext 2222 for backup.**

If the situation is less urgent and it is within office hours, contact Counselling, Health and Wellbeing for advice on Ext 3493. Out of Hours contact University Security on Ext 2222

If student does not provide consent, you can still discuss your concerns confidentially by talking to Counselling, Health and Wellbeing or the University counsellors at 'ten to the hour' Contact number is Ext 3493

If the student is calm enough tell them "I am really concerned and I am giving your details to the Counselling, Health and Wellbeing Service who will then contact you. Advise student to contact their GP or go to the Accident and Emergency Dept. at their local hospital (Usually MRI in Manchester 0161 276 4147 or Leighton Hospital in Crewe 01270255141) If necessary call Counselling, Health and Wellbeing or security for advice, which may include ordering a taxi to take them to hospital.

If you refer someone to hospital, inform the Counselling, Health and Wellbeing Service as the Mental Health Adviser will then liaise with colleagues in the NHS and also inform Residential Service if student lives in University Accommodation.

Remember that students can contact Samaritans free on 116 123. Also, in Manchester they can contact or visit 'The Sanctuary' support line 6.00am – 8.00pm and Safety and Support 8.00pm – 6.00am Call 0300 003 7029