SUPPORTING DISTRESSED STUDENTS

April 2016

Supporting Wellbeing for Academic Success
Many people experience emotional and psychological difficulties at some point in their lives. Usually these can be resolved by talking them through with family and friends. Sometimes professional help is needed. Most students will cope well with the stresses of academic life given reasonable support from their friends, family and academic departments. Sometimes they need more than this. If you feel you need to, or are requested to, give a student extra assistance, it is important to help within the boundaries of what you feel competent to do.

Helping Distressed Students:  
_A guide for staff_

This guide has been produced to:  

- Help you to recognise when a student may be in difficulty  
- Provide advice to help you respond/refer appropriately and effectively  
- Remind you of the sources of support within the University  
- Raise awareness of issues relating to student mental health  

What you can do  

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

What you can’t do  

- Solve all the student’s problems  
- Take responsibility for his or her emotional state or actions

The health and wellbeing 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 you should be aware they occur very rarely and that expert help is available.  

If you are concerned that a student may be a risk to others or to the faculty and learning environment contact the Proctor.

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 a 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.  
- UHSC offers a confidential consultation service to all staff who may wish to discuss their concerns about a student in difficulty.
How do you know there is a problem?

**Trusting your own judgement – check the following**

- **Is the student’s behaviour causing concern**
  - Is the student telling you there is a problem?
  - Is there anything unusual or unpredictable about the student’s behaviour that makes you feel uneasy?

- **How does the student seem?**
  - Tense/Irritable
  - Sad/Miserable/Tearful
  - Behaving erratically
  - Changing mood or behaviour
  - Panicky
  - Withdrawn or very quiet
  - Poor Concentration
  - Smelling of alcohol, cannabis
  - Agitated
  - Very loud/disinhibited
  - Talking incoherently
  - Dulled

- **Is there other information?**
  - Has the student declared a mental health problem?
  - Are housemates or staff telling you something about the student that indicates a problem?
  - Have you spoken with the Proctor regarding your concerns?

- **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).

- **Do you need more information from the student?**
  - How does he or 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
  - Student Support Services
  - Proctor
What you should do if the situation does NOT require immediate action

It is NOT urgent if:
There is no immediate risk to student, or others, although the student may be:
- Depressed, anxious, generally stressed
- Homesick, lonely and isolated
- Having problems with relationships
- Suffering from low-self esteem
- Bereaved
- Having unexplained study or money problems

If the student will accept help

Decide who the best person to help is

If you feel you could help the student you must 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 you feel someone else should help the student:
- Are you clear what the student needs?
  - If so, refer directly
  - If you are unsure then seek further advice from a colleague or speak to UHCS
    Ph: 923 7681
    Ask for the duty counsellor
  - Concerned about impact of behaviour on other students? If so, discuss your concerns further with the Proctor
    Ph: 923 7005
    proctor@auckland.ac.nz

If the student will not accept help

You can make it clear that you will help if the student changes his or her mind
Seek advice from UHCS
Ph: 923 7681
Ask for the duty counsellor
You should alert the relevant person/s about the continuing concerns
Concerned about impact of behaviour on other students? If so, discuss your concerns further with the Proctor
Ph: 923 7005
proctor@auckland.ac.nz

In all situations
- Make sure that you debrief by talking the situation through with an appropriate colleague
- If appropriate make a record of the conversation.
- Follow up and ensure that the student is still managing at nearest opportunity
What you should do if the situation IS urgent

It is urgent if:
You believe the student may be at risk of harm to him or 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 – Call the Police on 111
- Has completely stopped functioning
- Seems very disorientated and out of touch with reality
- Is behaving out of character
- Expresses suicidal thoughts

If the student will accept help

In office hours
Refer the student directly to their GP or contact UHCS, Ph. 923 7681 and ask for the Duty Counsellor.
Inform the receptionist of your role and let them know if it is for urgent advice or appointment.
See website for UHCS
Inform the appropriate person e.g. Inform Area Officer/Residential Manager

Out of Hours
Mental Health Crisis Line
0800 800 717
This is 24/7 and they will call you back once you inform them of your location.

If in immediate danger (you or the student)
Police 111 - Emergency

If the student will not accept help

In office hours
Contact the Student’s GP, or, if unknown, UHCS will offer advice.
Ph: 923 7681 and ask for the Duty Counsellor
Or call the emergency services 111, or Security 85000.
UHCS will offer advice.

Out of hours
Mental Health Crisis Line
0800 800 717
This is 24/7 and they will call you back once you inform them of your location.

If in immediate danger (you or the student)
Police 111 - Emergency

In all situations

- Try to stay calm
- Engage with the student if possible, but put safety first
- Prioritise you own safety and that of others at the scene
- Whenever possible, make sure that you have back-up available
- Make sure that you debrief by talking the situation through with a colleague or UHCS
- If appropriate keep a written record
What sort of support does the student need?

- Are there support issues arising from a mental health problem?
  - Student Disability Service
    - Ph: 09 373 7599 x 82936
  - GP or Health Service
  - UHCS
    - University Health & Counselling Service
      - Ph: 09 923 7681
  - Faculty
    - Student Contact Centre
  - Student Learning Centre
    - Ph: 09 373 7599 x 88850
  - AUSA Student Advocates
    - Ph: 09 923 7299
  - Accommodation Solutions
    - Ph: 09 3737599 x 87691
  - Chaplain
    - See www.auckland.ac.nz
      - Spiritual and religious support
  - International Office
    - Ph: 09 923 1969
  - Proctor
    - Ph: 09 923 7005

- Is the student concerned about his or her use of alcohol or drugs?
  - Does the student:
    - Experience panic attacks or extreme anxiety
    - Work unrealistic hours
    - Avoid starting or finishing work
    - Have perfectionist tendencies

- Is the problem due to loss of motivation or difficulty concentrating? Symptoms could be:
  - Signs of depression
  - Low mood, low energy
  - Difficulty sleeping
  - General loss of interest/concentration
  - Loss of self-confidence
  - Tiredness

- Is there a problem of discrimination or harassment or a complaint?

- Is there a problem related to accommodation?

- Does the student need spiritual support?

- Might the issue be related to the student being from overseas?

- Do they have a dispute with another student?
Supporting Student Wellbeing

See Something  Say Something  Do Something

On completion of this two hour workshop you will:

- Feel confident in identifying students who may require more support
- Know support systems available to students and referral paths
- Have a broader understanding of working with students to ensure that they reach their full academic potential through supporting long term wellbeing.
- Be able to respond appropriately to students in distress.

This training is appropriate for any staff who have student contact - or in a position where they may be required to respond to a student in distress.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PROMOTING STUDENT WELLBEING
PHONE KYLIE RYAN, WELLBEING EDUCATOR
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