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 How does the student seem? Is there other information? causing concern Tense/Irritable Has the student declared a Sad/Miserable/Tearful mental health problem? Behaving erratically Is the student telling you Changing mood or behaviour Are housemates or staff there is a problem? **Panicky** telling you something about Is there anything unusual or Withdrawn or very quiet the student that indicates a unpredictable about the **Poor Concentration** problem? student's behaviour that Smelling of alcohol, cannabis Have you spoken with the makes you feel uneasy? Agitated Proctor regarding your Very loud/disinhibited concerns? Talking incoherently Dulled 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 Do you need more information Would it be helpful to consult from the student? from other staff? with someone else? How does he or she feel? Has anyone else noticed a Your colleagues problem? Is there something wrong? **Student Support Services** How is the student functioning Has there been a similar Proctor academically? experience in the past?

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 not accept If the student will accept help help Decide who the best person to help is You can make it clear that you will help if the student changes his or her mind If you feel someone else should If you feel you could help the help the student: Seek advice from UHCS student you must ensure that: Ph: 923 7681 Ask for the duty counsellor Are you clear what the student needs? You should alert the relevant You have the time and/or skill person/s about the If so, refer directly It does not conflict with your continuing concerns role If you are unsure then seek further advice from a colleague You are able to: Concerned about impact of or speak to UHCS Listen to the student's behaviour on other students? concerns Ph: 923 7681 If so, discuss your concerns further with the Proctor Offer practical advice Ask for the duty counsellor Provide reassurance Ph: 923 7005 Concerned about impact of Show your concern by proctor@auckland.ac.nz behaviour on other students? If following up your so, discuss your concerns conversation at another further with the Proctor time Ph: 923 7005 In all situations

Make sure that you debrief by talking the situation

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

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

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In all situations

- Try to stay calm
- Prioritise you own safety and
- Engage with the student if possible, but put safety first
- 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?

Student Disability Are there support issues arising Is the student concerned about his Service or her use of alcohol or drugs? from a mental health problem? Ph: 09 373 7599 x 82936 Does the student: Is there a clear health issue? GP or Health Service Experience panic attacks or extreme anxiety Work unrealistic hours Has the student told you directly Avoid starting or finishing about a specific problem, eg: **UHCS** work Bereavement University Health & Counselling Service Have perfectionist Ph: 09 923 7681 Relationship breakdown tendencies Eating disorder Drugs/Alcohol Is the problem due to loss of Faculty Student Contact Centre motivation or difficulty concentrating? Symptoms could Is the student very worried about be: academic matters? Signs of depression Student Learning Centre Low mood, low energy 09 373 7599 x 88850 Difficulty sleeping Is there a persistent study General loss of problem? interest/concentration Loss of self-confidence **AUSA Student Advocates Tiredness** Ph: 09 923 7299 Does the student have financial problems? Is there a problem of discrimination or harassment or a Accommodation complaint? **Solutions** Ph: 09 3737599 x 87691 Does the student need to talk Is there are problem related to accommodation? things through with someone who will provide a listening ear? Chaplain See www.auckland.ac.nz Does the student need spiritual Spiritual and religious support support? Are you concerned about International Office Might the issue be related to the inappropriate behaviour towards student being from overseas? Ph: 09 923 1969 staff or other students, disruptive behaviour in classes, or a student defaming or threatening a staff Do they have a dispute with member via email or social media? **Proctor** another student? Ph: 09 923 7005

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.

