

## **Students in Emotional or Mental Health Crisis**

**If you are aware of a student who is very disturbed or distressed, or indicating suicidal or self-harming feelings, action should be taken.**

**Exactly what action will depend upon the following features:**

- The seriousness and nature of the behaviour/distress
- Whether they acknowledge they have a problem and agree to seek help
- Whether there are any other staff around
- Whether you feel safe dealing with the student
- Whether the student is coherent and rational
- Whether you know the student

The problem is urgent if:

- The student is actively talking about suicide
- The student is clearly very disturbed
- You think that the student is at risk of harming themselves or others.

### **Procedures if urgent (during office hours)**

If they are willing to seek help – any combination of the following:

- Encourage the student to contact their GP\* or the counselling service. Ask if they wish to do this themselves or would like assistance. Ensure they have the information they require. Where appropriate, offer to accompany them. (\*Drs at the SHS will see students in an emergency if they are registered with the practice or have no GP in Bristol. The office hours are 8.45am-5pm. If registered with another GP in Bristol, they should refer to that surgery.)
- If the situation is serious and they require immediate attention, call an ambulance. It is important to stay with them until they are seen by a doctor.

If they are not willing to seek help –

- Seek guidance from the duty doctor at the Students Health Service and/or your senior manager.
- If they are very disturbed, summon an ambulance and/or the police.

### **Procedures if urgent (out of office hours)**

If they are willing to seek help –

- If they require immediate attention, offer to call the Out of Hours service for their registered GP, or an ambulance.

If they are not willing to seek help –

- Call an ambulance (and the police if violent)

**If there is any suspicion that the student has taken an overdose, call an ambulance immediately.**

## **Procedures if less urgent**

- Talk to them and listen calmly to whatever they have to say. Prompt and clear indications to the student that they are a cause of concern are usually helpful.
- Suggest that they contact the Counselling Service, the Student Health Service or their GP (if not registered with the Student Health Service).
- You can speak to the Student Counselling Service or the Student Health Service for advice.
- Contact the Secretary's Office for advice on issues such as Data Protection or Disability legislation
- Arrange to see the student again soon.
- Keep notes and inform your line manager of your concern.
- Where useful and necessary, inform other members of staff so that they may respond appropriately.

## **Strategies to bear in mind**

- Speak softly and remain calm.
- Be non-threatening – do not, for instance, approach from behind without warning, or stare.
- If other students are present, it is generally right to ask them to leave (though knowing who are the student's closest friends may prove useful).
- Give the student 'room to breathe' and do not touch them unless you are absolutely sure that doing so might not be interpreted as threatening in some way.
- Explain your actions and reassure the student, without being patronising, about what is happening.
- Take threats of suicide seriously – it is a myth that 'those who talk about it don't do it'.

If the student remains distressed, call the Student Health Service on 0117 330 2721; this number also activates the out-of-hours service.

If calm is regained and the student shows some perception of the nature of their problem, encourage them to seek help of their own volition or, if they prefer it, telephone the relevant service on their behalf – but do so only with their permission and within the bounds of confidentiality.

Remember that a student's distress may not have a single cause; finance, accommodation, disability or being an international student, for instance, might be involved. Contact details for specialist services can be found in the Student Services booklet (also available on-line).

## **Follow up in all cases**

- Inform your Head of Department if a student experiences a mental health episode.
- Your department may have its own follow up procedure that needs to be activated.
- This may involve talking to the student and discussing options, for example, if the student would like to take leave of absence, arranging accommodation for visiting parents, or any other advice and support that the student may need.

Students may have difficulty returning to study after a serious mental health episode. They may feel embarrassed by what they said and did when they were ill, and be scared of reoccurrence of their illness.

Much of the above will apply to a student who has not had a mental health episode, but has been assaulted.

The University Student Counselling Service and the Student Health Service can provide support and therapy, and you should ensure that the student knows these services are available and how to access them.

## Summary

**Your calm can be catching. Your safety and that of others, including the troubled student, is paramount. Calling an ambulance or the police is not necessarily an over-reaction.**

- Adopt a non-threatening approach.
- If necessary, ensure that there is a third person present, or that someone is aware that you are supporting a student in crisis.
- If you do not feel confident to approach the student, make sure someone more senior knows what is happening.
- If there are more people nearby, calmly ask them to leave the area.
- Give the student space to breathe, and do not make physical contact.
- Explain to the student what actions you are taking, keep them informed and reassure them, without being patronising.
- Take any threats of suicide seriously.
- **If there is any suspicion that the student has taken an overdose, call an ambulance immediately.**
- If you fear that you or others are in danger call Security or the police.
- If there is no immediate danger, encourage the student to seek help from the Student Health Service or the Student Counselling Service.
- Keep a written record of what has happened, decisions taken and outcomes.

## Contacts

Student Health Service	0117 330 2721
NHS Direct	0845 4647
BRI, A&E	0117 923 0000
Student Counselling Service	(0117 95) 46655
Access Unit for Deaf & Disabled Students	(0117 95) 45727
University Secretary's Office	(0117 92) 87788
University Security Services	(0117 928) 7848 or (0117 331) 12233
Ambulance/Police	999

Others: personal tutors, hall wardens, departmental first aiders.  
*Of all those listed, only the Student Health Service or an A&E Department can access a psychiatrist.*