



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

Student  
Services  
Department.



Helping  
Students  
With  
Mental Health  
Difficulties.



# Helping students with Mental Health Difficulties

This document has been produced to assist staff in their dealings with students with mental health difficulties.<sup>1</sup> It aims to:

- Promote awareness about behaviours and characteristics that may indicate that a student is suffering serious mental distress
- Provide guidance to staff about how to respond to such situations
- Give information about where the member of staff and/or the student may turn for help

## Definitions of Mental Health

Mental health issues can be seen as being on a continuum between 'relatively mild anxieties and frustration associated with everyday life, and severe problems affecting mood and the ability to think and communicate rationally'.<sup>2</sup> A person's mental health can fluctuate between these and is therefore, not static. Managing stress plays an important part in mental health; the recent RAPSS report<sup>3</sup> notes that there are particular times within the student experience that are linked to an increased risk of deterioration, for example, periods of assessment and exams, and during periods of transition.

If a student is experiencing mental health difficulties there will often be warning signs. Some are more obvious than others:

- Loud, aggressive or agitated behaviour
- Erratic or unpredictable behaviour
- Lack of self care; poor personal hygiene, unkempt appearance or significant weight changes
- Under-performance in academic work; frequent lateness/absence from classes, missing deadlines or poor concentration
- Substance/alcohol abuse. Changes in eating habits
- Very withdrawn or unusually quiet behaviour

## If you are worried about a student

Some students will conceal their difficulties from others. If you are worried about a student the first step would usually be to talk to the student to find out more about their current situation. At this stage you may find that the student is already in contact with appropriate services such as their GP, counsellor or mental health worker.

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to the University of Leeds for allowing us to draw upon their booklet 'Helping Students with Mental Health Difficulties' 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, and similarly to the Universities of Loughborough, Leicester and Nottingham.

<sup>2</sup> IRISS Project (1995) Students and Mental Health Resource Pack. Rethink/ National Union of Students, London.

<sup>3</sup> Responses and Prevention in Student Suicide. Stanley, N., Mallon, S., Bell, J., Hilton, S., Manthorpe, J. University of Central Lancashire 2007.

Showing your concern may help to reassure the student and allay your own worries. You may also wish to speak to others who know the student to see if they also have concerns about their well-being. In the majority of cases pointing the student towards appropriate sources of help may be all that is needed. If you are not reassured by your contact with the student you could contact one of the following for guidance:

- University Health Service x22100
- University Counselling Service x24134
- Student Services Information Desk (SSiD) x21299
- Student Support and Guidance Critical Support Team x24321
- Disability and Dyslexia Support Service x21303
- Multi Faith Chaplaincy x28923

If you wish, this can be done initially without identifying the student.

### **Bear in mind the following:**

- The most helpful approach is a collaborative one that involves the student. Often, departments and student services can work together to develop a support network for the individual
- Whilst some services will need to operate within their codes of confidentiality, a student will sometimes give consent for relevant information to be shared
- Be clear about your own limits both in terms of the amount of confidentiality you can offer the student and of the amount of time you have available. Be aware of getting out of your depth, offering more than is appropriate, and of role confusion
- Do not hesitate to seek advice from other sources

### **When a student will not accept help**

In such situations there is little you can do other than to ensure that the student has the relevant information about sources of help. Note your concerns in the student's file<sup>4</sup> and inform senior staff in the department so that others are aware of the situation.

### **Urgent situations**

On very rare occasions a student's behaviour may indicate that there is a serious threat to their health and safety. For example:

- Suicidal tendencies
- Serious self harm
- Risk of harm to others
- Acute alcohol or substance addiction
- Hallucinations (e.g. hearing voices) or holding fixed irrational beliefs
- A complete lack of functioning academically or in other areas of life
- No sense of reality

In such situations the need to intervene will be more urgent. If the student will accept help, refer them to the University Health Service, either by supporting them to make contact or ringing them yourself and if need be accompanying them to the surgery. If the student will not accept help, phone the University Health Service on x22100, the University Counselling Service on x24134, or the Student Services Critical Support Team on x24321 to seek advice. If there is an immediate danger of harm to self or others call 4444 straight away and alert security staff.

### **Confidentiality**

Although staff are not bound by the same codes of confidentiality as a GP or counsellors, if you wish to share information about a student you should first seek their consent.

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<sup>4</sup> Remember that under the Data Protection Act the student may be allowed to see these notes. See [www.shef.ac.uk/cics/dataprotection/pip.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/cics/dataprotection/pip.html) for further information.

## How can you respond to a student with Mental Health difficulties?

### Is the problem urgent?

#### Do you think that:

- There is a risk of suicide
- The student may be at risk of hurting her/himself or others?
- The student is seriously physically ill?
- Has she/he stopped functioning academically or in other areas of life?

Yes

#### If the student will accept help:

- Contact the University Health Service x22100 or their GP if not registered with UHS and ask to speak to the Duty Doctor
- Contact the University Counselling Service x24134 and ask to speak to the Duty Counsellor
- Alternatively, support the student in referring her/himself to one of the above
- Ask the student for permission to contact the service to confirm that contact has been made
- In rare cases where there is immediate danger to self or others, call the Emergency Services, 4444 and alert Security x24085

#### If the student will not accept help:

- Contact UHS x22100 (Duty Doctor) or UCS x24134 (Duty Counsellor) yourself and seek advice
- In exceptional circumstances, GPs can visit without the patient's agreement

No

### How can you help?

- Do you have the time and/or the skill?
- Do you know who to consult for advice?

Yes

#### Offer targeted and appropriate support.

This might include

- Listening to the student's concerns
- Offering practical advice
- Providing reassurance
- Arranging a network of support for the student through UHS, UCS, DDSS, SSG, and through the relevant academic department

If the student does not want any help make a note of your concerns in the appropriate files

No

#### Refer the student to a support service

- If you are unsure which service the student requires, ask either UCS or DDSS (mental health advisor) for guidance
- Consult the list of services available in this booklet

**UHS** (University Health Service)  
**UCS** (University Counselling Service)  
**DDSS** (Disability and Dyslexia Support Service)  
**SSG** (Student Support and Guidance)

# University of Sheffield Support Services

## University Health Service

53 Gell Street, Sheffield, S3 7QP

Tel No: 0114 22 22100 (24 hours)

Fax No: 0114 22 22123

Email: [health.service@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:health.service@sheffield.ac.uk)

[www.shef.ac.uk/health](http://www.shef.ac.uk/health)

Opening Hours:

### Term-time

Mon to Thurs 8.45am – 6.00pm

Friday 8.45am – 5.00pm

### Vacation

Mon to Fri 8.45am – 5.00pm

When the surgery is closed telephone calls will be directed automatically to the Doctors' Out of Hours Collaborative.

## University Counselling Service

36 Wilkinson Street, Sheffield, S10 2GB

Tel No: 0114 22 24134

Fax No: 0114 22 2 4090

Email: [ucs@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucs@sheffield.ac.uk)

[www.shef.ac.uk/counselling](http://www.shef.ac.uk/counselling)

Opening Hours:

### Term-time

Mon – Wed 9.00am – 4.00pm

Thurs 9.00am – 6.30pm

Friday 9.00am – 4.00pm

### Vacation

Mon – Fri 9.00am – 12.45pm,  
1.45pm – 4.00pm

## Disability and Dyslexia Support Service

The Hillsborough Centre, Alfred Denny Building

Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN

Tel No: 0114 22 21303

Dedicated Text lines: 0114 22 21320/21321,

Fax No: 0114 222 1373

Email: [Disability.Info@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:Disability.Info@sheffield.ac.uk)

[www.shef.ac.uk/disability](http://www.shef.ac.uk/disability)

Opening Hours:

Mon 9.00am – 5.00pm

Tues 9.30am – 5.00pm

Wed 10.30am – 5.00pm

Thurs 9.30am – 5.00pm

Fri 9.00am – 5.00pm

## Chaplaincy

344 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2HW

Tel No: 0114 22 28923

Fax No: 0114 276 3973

Email: [chaplaincy@shef.ac.uk](mailto:chaplaincy@shef.ac.uk)

[www.shef.ac.uk/ssd/chaplains](http://www.shef.ac.uk/ssd/chaplains)

Opening Hours:

Mon to Thurs 9.30am – 5.00pm

Fri 9.30am – 2.00pm

## Student Support and Guidance

University House, Level 6, Western Bank Sheffield, S10 2TG

Tel No: (SSiD) 0114 22 21299

Fax No: (SSiD) 0114 22 21297

Critical Support Team

Tel No: 0114 22 24321

Email: [support@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:support@sheffield.ac.uk)

[www.shef.ac.uk/ssd/ssg](http://www.shef.ac.uk/ssd/ssg)

Opening hours:

Mon to Fri 9.00am – 5.00pm

### Student Advice Centre

Union Level 3

Tel No: 0114 22 28660

Email: [advice@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:advice@sheffield.ac.uk)

Opening Hours:

#### Term-time

Mon to Fri 9.00am – 5.00pm

#### Vacation

Mon To Fri 9.00am – 4.00pm

### Nightline

Listening, Tel No: 0114 22 (28787)

Information, Tel No: 0114 22 (28788)

E-Listening, [nightline@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:nightline@sheffield.ac.uk)

[www.shef.ac.uk/union/advice/nightline-info.php](http://www.shef.ac.uk/union/advice/nightline-info.php)

Opening Hours:

8.00pm - 8.00am (term-time only)

### Security Services

51 Gell Street

Sheffield

S3 7QP

Tel No: 0114 22 24085

Fax No: 0114 22 29235

Security at 'The Edge' 0114 22 28801

Emergency Contact (campus security) 0114 222 4444

Email: [security@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:security@sheffield.ac.uk)

[www.shef.ac.uk/security](http://www.shef.ac.uk/security)

Opening Hours:

24 hour control room and response personnel

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## Support Services outside of the University

### Accident and Emergency

Northern General Hospital

Tel No: 0114 243 4343

### Walk-In Centre

Royal Hallamshire Hospital (B Floor)

Tel No: 0114 271 2340

Opening Times

Mon to Sun 8.00am – 8.00pm

### Samaritans

26 Rockingham Lane

Sheffield

S1 4FW

Tel No: 0114 276 7277

[www.samaritans.co.uk](http://www.samaritans.co.uk)

### NHS Direct

24 hour nurse led telephone advice service

Tel No: 0845 46 47



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