



Helping Distressed Students

a guide for University staff

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 their point of view
- Be sympathetic and not dismissive
- Help the student to feel supported
- Make appropriate referrals

What you can't do

- Solve all the student's problems
- Take responsibility for their emotional state or actions

The health and welfare of all members of the University is everyone's concern.

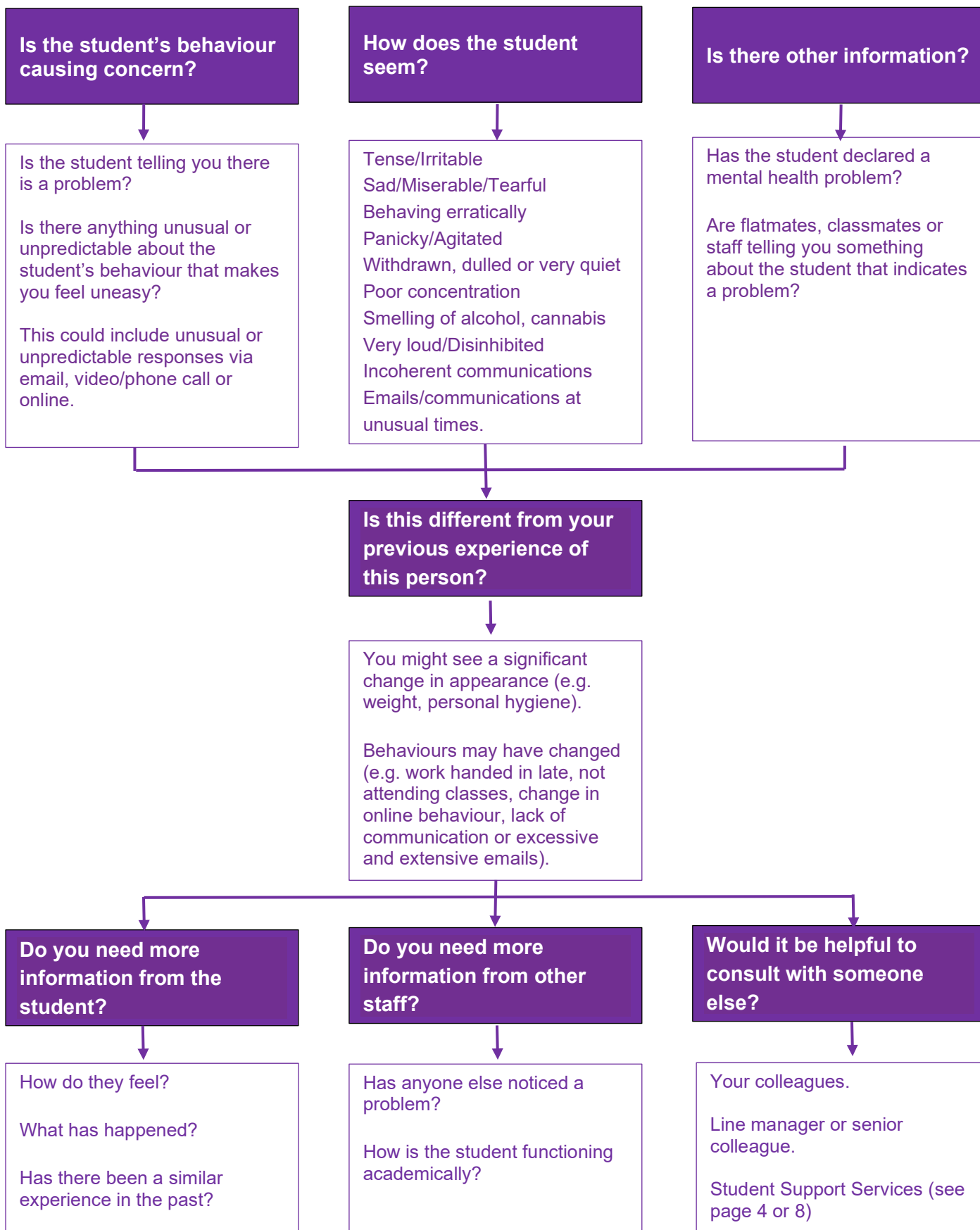
This guide gives you advice on dealing with both crises and everyday situations. It is important to be prepared for emergencies, but you should be aware they occur very rarely and that expert help is available.

Mental Health Training for Staff

UoE staff can book onto training via MyEd which provides guidance and example scenarios related to this Guide. MyEd>News and Events>Training and Event Booking>Disability & Learning Support Service

How do you know there is a problem?

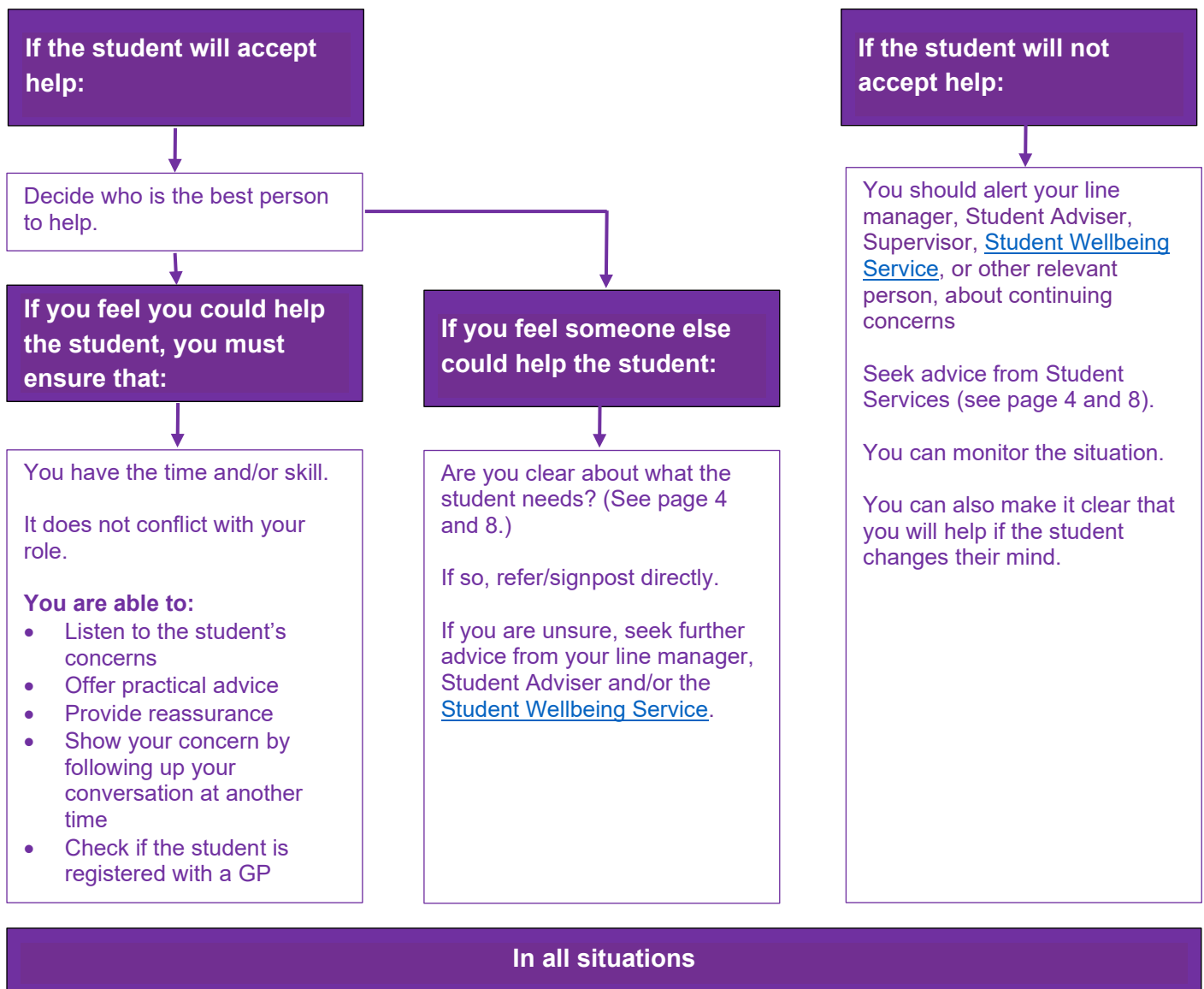
Trusting your own judgement - check the following



What you should do if the situation does NOT require immediate action

It is NOT urgent if there is no immediate risk to the 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



Make sure you debrief by talking the situation through with your line manager or the [Student Counselling Service](#) (see last page).

Outline plan to student.

You should make a record of the conversation and store this in a secure way in line with the University and [GDPR guidelines](#).

What you should do if the situation IS urgent

It IS urgent if you believe the student may be at risk of harm to themselves or others, and 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
- Has completely stopped functioning
- Seems disorientated and out of touch with reality
- Is behaving extremely out of character
- Expresses suicidal thoughts or plan

If the student will accept help:

In office hours

Signpost the student directly to their GP and make contact with the Student Counselling Service.

Inform the appropriate person (e.g. Student Adviser, Supervisor or [Student Wellbeing Service](#)).

Out of hours

Encourage the student to call their GP or NHS 24 (111) or the emergency services and Security.
Ask them to share the name of their GP practice with you.

If the **student is not in the UK** contact University Security on 2222 or 0131 650 2257.

The next day, advise the Student Adviser or [Student Wellbeing Service](#), who will check whether further action is required.

If the student will not accept help:

In office hours

The Student Counselling Service will offer advice.

The Residence Life Team will offer assistance if the student is in University accommodation.

Contact the Student's GP. If GP is unknown or the student is not in the UK call Security on 2222 or 0131 650 2257.

Consider calling Security if the student is violent or threatening violence.

Out of hours

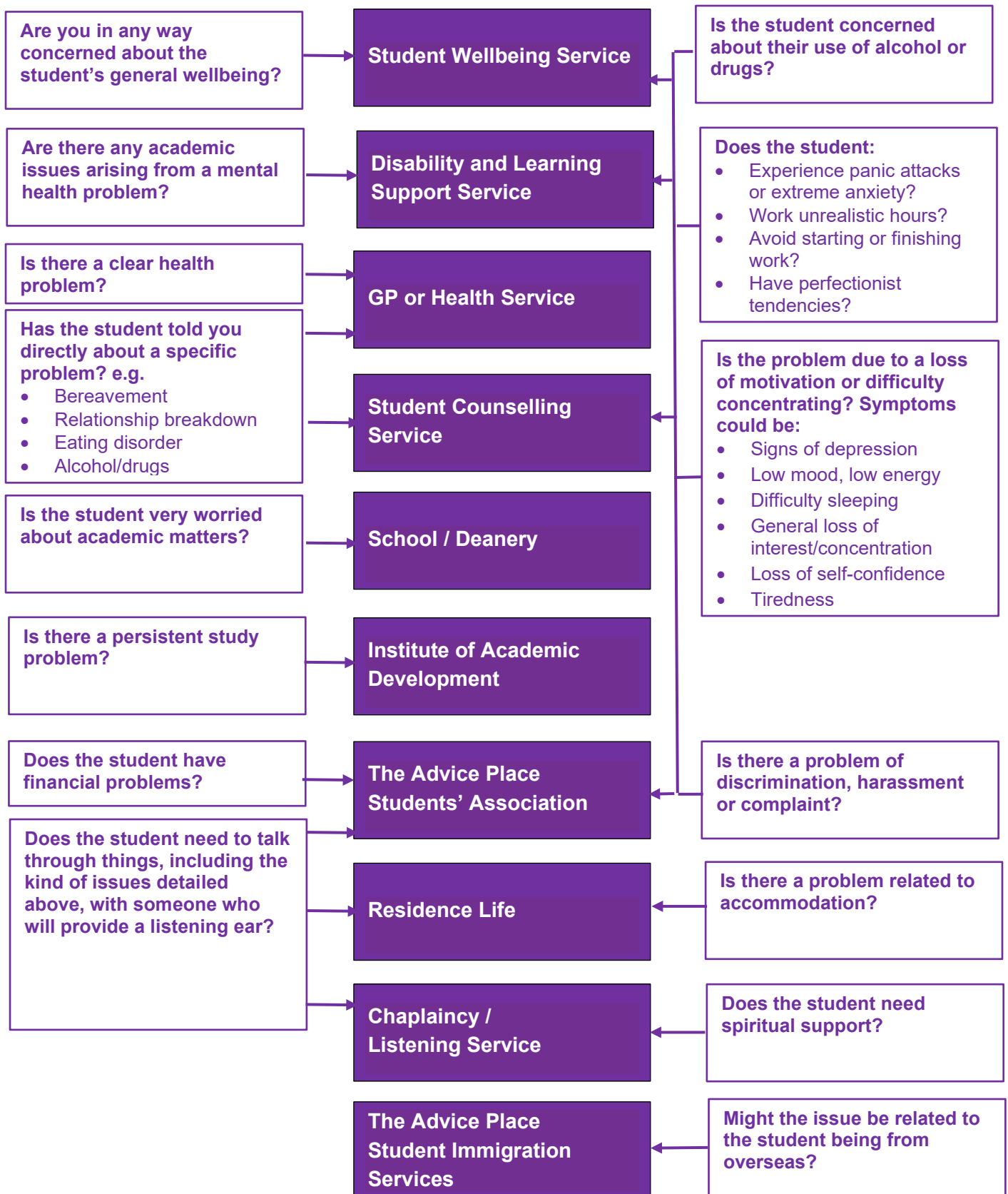
Call the student's GP (if known), contact NHS 24 (111) or call the emergency services (999) or Security on 2222 (internal UoE phones only). If student is resident in University accommodation contact the Community Support Team (651 2001) who can contact the Residence Life Team.

Next day, inform the student's GP if you can and the Student Adviser, Supervisor,

In all situations

- Try to stay calm.
- **If the student is at immediate risk to themselves or others contact the Emergency Services.**
- Engage with the student, if possible, but put safety first.
- Outline plan to student.
- Whenever possible, make sure that you adhere to your local Lone Working Policy.
- Make sure that you debrief by talking the situation through with your line manager or the Student Counselling Service (last page).
- Keep a written record.

What sort of support does the student need?



Remember – friends and family may be a source of support.

Roles and responsibilities

Identifying Sources of Support

- It is not always possible to know what the best source of support might be. The student may have more than one problem, or the initial problem may not be the most central.
- What is important in the first instance, is to signpost the student to somewhere **that is acceptable to them**. Further signposting can be made later, if appropriate.

Offering Support Directly

If you offer support yourself, you must ensure that:

- You have sufficient time within the context of your other commitments to do this.
- Keep to the boundaries of your role.
- You seek advice from colleagues or Student Experience Services if you have persistent concerns.

Other supports available to staff include:

- The [Chaplaincy Listening Service](#)
- The [Staff Counselling Service](#)

Remember, you cannot take sole responsibility for supporting a student.

Confidentiality

- Do not disclose personal information about students to anyone outside the University, including trusted contacts, without the student's explicit consent: [Guidance on Communicating with Student Trusted Contacts](#).
- If the parents/trusted contacts wish to contact a student, you can offer to forward a communication or tell the student they have been in touch. You should not confirm or deny someone is a student when doing so.
- Treat personal information about students in accordance with the University's [Data Protection Policy](#).
- Do not promise absolute confidentiality and advise the student that you may have to consult a colleague. The Student Counselling Service offers a confidential consultation service to all staff who may wish to discuss their concerns about students in difficulty.
- The Advice Place offers remote contact with the police. Remote reporting allows victims or witnesses of a crime or incident to report it to the Advice Place rather than having to go to the police directly. [Edinburgh University Students' Association](#),
- Guidance is available for supporting students who report gender based violence and discrimination:
 - [Report and Support](#)
 - [Supporting students who report gender-based violence](#)
- [Guidelines on the disclosure of information on students](#). If you require further advice or clarification, contact Information Compliance Services on informationcompliance@ed.ac.uk
- [Further guidelines on disclosure and confidentiality](#)

The University of Edinburgh would like to acknowledge the contribution of Myra Woolfson at the University of Nottingham Counselling Service to this document.

Student and Other Support Services

Internal

[Bursary, Scholarship & Financial Aid Enquiries](#)

0131 651 4070

studentfunding@ed.ac.uk

[Chaplaincy](#)

0131 650 2595 (in emergency contact Security)

0131 650 2598 (non-semester)

chaplaincy@ed.ac.uk

[Disability & Learning Support Service](#)

0131 650 6828

disability.service@ed.ac.uk

[Study & Work Away Service](#)

Helpline for emergencies 0131

651 5999

studyabroad@ed.ac.uk

[Fees and Student Support](#)

0131 650 2230

fees@ed.ac.uk

[Institute for Academic Development](#)

0131 651 6662

iad.study@ed.ac.uk

[Residence Life](#)

0131 667 1971

Accom.Reslife@ed.ac.uk

[University Security](#)

0131 650 2257 (non-emergency);

2222 (emergency - internal UoE phones only)

0131 650 6666 (Pollock Halls)

security@ed.ac.uk

[Student Counselling Service](#)

0131 650 4170

Student.Counselling@ed.ac.uk

[Student Wellbeing Service](#)

Student.Wellbeing@ed.ac.uk

External to UoE

[Befrienders Worldwide.](#)

Volunteer action to prevent suicide.

[Edinburgh Crisis Centre](#)

0808 801 0414

Text: 07974 429075

crisis@edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk

[Edinburgh University Students' Association: Advice Place](#)

0131 650 9225 (Central)

0131 650 5822 (Kings Buildings)

advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk or

academic.advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk

[International Suicide Prevention / Crisis Helplines](#)

[Mental Health Assessment Service](#)

MHAS provides NHS care to Edinburgh patients who are acutely mentally unwell and in crisis.

0131 286 8137

[NHS 24: 111](#)

(evenings/weekends/ public holidays)

health.service@ed.ac.uk

Self-Help

[Breathing Space](#)

0800 83 85 87

(Mon - Thu 6pm - 2am)

Fri - Sun 6pm - 6am)

[Nightline](#)

Student support and information

0131 557 4444

(8pm - 8am)

[Samaritans](#)

Freecall: 116 123

Text: 07725 90 90 90

jo@samaritans.org

[SilverCloud](#)

Suite of online CBT programmes.

[Togetherall](#)

Online interactive emotional support.

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To provide feedback on the usefulness of this document, contact: disability.service@ed.ac.uk

Available in alternative formats on request from disability.service@ed.ac.uk