Student Counselling Service

www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student.counselling/home

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Outline

• Responsibility
• What is mental health?
• How to respond in the moment
• Boundaries and confidentiality
Whose responsibility? - Ours

Academic and support staff have a key role in supporting and promoting student mental health.

– Relationships with teaching staff are some of the most important and influential
– Can provide students with opportunity to seek help and support at early stage
– A learning environment that appears unsupportive may result in students choosing not to disclose difficulties of any kind.
The mental health continuum

Has a diagnosis of a serious mental health problem but copes with life well and has positive mental health

Has a diagnosis of a serious mental health problem and poor mental health

Flourishing Mental Well-being

No diagnosable illness or disorder and positive mental health

No diagnosable illness or disorder but poor mental health

Diagnosis of Mental Illness

Poor Mental Well-being
Common assumptions

• That students with a diagnosis of a mental illness have poor mental health.

• If students have a specific mental health diagnosis that it affects them all in the same way.
Who needs support?

- Students with enduring mental health problems that impact studies
- Students with other mental health problems –
- Students with no obvious problems but subject to risk factors
What issues do students seek help with?

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Self and identity issues
- Relationship difficulties
- Study related problems
- Coping with a wide range of life events
Where are we?

Appointments on six sites: Main Library, Holyrood campus (Paterson’s Land and Moray House Lodge), KB, ECA, Vet School
Responding to Distress

• Express your concern
• Listen – avoid problem solving
• Agree – what you can do/what the student can do
• Refer
• Review
• Record
Effective Listening involves:

• Listening without interrupting
• Listening actively – doing all that you can to understand what is being said to you
• Resisting the urge to fix the problems by offering advice
• Putting aside your own feelings and attitudes temporarily so that you can listen without judging
• Expressing genuine concern for the person
Boundaries and Confidentiality

- Access: how and where can a student access you? Appropriate location
- Time: when are you available to students and for how long?
- Learning to say ‘no’
- Confidentiality:
  - don’t promise complete confidentiality
Self-harm

- Often done in secret
  - may be used by the person as a coping mechanism or as a release
- Self-harm should not be thought of as failed suicide
  - the two are very different
  - self-harm is not a desire to die but a desire to feel better though increasing self-harm could indicate greater risk of suicide
Suicidal ideas

• Thoughts of suicide are distressing and frightening and the person needs help even if they don’t have immediate plans to act on the thoughts.
• Suicide can be prevented by asking a direct question about whether or not the person has suicidal feelings and showing a willingness to listen without judgement.
• If a person is at immediate risk they should not be left alone and help should be called as a matter of urgency.
Be aware of your role

• Be realistic about what you can do
• Refer on
• Inform a senior colleague if you have a serious concern about a student or are not sure what to do
Helping Distressed Students Guide

- [http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/supporting-students/student-mental-health/helping-distressed-student](http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/supporting-students/student-mental-health/helping-distressed-student)