



Everyone has mental health; but there are times when an individual's mental wellbeing may become a barrier to full participation in life – including study. While some students may have a diagnosed mental health difficulty including depression, anxiety and panic attacks or conditions such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, many do not have a 'diagnosis'. There is wide spread, negative misunderstanding about mental health difficulties but as awareness grows, people are beginning to realise there should be no stigma attached to mental health difficulties. Stress and anxiety are a factor of many people's lives but become mental health difficulties when they have a significant negative impact on a person's day-to-day life.

Mental health labels can be very negative and it is important to look at the individual learner and their individual needs.

Reasonable adjustments and Support Strategies

Refer to the University's Mental Health and Wellbeing webpages: <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/current-students/student-support/mental-health-and-wellbeing-advice/>

- Attitude is very significant: be patient, positive, maintain strict confidentiality
- Provide encouragement and reassurance - be aware negativity can have a devastating affect on confidence
- Reward all successes
- Change, new places and meeting new people can be very stressful and take significant courage – remember this and be welcoming; support interaction in your teaching area using structured activities and group work
- Explain upcoming changes clearly – with written back-up as memory can be affected
- Flexibility (within regulations) about completing work and meeting deadlines – and understand attendance may be affected at times – work as a department on an inclusive assessment plan. Creating a teaching, learning and assessment setting that minimises stress and 'pinch points' is very supportive.
- Understand that medication may affect concentration and energy levels at different times
 - If concentration wavers, provide notes and summaries
 - Use talk and group work to revisit information covered
- Empowerment – giving back control by making work demands manageable
 - Break down work into stages or chunks – try a checklist to tick off stages
- Sign post to professional support – GP, counsellor – don't become over-involved
- Refer to the University's Boundaries guidance to establish clear boundaries about responding to students (coped below)

When a student finds a supportive member of staff or when a student presents in distress, establishing the reasonable boundaries of what support the member of staff can provide are essential. This ensures the student knows when you may be available and what level of support you can provide.

When you are concerned about a student, it may feel supportive to say, 'Contact me any time.' This includes students who need additional academic support. However this can quickly lead to student over-reliance and places you in a difficult position should a student contact you for urgent support, especially out of usual working hours, or makes continual demands on your time for support.

Guidance to establishing boundaries:

1. Be clear about when you are available to respond to student queries/requests for support

- Add your usual working hours to your email signature and that emails are not monitored outside of these hours.
- Add times you can be available e.g. SAMS bookable appointments on a Wednesday afternoon
- You can use your 'out of office' when you will not be responding to emails (e.g. 5pm to 8am)
- Do not share your personal mobile number (unless a number used only for work which can be switched off). If you have a work mobile, add a voice message that says when the phone is monitored (usually 9am-5pm); communicate via email.
- It is OK to say to a student I only have 10 minutes now so can we book a follow up session on this day/time...

2. Be mindful of when you make contact with a student

- Avoid initiating contact with a student outside of your agreed usual working hours; if you need to email students put the email onto a delay send time so it is sent within your usual working hours.
- Fridays can be a difficult time for a student to receive 'bad' news (negative assignment feedback, notification of withdrawal or a conduct issue).
- Where possible, send letters/emails which could lead to student distress Mon-Thurs before 3pm and include info about where to go for further advice/support (as a default the Faculty Student Services Office).

3. Ensure students are aware of wider Student Support services and that you are a part of a 'team' response

- Provide access to bookable (i.e. time specific) Faculty tutorials and workshops
- Include links to support services in your email signature and in emails you send (depending on the situation)
- Ensure students understand our University support services are not emergency response services and are available in usual working hours (9-5pm Monday to Friday)
- You must not take on the role of mental health specialist or mentor – you can listen, provide information, discuss solutions but also signpost as needed
- Do not guarantee full confidentiality. If you have concerns you may need to share these – and advise the student of this but let them know *who* you will contact; line manager etc.

4. Ensure the student is given options/next steps

- A student who has options is more in control (rather than relying on you); the student knows who to call and what actions to take if feeling distressed.
- If you have immediate concerns about risk, ask the student to stay with you and ring 999

All staff at the University have an important role to play in providing a supportive environment in which students can achieve and progress. Depending on individual roles, students may approach staff requesting

advice, guidance and support. There are students who will also present in distress or with concerns about their wellbeing.

When a student presents in distress or with a concern about their wellbeing, an initial compassionate conversation between the member of staff and the student is the first step towards identifying solutions (e.g. academic) or signposting/referring the student to the right support. This 'conversation' may also be initiated or conducted by email or text. The University's '3 Minutes to Save a Life' training is open to all staff to explore how to conduct this conversation with compassion and confidence.

If a student shares their concerns or distress with you, they are asking for your support. All staff should show compassion and provide guidance. However for the benefit of the student and for you as a member of staff, establishing clear boundaries and connecting students to the right guidance and support will clarify to the student your role. It is important to signpost students to the right support for them.