

## HELPING A STUDENT

The most effective way to help a student is to keep in regular contact with them and refer them to Student Support Services. Not all students will want this, so in these cases, we will support the staff member in helping the student. However, it is important to keep Student Support Services informed of any concerns as this is the only way we can monitor situations and make an assessment about the risk of deterioration in their mental state. We often have a lot of information about students which can help make sense of behaviours.

We may convene a case conference, involving key staff and the University Health Service, to discuss cases where there are serious concerns so that we can agree how to support a student. A student is always consulted before arranging a case conference and is usually involved in the discussion.

**Remember that you are not solely responsible for a student's mental health: contact any person listed on the reverse for advice.**

## HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY CONTACTS

### Student Support and Accommodation

Director: Christine Johnston

☎ 0131 451 4505

@ C.Johnston@hw.ac.uk

Senior Counsellor: Carol Murray

☎ 0131 451 3387

@ C.J.Murrya@hw.ac.uk

### Scottish Borders Campus:

Student Advisor: Eleanor Drummond

☎ 01896 892178

@ E.Drummond@hw.ac.uk

### University Health Service

Lead Physician: Dr. Victor De Lima

☎ 0131 451 3010

@ V.R.F.De\_Lima@hw.ac.uk

Practice Manager: Carol Pearson

☎ 0131 451 3010

@ C.Pearson@hw.ac.uk

### Campus Security and Out of Hours Contact Numbers

☎ Ext 2222

### Other Help Lines

24/7 Edinburgh Crisis Centre and Services:

24 hour helpline for Edinburgh residents

☎ 0808 801 0415

Breathing Space: Helpline open 6pm - 2am

☎ 0800 83 85 87

The Samaritans:

☎ Edinburgh: 0131 221 9999

☎ Borders: 01750 20000

Mental Health Assessment Service:

(Edinburgh only) open 24 hours

☎ Edinburgh: 0131 537 6463

## STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

## A Guide for Staff

Check out our website at



[www.hw.ac.uk/support](http://www.hw.ac.uk/support)

## INTRODUCTION

We are seeing an increase in both the amount and severity of mental health problems that students present with. The aim of this guide is to provide staff with some general information on how to support students with mental health difficulties. You are not expected to be an expert. For more information or guidance read the Mental Health Policy or contact Student Support Services.

## CAUSES OF MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

Anyone can have a mental health problem. Mental health difficulties can be triggered by many factors. Stress, life events, past experiences and genetics all play a part in determining our mental health. Student life exposes individuals to risk factors affecting mental health including debt, periods of transition, cannabis use, alcohol use, culture shock and disconnection from previous supports. People with past problems are likely to struggle more.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

There are a number of signs to look out for, and whilst they don't necessarily mean that a student is experiencing mental ill-health, they may be early signals.

**Low attendance at classes**

**Failure to submit work**

**Lower grades than expected**

**Withdrawing from the social group**

**Less interactive at tutorials than previously**

**Changes in behaviour**

**Tearfulness**

**Physical signs such as cuts to wrists or low energy**

**Bizarre behaviour or thoughts in conversation or in emails**

**Low or very high mood**

**Signs of excessive alcohol or drug use**

**Excessive anxiety e.g. not responding to reassurance**

The time of the year can also be significant. Periods of transition at the beginning and end of a year can be stressful.

## SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Risk factors for suicide are complex. They include predisposing factors such as a history of depression or hopelessness; vulnerability factors such as poor problem-solving skills or impulsivity; and trigger factors, such as stress or loss. The reasons why people become suicidal are a complex mix of personal and social factors.

If a student says that they are feeling suicidal you should take this seriously. Explain to them that you are concerned for their safety, encourage them to get help and support them to do so. Tell them that they will need to see someone in Student Support Services and/or the University Health Service. Don't promise confidentiality as this cannot be guaranteed if there is a serious risk of harm to the student. You may feel out of your depth in trying to help the student but there are people in the University who can help, so it is important that you put the student in touch with someone who is qualified and able to help them. See the contact details on the reverse.

## IN AN EMERGENCY

Any staff member or student who is seriously concerned about the mental health of a student should contact Student Support to raise their concern. The University Health Service can also be consulted and a decision will be made between Student Support Services and the University Health Service about future action. If it is out of hours, contact Security Control.