



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 his or her point of view
- Be sympathetic and not dismissive
- Help the student to feel contained
- Make appropriate referrals

What you can't do

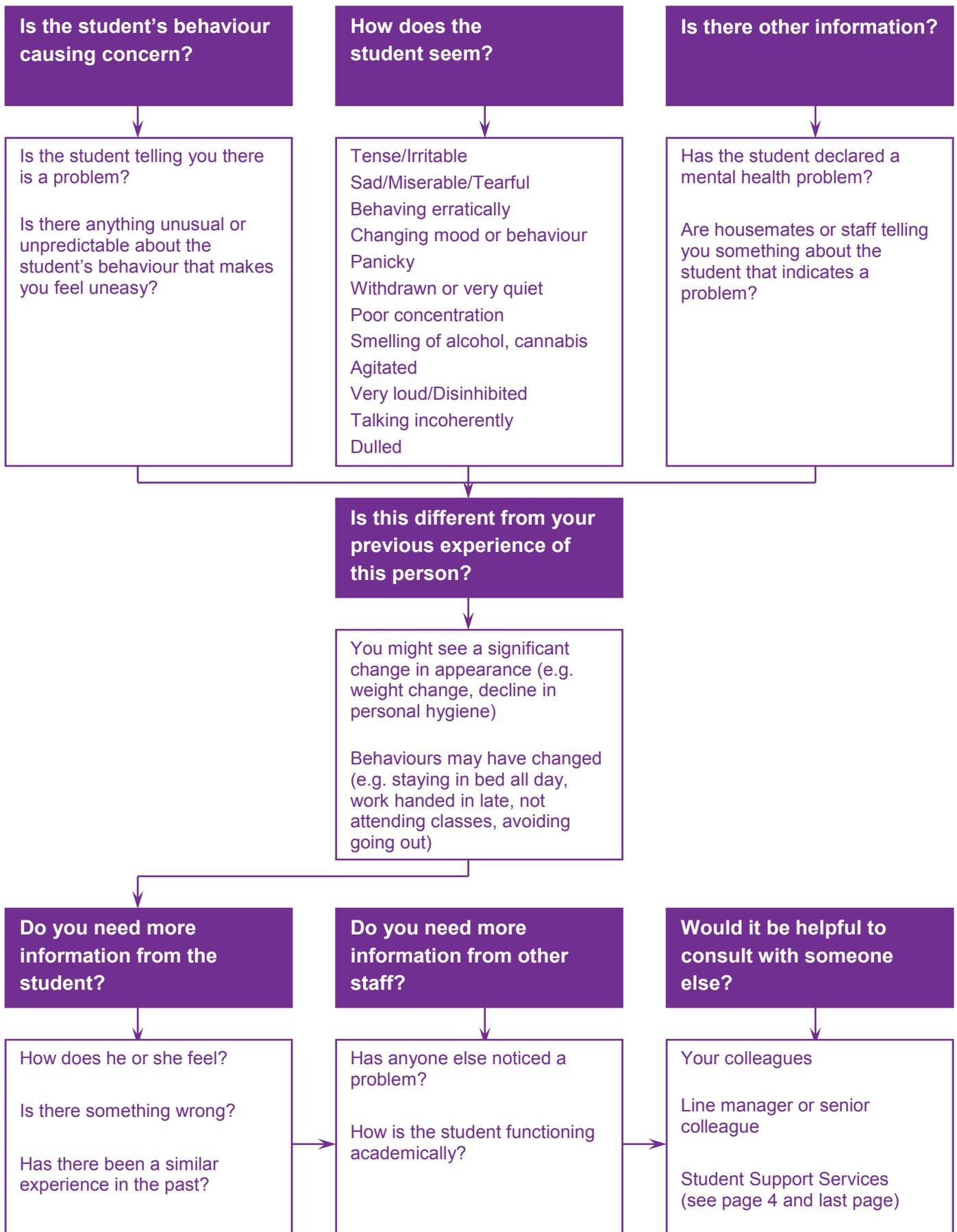
- Solve all the student's problems
- Take responsibility for his or her emotional state or actions

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 more 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.

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

If the student will accept help

Decide who is the best person to help

If you feel you could help the student you must ensure that:

You have the time and/or skill

It does not conflict with your role

You are able to:

- Listen to the student's concerns
- Offer practical advice
- Provide reassurance
- Show your concern by following up your conversation at another time

If you feel someone else should help the student:

Are you clear what the student needs? (see page 4 and last page)

If so, refer directly

If you are unsure then seek further advice from a colleague or speak to the Student Counselling Service (last page)

If the student will not accept help

You can make it clear that you will help if the student changes his or her mind

Seek advice from Student Services (see page 4 and last page)

You can monitor the situation

You should alert the student's Personal Tutor, Student Support Team, or other relevant person, about continuing concerns

In all situations

- Make sure that you debrief by talking the situation through with a colleague or the Student Counselling Service (last page).
- You should make a record of the conversation signed by both you and the student. Failing that, record your concerns and inform the appropriate person.

What you should do if the situation IS urgent

It IS urgent if:

You believe the student may be at risk of harm to him or herself, or others.

You are concerned for one or more of the following reasons. The student:

- May be at risk of serious self-harm
- Has completely stopped functioning
- Is behaving out of character
- Is violent or threatening violence to people or property
- Seems very disorientated and out of touch with reality
- Expresses suicidal thoughts

If the student will accept help

In office hours

Refer the student directly to his or her GP, or the Student Counselling Service (last page). If possible, arrange for the student to be accompanied.

Inform the appropriate person (e.g. Personal Tutor, Senior Tutor or Student Support Team)

Out of hours

Call the student's GP, if closed contact NHS 24 (111). If all else fails, call the emergency services, go to the Mental Health Assessment Service (last page) or contact Security on 2222.

Next day, advise the Personal Tutor, who will check whether further action is required.

If stuck, you can phone non-emergency security for advice (last page)

If the student will not accept help

In office hours

Contact the Student's GP, or, if unknown, the University Health Service (last page) will offer advice, or call the emergency services or Security on 2222.

Student Counselling Service (last page) will offer advice.

If resident in University accommodation, contact the Residence Life Team for assistance (last page).

Out of hours

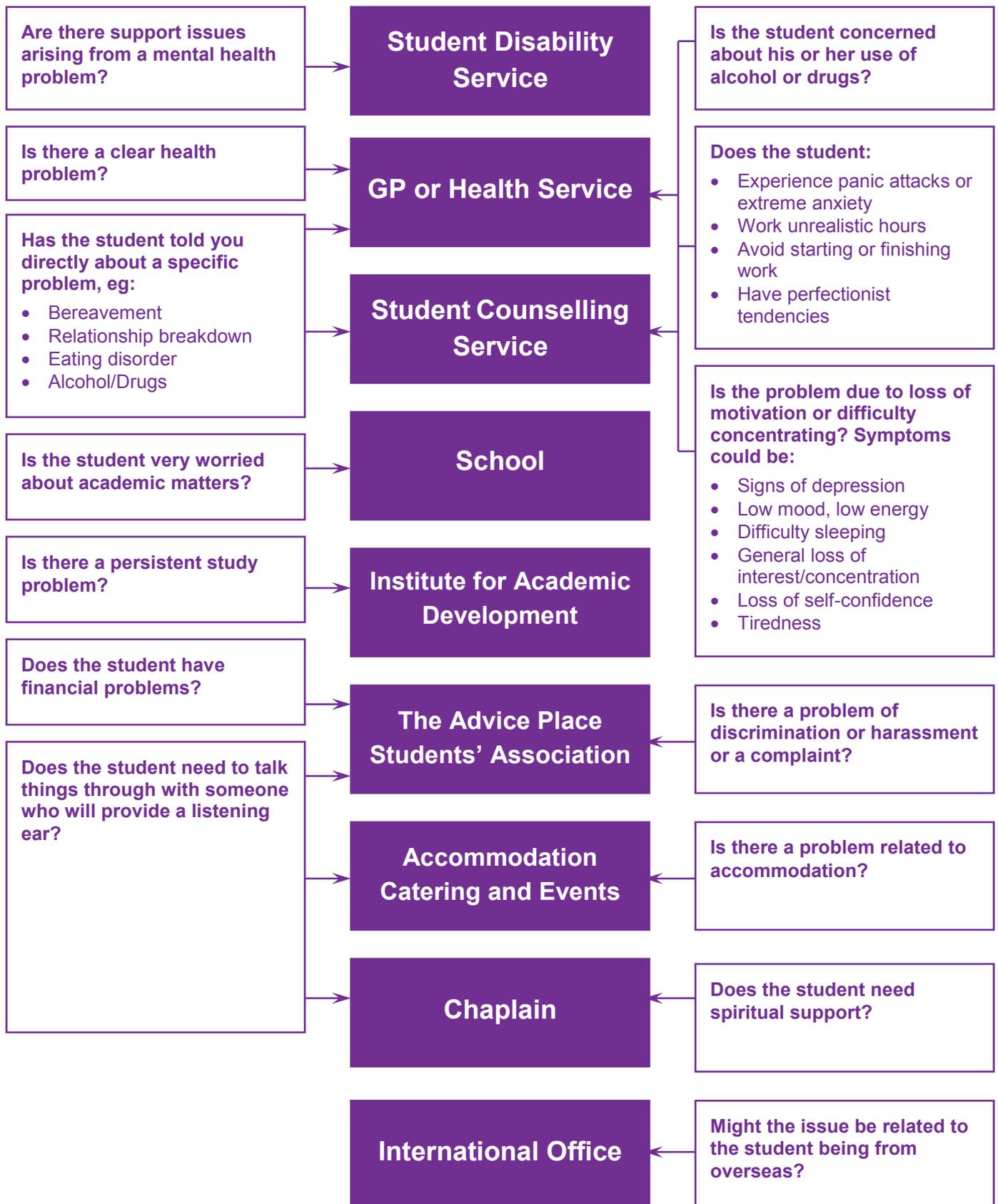
Call the student's GP, if closed contact NHS 24 (111). If all else fails, call the emergency services (999), go to the Mental Health Assessment Service (last page) or call Security on 2222. If student is resident in University accommodation contact the Accommodation Security Team (651 2001) who can contact the Residence Life Team for assistance.

Next day, inform the student's GP if you can (last page) or the Personal Tutor or Student Support Team.

In all situations

- Try to stay calm
- Engage with the student if possible, but put safety first
- Prioritise your own safety and that of others at the scene
- Whenever possible, make sure that you have back-up available
- Make sure that you debrief by talking the situation through with a colleague or the Student Counselling Service (last page)
- Keep a written record

What sort of support does the student need?



Remember – friends and family can 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 refer the student to somewhere **that is acceptable to him or her**. A further referral 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
- It does not conflict with other aspects of your role
- You have access to consultation
- You seek advice from colleagues or student services if you have persistent concerns.

Support for yourself can also come from the Chaplain or the Staff Counsellor (502513).

Remember – you are not solely responsible for a student's emotional state.

Confidentiality

- Do not disclose personal information about students to anyone outside the University, including parents, without the student's explicit consent.
- If the parents wish to contact a student, you can offer to forward a communication or tell the student they have been in touch.
- Treat personal information about students with discretion.
- 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 a 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. www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/adviceplace/safetyandcrime/reportingacrime

Guidelines on disclosure of information on students are available: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/records-management-section/data-protection/guidance-policies/student-information
If you require further advice or clarification please contact Records Management Section (0131 651 4099).

Further guidelines on disclosure and confidentiality are available: www.ed.ac.uk/student-disability-service/staff/supporting-students/student-disclosure

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

Accommodation, Catering and Events: Residence Life Reception Centre, Pollock Halls
18 Holyrood Park Road, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 667 1971
Email: accom.reslife@ed.ac.uk
www.ed.ac.uk/accomodation-services

Advice Place
Potterrow Student Centre,
5/2 Bristo Square, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 650 9225
Email: advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk or
academic.advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk
www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/advice

Kings Buildings Campus,
KB House (ground floor)
West Mains Road, Edinburgh
(limited opening)
Tel: 0131 650 5822
Email: advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk

Big White Wall
Online interactive emotional support.
www.bigwhitewall.com

Breathing Space
Tel: 0800 83 85 87
(Mon – Thu 6pm – 2am
Fri – Mon 6pm – 6am)

Chaplaincy Centre
1 Bristo Square, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 650 2595 (in emergency, contact Security)
Tel: 0131 650 2598 (outside termtime)
Email: chaplaincy@ed.ac.uk
www.chaplaincy.ed.ac.uk

Student Administration
General Enquiries
Tel: 0131 650 2845
Email: infopoint@ed.ac.uk

Fees and Student Support
Tel: 0131 650 2230
Email: fees@ed.ac.uk

Bursary, Scholarship & Financial Aid Enquiries
Tel: 0131 651 4070
Email: studentfunding@ed.ac.uk

Student Counselling Service
Main Office:
Third Floor
Main Library Building
55 George Square, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 650 4170
Email:
student.counselling@ed.ac.uk
www.ed.ac.uk/student-counselling

Student Disability Service
Third Floor
Main Library Building
55 George Square, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 650 6828
Email: disability.service@ed.ac.uk
www.ed.ac.uk/student-disability-service

GPs – University Health Centre
Richard Verney Health Centre,
6 Bristo Square, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 650 2777
(weekdays, 8-6pm);
or NHS 24: 111
(evenings/weekends/
public holidays)
Email: health.service@ed.ac.uk
www.health-service.ed.ac.uk
www.NHS24.com

Edinburgh Crisis Centre
Tel: 0808 801 0414
Text: 07974 429075
Email: crisis@edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk
www.edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk

International Office
33 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 650 4296
Email:
enquiries.international@ed.ac.uk
www.ed.ac.uk/internat/

Institute for Academic Development
1, Morgan Lane, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 651 6662
Email: iad.study@ed.ac.uk
www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development

Mental Health Assessment Service
Royal Edinburgh Hospital
Mackinnon House
Morningside Terrace, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 537 6000

Nightline
Student support and information
Tel: 0131 557 4444
(8pm – 8am)

Samaritans
Freecall: 116 123
Text message: 07725 90 90 90
Email: jo@samaritans.org

Security
13 Infirmary Street, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 650 2257 (non-emergency);
2222 (emergency);
6666 (Pollock Halls)
Email: security@ed.ac.uk

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For further copies and feedback on the usefulness of this document, contact: disability.service@ed.ac.uk

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