



Guidance on When to Contact Student Emergency Contacts

Purpose of Guidance

On some occasions, it is appropriate to contact a student's emergency contact if you have exhausted attempts to contact the student, or in an emergency where there is an urgent risk to the student's immediate health or safety. You must make sure that you have considered whether the situation warrants this, and have sought the appropriate authority to make contact from a designated 'Authoriser', as listed in the guidance below.

Scope

All Students, Staff in student-facing roles such as Student support teams, Personal Tutors, Senior Tutors, Supervisors, heads of Student Services in Schools, Directors of Professional Services, Deans of Students and Heads of College Academic Administration or Affairs.

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Document control

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Approving authority	University Executive				
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Section responsible for guidance maintenance & review	Wellbeing Services, Student Experience				
Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations	Annual registration, University Data Protection Guidance, Support for Study Policy				
UK Quality Code	N/A				
Guidance superseded by this guidance	N/A				
Keywords	emergency contacts, student wellbeing, emergency situations				



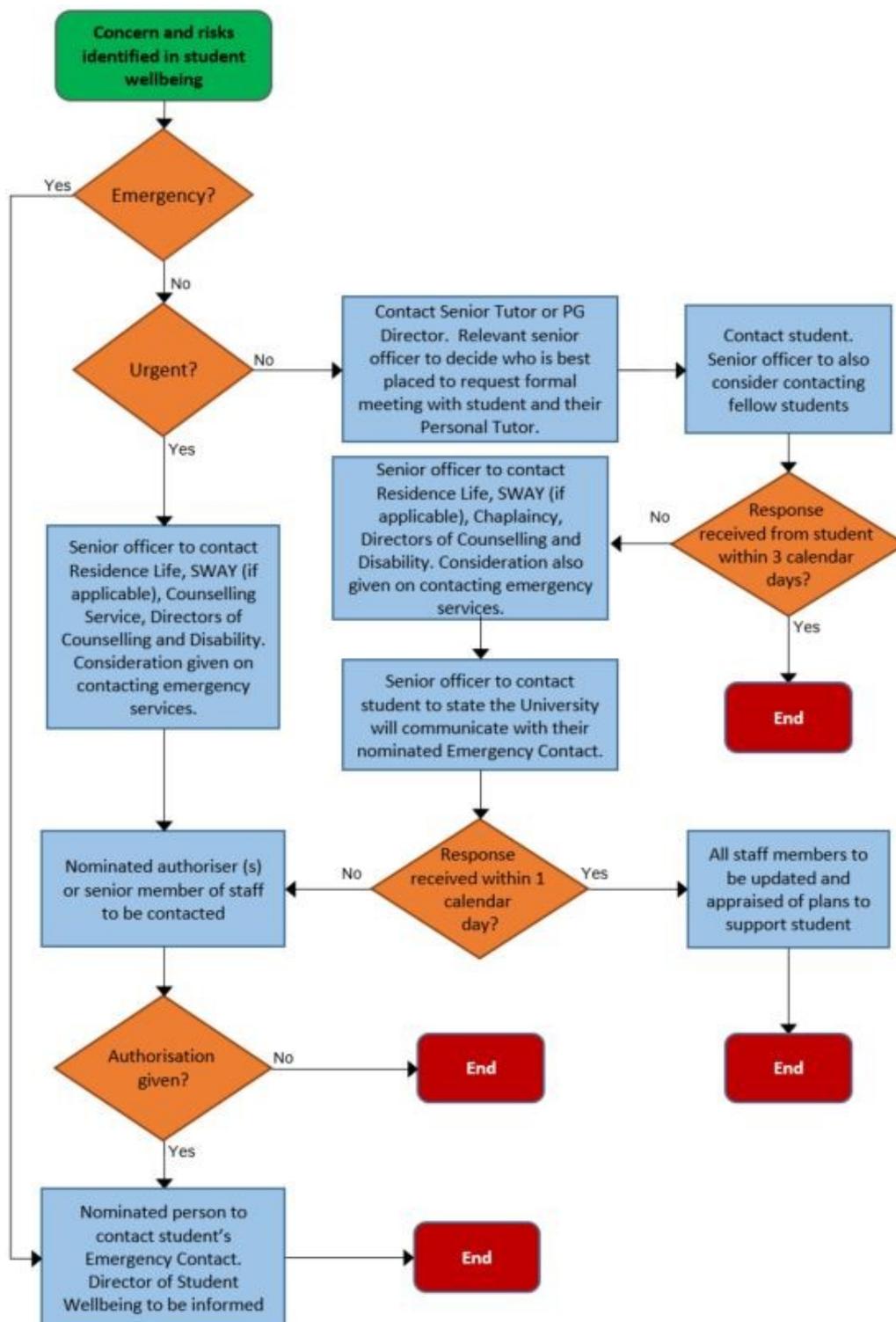
Guidance on When to Contact Student Emergency Contacts

University of Edinburgh Guidance for Staff on When to Contact Student Emergency Contacts (Review v1.3, Oct 2021)

1 Key points about this guidance

- a) This guidance relates to all students studying at the University, including those studying online programmes, and has been approved by the University's Legal Services.
- b) On some occasions, it is appropriate to contact a student's 'Emergency Contact' if you have exhausted attempts to contact the student, or in an emergency where there is an urgent risk to the student's immediate health or safety (see paragraph 4.1 below for examples of emergency situations). You must make sure that you have considered whether the situation warrants this (see paragraph 3.3), and have sought the appropriate authority to make contact from a designated 'Authoriser', as listed in the guidance.
- c) Wherever possible, University staff should consult with the student prior to communicating with their Emergency Contact. The student has provided their Emergency Contact information on the understanding that it is used without prior consent only when there is evidence of an urgent risk to their immediate health or safety.
- d) If you cannot confirm the student's safety or location, in addition to attempting to contact the Emergency Contact, the University should immediately pass on the student's details to Emergency Services via 999 (if the student is in the UK), or other services appropriate to the location of the student (if the student is abroad- see paragraph 5.8).
- e) In non-emergency situations, proactive attempts must be made to engage with the student using all available and reasonable methods of communication, prior to contacting an Emergency Contact (see paragraph 6.4). Setting clear deadlines for the student to respond is essential in this situation. Suggested timescales and template email communications are provided within the guidance to assist with this.
- f) Many of our students will be studying/ working/ living overseas. In terms of how best to respond to situations, it is important to differentiate between (i) those students who are studying with us from overseas or are studying online programmes; and (ii) those students who are on exchange, study/work abroad or overseas fieldwork/research, who may be known to the University's [Study and Work Away Service](#) (see paragraph 6.5).
- g) The flow chart on page 2 sets-out the proposed process, and this is described in more detail within this guidance.
- h) In the unfortunate event of a student death, please refer to the University's [Student Death Protocol](#).
- i) Working through these situations can be emotionally challenging. The University has a range of [health and wellbeing support](#) available for staff.

2 Process Flowchart





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3 Introduction

- 3.1 All students are asked to record annually the details of their next of kin or other Emergency Contacts on the University's student record system, EUCLID, when they enrol.
- 3.2 There are times when the University may need to contact a student's Emergency Contact without the student's consent. Deciding to do this may be relatively straightforward (for example in the case of a medical emergency) or it may be a relatively complex decision, for example where students or staff have raised concerns about a student's wellbeing and the whereabouts of that student are not known.
- 3.3 This guidance has been developed to help staff in such situations, i.e. when they identify concerns and risks relating to a student's wellbeing, and they are considering whether to communicate with the student's nominated "Emergency Contact" to make them aware of the situation and secure their help with locating and/ or supporting the student. These situations can be complex and as such it would be impossible for this guidance to cover comprehensively every situation. If you are in doubt as to whether to make contact with a student's Emergency Contact, please contact the Duty Assistant Director at the [Student Counselling Service](#) (or their nominated deputy) via Student.Counselling@ed.ac.uk, or the Head of Academic Affairs/Director of Academic Administration for your College (or their deputy).
- 3.4 This guidance may be used at any point in the student's time at the University, including when they are at the point of interrupting their studies or withdrawing.
- 3.5 This guidance should be read within the context of the University's GDPR guidance. The Data Protection guidance that covers disclosure of data to family members can be found [here](#).
- 3.6 Wherever possible, University staff should consult with the student prior to communicating with their Emergency Contact. The student has provided this information on the understanding that it is used without prior consent only when there is evidence of an urgent risk to their immediate health or safety.
- 3.7 There may be situations when a third party (including the student's nominated Emergency Contact) makes contact with the University with concerns about a student's health and safety. Within these situations, the nominated 'Authoriser' within the relevant School (see Appendix 1, page 7) should be contacted so that decisions can be made rapidly about (a) the urgency of the situation; (b) information sharing; and (c) what action is required in order to ensure the student is safe.
- 3.8 If a situation where this guidance needs to be used occurs out of normal University office hours (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm), then the University Security Section should be contacted (0131 650 2257) so that they can alert a senior University manager to the situation.

4 Emergency situations

- 4.1 If there is an emergency, for example if any student (including students studying online) is taken to hospital due to serious and immediate concerns regarding their health, University staff can contact the student's Emergency Contact to let them know about the situation. If the Emergency Contact details are either not populated or out of date/ incorrect, then the default contact information should be the student's most recent home address. If the concerns relate to a University of Edinburgh student who is overseas as part of their programme, staff should contact colleagues at the [Study and Work Away Service](#) (SWAY- 0131 650 4296) to find out more



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information about the situation. SWAY can support through contacting the HEI/ overseas placement provider where the student is studying/ working.

- 4.2 The nominated “Authoriser” within the School/ Deanery should immediately be consulted (refer to Appendix 1 for information on who the “Authoriser” can be), and a decision reached on who should contact the student’s Emergency Contact.

5 **Urgent situations**

- 5.1 It may be in a student’s best interests for the University to use the Emergency Contact in urgent situations where there is a significant concern about a student’s health or safety. Examples of such situations include but are not limited to:

- When a student cannot be located/ is believed to be a ‘missing person’ and there are immediate concerns for their safety and wellbeing
- A student is displaying symptoms of serious and immediate physical or mental illness or there are concerns about behaviour which might indicate serious and immediate physical or mental illness
- When a student has been involved in an accident or is a victim of crime

- 5.2 The member of University staff who is leading on responding to the situation should make *immediate* contact with the services listed below to identify whether there is any information to confirm the student’s safety or can facilitate a resolution to the situation. If the student’s School has not been alerted to the concerns regarding the student’s health and safety, then the member of staff leading on responding to the situation should contact the Head of School/ Deanery (or nominated deputy) immediately so that the student’s last point of contact with the School/ Deanery can be identified.

- The [Study and Work Away Service](#) for students who are abroad as part of their programme
- A manager at [Residence Life](#) (if the student lives in University accommodation)
- The [University Chaplaincy](#)
- The Director (or one of the Assistant Directors) of both the [Student Counselling Service](#) and the [Student Disability Service](#)

- 5.3 The member of University staff should speak with these services to confirm whether there are any known risks associated with communicating with the student’s Emergency Contact which may exacerbate the situation.

- 5.4 The nominated “Authoriser” within the School/ Deanery should then quickly be consulted (refer to Appendix 1 for information on who the “Authoriser” can be), and a decision reached on whether contacting the student’s Emergency Contact is appropriate, and if so who should do this.

- 5.5 The purpose of this contact will be to make the student’s Emergency Contact aware of the situation and identify whether anything more can be done to locate and/ or support the student/ make the student safe. The Authoriser must also ensure that both the Director of Student Wellbeing and the Head of Academic Affairs/ Academic Administration (or their deputy) within the College are made aware of the situation.

- 5.6 If a nominated “Authoriser” within the School is not available, then a senior member of staff within the relevant College Office should be contacted. Refer to Appendix 1 for College office Authorising Officers.

- 5.7 If the student’s safety cannot be confirmed, in addition to attempting to contact the Emergency Contact, the nominated Authoriser should pass on the student’s details to Emergency Services



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via 999 (for students in the UK). If the situation occurs out of office hours, then the guidance at paragraph 3.8 above should be followed.

- 5.8 For students living abroad, if the student's safety cannot be confirmed, during office hours the Director of Student Wellbeing (or their nominated deputy) should be contacted so that, working collaboratively with SWAY (where appropriate- see paragraph 4.1 above), other services appropriate to the location of the student can be identified and contacted (this may involve contacting e.g. an embassy/ consulate; an Edinburgh Global Regional Director; emergency services overseas). Again, if the situation takes place out of office hours, then the guidance at paragraph 3.8 above should be followed.
- 5.9 If authorisation to communicate with the Student's Emergency Contact is not given, the reasons for this decision should be recorded on EUCLID or on an alternative local case management system where EUCLID is not available or used, ensuring that records are kept in an appropriately secure manner in line with University retention requirements (refer to 6.14 below).

6 Ongoing concerns for a student's wellbeing

- 6.1 It may also be necessary to contact a student's Emergency Contact even in situations which are not emergencies or urgent as described above. Examples of this would include situations where there are emerging concerns (e.g. about engagement/ attendance/ behaviour/ deterioration in mental health and wellbeing) that have been identified by a member of staff or fellow student, or where the student has not responded to multiple contact attempts from the School and has become disengaged.
- 6.2 In any such case the School/ Deanery's Senior Tutor (ST)/ Postgraduate Director should be contacted. The ST, or appropriate senior officer, will decide on who is best placed to request (via email, letter and phone call) a formal meeting with the student and their PT/ supervisor to discuss the concerns raised.
- 6.3 In most cases this will be the student's PT, supervisor or Student Support Officer, but in some cases it may be a studio tutor, for example, if it is felt this is appropriate. What is also important at this stage is that staff within the School/ Deanery take a co-ordinated approach to ensure that multiple members of staff are not contacting the student simultaneously (with the student responding to only one, leaving the remaining staff members concerned regarding the student's situation).
- 6.4 The nominated staff member should make pro-active attempts to engage with the student. All available and reasonable methods of communication should be used, and staff should be mindful that many students are unlikely to respond just to an email in situations where they are isolating themselves deliberately. Methods of contacting the student should include:
- E-mail (see Template Communication at Appendix 2)
 - Telephone (NB: staff should not use personal mobile phones)
 - Writing a hard-copy letter (NB- this may not be appropriate for students living overseas)
- 6.5 If the student is studying or working abroad as part of their programme at the University, then the [Study and Work Away Service](#) (0131 650 4296) should be contacted. This is so that they can assist by identifying a point of contact at the student's host Higher Education Institution/ placement provider or organisation whom the nominated member of staff should then contact immediately and ask to identify where and how the student is.



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- 6.6 The nominated staff member should also consider whether it is appropriate to contact fellow students of the student. Whether it is appropriate to contact specific students, and how much information to share regarding the reason behind the contact will vary on a case by case basis (see point 6.7 below). If there is good reason to think that a particular fellow student may have relevant information (for example, if they are working on a group project with the student about whose health and safety there are concerns, they are likely to know where the student is - or if indeed they raised the initial concerns), then they should be contacted.
- 6.7 In each case of contact with fellow students, only the minimum information regarding the “at risk” student that is required to obtain the relevant information should be disclosed. A documented reason for contacting specific fellow students should be kept on the EUCLID record (or the local recording system) of the “at risk” student by the relevant staff member (see section 6.14 below). Beyond enquiring about their recent contact with the “at risk” student, no details of the “at risk” student or their circumstances should be disclosed to fellow students.
- 6.8 If the student has not responded to attempts to contact them after **72 hours**, then the staff member should follow the guidance at Section 5.2 above. They should then email the student (see Appendix 2), write to them (hard copy letter- NB this may not be appropriate for students living overseas) and leave a message on their telephone, clearly stating that the University will communicate with their nominated Emergency Contact if the student does not make contact with the staff member within a further **24 hours**. If there is no Emergency Contact information on the student’s EUCLID record, then staff members should use the student’s listed home address contact details for this purpose. All messages conveyed to the student should:
- Include specific information on whom we will contact should the student not respond.
 - Provide the student with an opportunity to nominate a third party whom the University should contact, and give the University their formal, written permission for us to liaise with their third party advocate.
 - Provide a number of different options for whom the student can contact (e.g. University Security) in case there are sensitivities for the student on making contact with other members of University staff for any reason.

Template communications are provided at Appendix 2.

- 6.9 University staff need to be mindful that someone may subsequently contact them on the student’s behalf (this could happen for a number of reasons). Within these situations, the member of staff should refer back to the formal [University Data Protection Guidance](#) noted in paragraph 3.5 above, and should also seek advice from the relevant College Office in terms of how to proceed from that point. This may include requesting from the student confirmation in writing (or from their University e-mail account) that they are happy for the nominated representative to communicate on their behalf.
- 6.10 If the student responds to contact from the School/ Deanery, then all relevant staff members should be updated and appraised of any plans to support the student. There may be a number of outcomes from this process that might trigger a discussion with relevant support services such as Counselling or Disability, and may lead to further consideration under the University’s [Support for Study Policy](#).
- 6.11 If the student does not respond within **24 hours**, then the situation should be escalated and the nominated Authoriser within the School should quickly be consulted (please refer to Appendix 1 for information on who the “Authoriser” can be) and a decision reached on whether communicating with the student’s Emergency Contact is required, based on all available



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information and risk factors (including risk of exacerbating the situation through communicating with the student's Emergency Contact).

- 6.12 If a nominated "Authoriser" within the School is not available, then a senior member of staff within the relevant College Office should be contacted. Refer to Appendix 1 for College office Authorising Officers.
- 6.13 The guidance at section 5.4 above should then be followed and a decision reached on whether contacting the student's Emergency Contact is appropriate, and if so who should do this.
- 6.14 Staff should record each decision and action confidentially using the comments and notes field on EUCLID, following the University's GDPR guidance. Where EUCLID is not available or used, staff should record the relevant information on an alternative local case management system where EUCLID is not available or used (ensuring that records are kept in an appropriately secure manner in line with University retention requirements).



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Appendix 1: Authorisers

Each School/Deanery need to ensure that at least **two** senior members of staff (recommended at least grade UE08, although agreed local arrangements may mean that this is not the case) are identified as Authorisers, one academic and one professional services. Suitable Academic Authorisers can be Head or Deputy Head of School, Director of Teaching, Head of Graduate School, Senior Tutor or Postgraduate Director. All Schools need to inform College who their Authorisers are.

Suitable Professional Services Authorisers can be Director of Professional Services, Teaching Office Managers, Director of Student Services, Director of Student Experience or Senior Student Support Officer but it is recommended that this responsibility should only be delegated to staff at grade UE08 or above. Staff delivering student support and the PGR student office within each School/ Deanery need to keep a list of Authorisers and ensure that people within the School/ Deanery know who they should approach for authorisation.

College Office Authorisers

CAHSS: Dr Lisa Kendall (Director of Academic and Student Administration) or Dr Jeremy Crang (Dean of Students)

CMVM: Ms Philippa Burrell (Head of Academic Administration), Dr Debbie Shaw (Dean of Students) or Dr Paddy Hadoke (for PGR students only)

CSE: Ms Alex Laidlaw (Head of Academic Affairs) or Mr Stephen Warrington (Dean of Student Experience)

Appendix 2: Template Communications

For paragraph 6.4

Dear "student's name",

I hope you are ok. I am writing to you because we are concerned about your wellbeing. This is because (*insert brief summary of reasons for concern*).

Please make contact with me within 3 calendar days, either by email or on (*insert telephone number*) so that we can organise a convenient time for you to come in to meet with (*insert names and roles/ job titles*) so that we can discuss how you are and ensure you have the right support in place.

If we do not hear from you within 3 calendar days, we will need to consider getting in touch with your emergency contacts to ensure that you are safe and well (*insert specific information on who the emergency contacts are*). You can nominate a third party whom the University should contact if that is easier- you will need to give the University your formal, written permission to enable us to liaise with your third party advocate.

(*Only insert if required: "If there are sensitivities for you in making contact with members of University staff for any reason, you can contact the University of Edinburgh Security Section on +44 131 650 2257*).

Yours sincerely,

Name
Job Title



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For paragraph 6.8

Dear “student’s name”,

Having made attempts to reach you by email and telephone, we are now so concerned for your well-being at this stage that I am offering an opportunity to come forward and let us know you are ok **before we contact your emergency contact (insert specific information on who the emergency contact is). We will also need to contact** emergency services in the area where you live (e.g. police and ambulance) to make them aware that we cannot reach you and to ask them to ensure that you are safe. We are deeply concerned about your welfare and safety. I stress that you are not in any trouble but please get in touch to let us know you are ok.

Your Emergency Contacts on EUCLID are as follows:

Names:

Address:

Tel:

00xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

If we get no response from you in the next 24 hours I’m afraid we have no other option but to get in touch with your emergency contact. If after referring to your emergency contacts you still do not contact us we will refer the matter on to the local police to investigate (Only insert if required: “or if you are living abroad we will need to contact the relevant embassy or consulate”).

You can nominate a third party whom the University should contact if that is easier- you will need to give the University your formal, written permission to enable us to liaise with your third party advocate.

This is now an urgent matter and I impress upon you the need for you to make contact with me as soon as possible. I am anxious to hear from you so I can establish that you are safe, and I look forward to your reply. Alternatively, please call on (insert telephone number) and ask to speak with me.

(Only insert if required: “If there are sensitivities for you in making contact with members of University staff for any reason, you can contact the University of Edinburgh Security Section on 0131 650 2257).

With best wishes,

Name

Job Title

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