



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

What you can't do

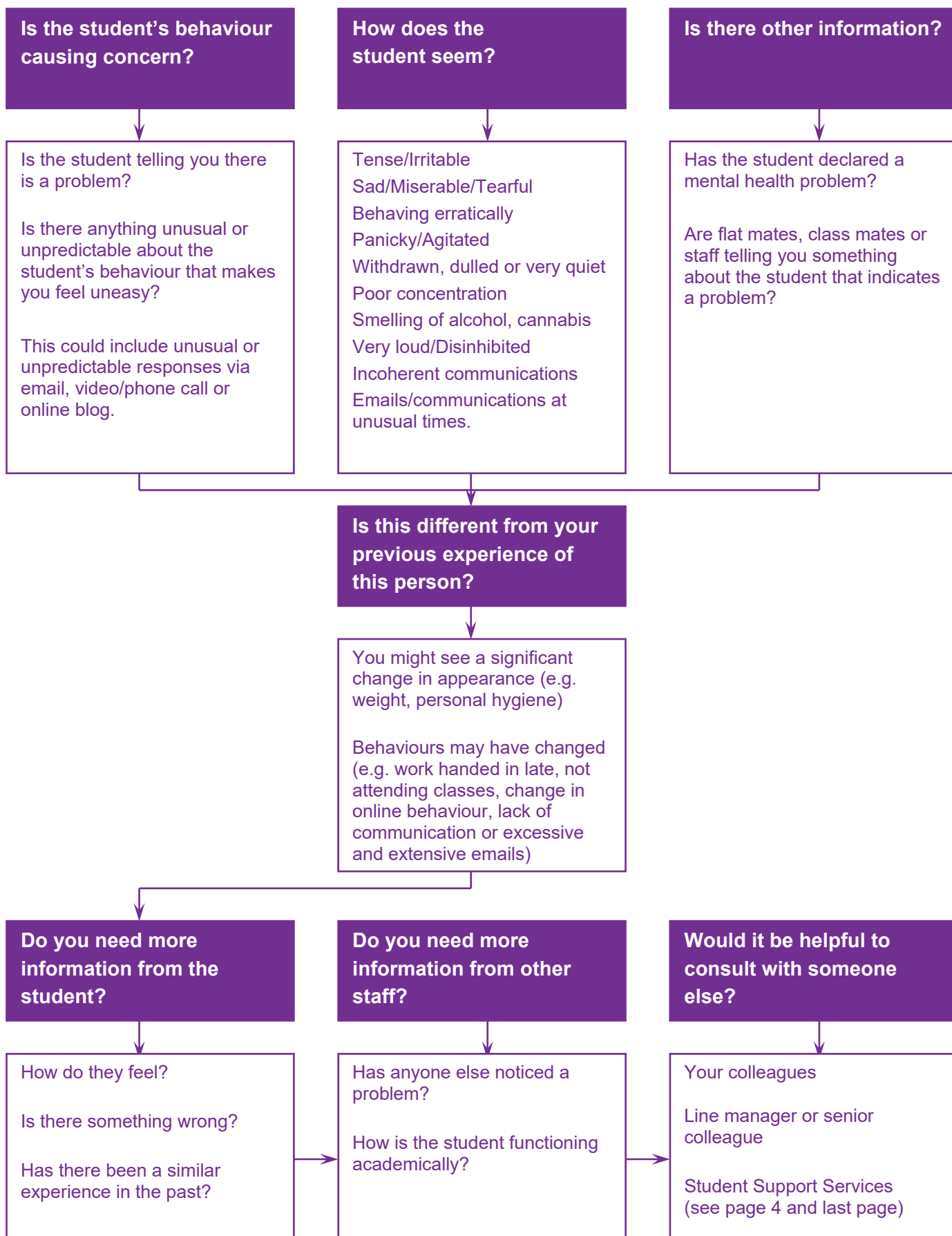
- Solve all the student's problems
- Take responsibility for their emotional state or actions

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

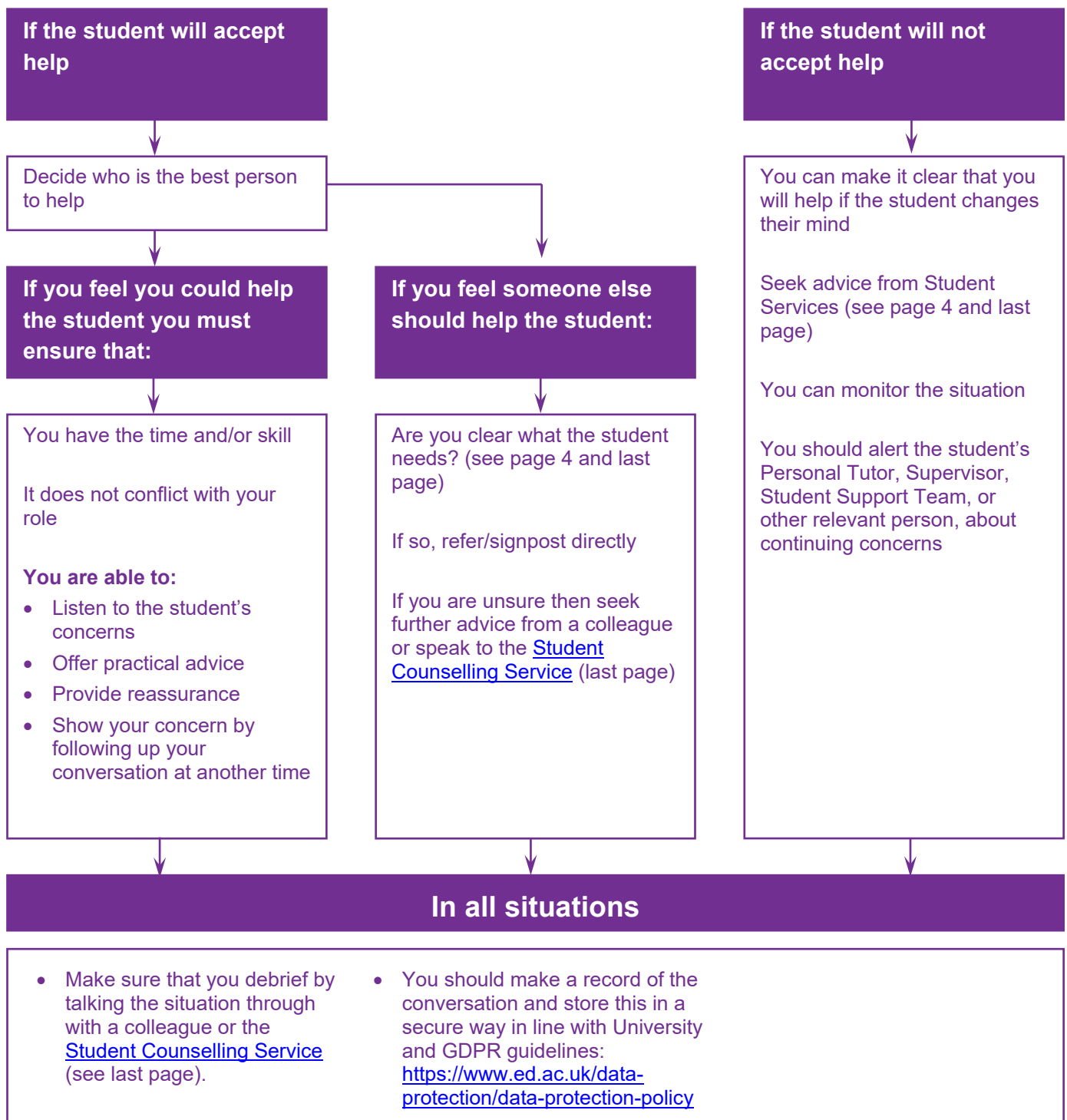


What you should do if the situation does NOT require immediate action

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



What you should do if the situation IS urgent

It IS urgent if you believe the student may be at risk of harm to themselves or others, and 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 extremely out of character
- Is violent or threatening violence
- Seems disorientated and out of touch with reality
- Expresses suicidal thoughts

If the student will accept help

In office hours

Signpost the student directly to their GP and make contact with the Student Counselling Service (last page).

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

Out of hours

If you have GP contact details or can get them from the student, call their GP. If closed, contact NHS 24 (111) or contact the emergency services and Security on 2222 (internal UoE phones only).

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

If the **student is not in the UK** contact University Security on 2222 or 0131 650 2257.

If the student will not accept help

In office hours

Student Counselling Service (last page) will offer advice.

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

Contact the Student's GP. If unknown or student not in UK call Security on 2222 or 0131 650 2257.

Out of hours

Call the student's GP, if closed contact NHS 24 (111) or call the emergency services (999) or Security on 2222 (internal UoE phones only). If student is resident in University accommodation contact the Accommodation Security Team (651 2001) who can contact the Residence Life Team.

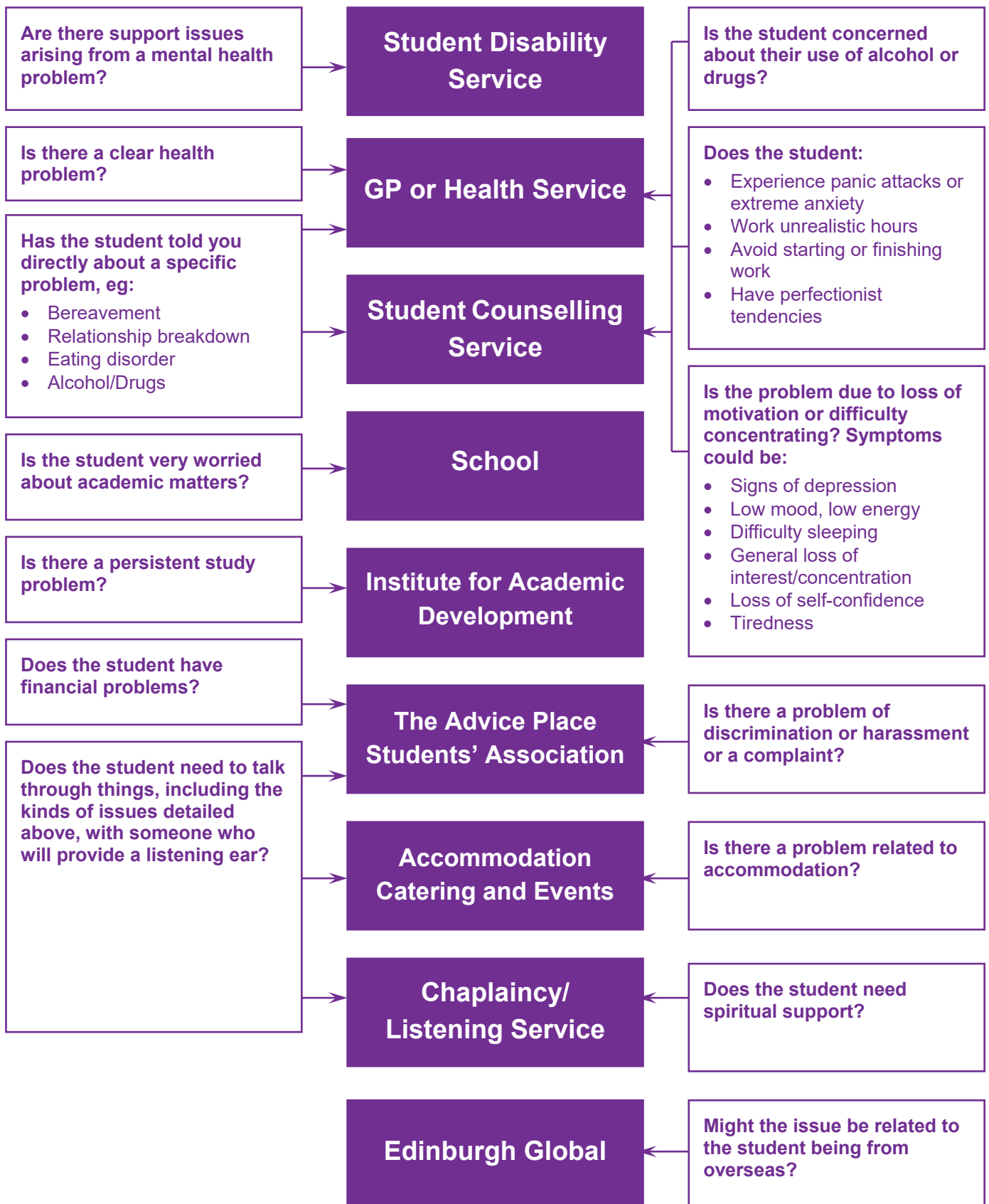
Next day, inform the student's GP if you can and the Personal Tutor or Student Support Team.

If the **student is not in the UK** contact University Security on 2222 or 0131 650 2257.

In all situations

- Try to stay calm
- **If the student is at immediate risk to themselves or others contact the Emergency Services**
- Engage with the student if possible, but put safety first
- 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 signpost the student to somewhere **that is acceptable to them**. Further signposting 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.

Other supports available to staff include:

The Chaplaincy Listening Service: [The Listening Service | The University of Edinburgh](#)

The Staff Counselling Service:
<https://www.ed.ac.uk/counselling-services/staff>

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: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/supporting-students/student-mental-health/guidance-communicating-student-emergency-contacts>
- 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. [Edinburgh University Students' Association](#)

Guidance is available for supporting students who report sexual violence: <https://reportandsupport.ed.ac.uk/> and <https://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/student-support/sexual-violence>

Guidelines on disclosure of information on students are available: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/records-management/guidance>
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](#)

Tel: 0131 667 1971
Email: accom.reslife@ed.ac.uk
www.accom.ed.ac.uk/for-students/residence-life

[Edinburgh University Students' Association: Advice Place](#)

(Central)
Tel: 0131 650 9225
Email: advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk or academic.advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk
www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/advice

[Edinburgh University Students' Association: Advice Place](#)

(Kings Buildings Campus)
Tel: 0131 650 5822
Email: advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk

[Togetherall](#)

Online interactive emotional support.

[SilverCloud](#)

Suite of online CBT programmes.
www.ed.ac.uk/student-counselling/what-is-silvercloud

[Breathing Space](#)

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

[Chaplaincy](#)

Tel: 0131 650 2595 (in emergency contact Security)
Tel: 0131 650 2598 (non-semester)
Email: 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](#)

Tel: 0131 650 4170
Email: student.counselling@ed.ac.uk

[Student Disability Service](#)

Tel: 0131 650 6828
Email: disability.service@ed.ac.uk

[NHS 24: 111](#)

(evenings/weekends/
public holidays)
Email: health.service@ed.ac.uk

International Suicide Prevention/
Crisis Helplines:

[International Suicide & Emergency Hotlines \(opencounseling.com\)](#)

[Befrienders Worldwide.](#)

Volunteer action to prevent suicide.

[Edinburgh Crisis Centre](#)

Tel: 0808 801 0414
Text: 07974 429075
Email: crisis@edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk

[University of Edinburgh: Edinburgh Global](#)

Email: mgmt.sway@mlist.is.ed.ac.uk

[Institute for Academic Development](#)

Tel: 0131 651 6662
Email: iad.study@ed.ac.uk

[Mental Health Assessment Service](#)

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

[University of Edinburgh Security](#)

Tel: 0131 650 2257 (non-emergency);
2222 (emergency – internal UoE phones only);
0131 650 6666 (Pollock Halls)
Email: security@ed.ac.uk

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To provide feedback on the usefulness of this document, contact: disability.service@ed.ac.uk

Available in alternative formats on request from disability.service@ed.ac.uk