

Imperial College London: Mental Health Difficulties Protocol

The aim of this protocol is to help those involved with students in the following ways:

1. How to recognise mental health difficulties
2. Suggest how to handle such difficulties in terms of the student's mental wellbeing and academically
3. Provide information as to the relevant helping agencies.

Definition

Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. - *World Health Organisation (WHO)* http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/

Mental health difficulties cover a spectrum of states of mind and behaviors, from temporary responses to painful events, through to more debilitating and persistent conditions. Severity of difficulties can range from mildly debilitating with an awareness of one area of functioning significantly affected to severely incapacitated with feelings of despair and hopelessness, feeling emotionally overwhelmed, out of control and not functioning.

What might you notice about someone having mental health difficulties?

- **Behaviour change:** are they doing anything differently? Such as withdrawing from social contact, changes in their sleeping habits, not attending lectures, meeting deadlines or doing their usual activities, not eating or increased use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs, chaotic and unpredictable behaviours
- **Physical change:** do they look very different? Such as weight change, consistently looking pale and tired or anxious and worried, not looking as if they are caring for themselves, appearing unkempt or neglected
- **Emotional change:** do you notice a change in their mood? Such as feeling consistently low, tearful, argumentative or irritable, sudden changes in mood, or oversensitivity, periods of elation, feelings of desperation and hopelessness
- **Cognitive change:** is what they are saying or thinking very different? Such as continual negative thinking, inability to concentrate, finding it difficult to follow conversation, disordered thinking, delusions or hallucinations, loss of reality, thoughts of self-harm.

Responding to concerns

It is important to recognise personal and professional limitations when offering support. Do not be reluctant to refer on. Be aware of the available appropriate services. Within this context try to:

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1. Listen carefully and respectfully to what the student is trying to tell you
2. Offer support and treat each student as an individual
3. Re-assure the student that where possible you will keep what they say confidential but that you cannot do so if they or someone else appears to be at risk or their behaviour is disruptive to others: **see 'Dealing with a Crisis'** below
4. Help the student to find the appropriate service if necessary
5. If in any doubt seek advice from the Student Counselling and Mental Health Advice Service or Imperial College Health Centre

Responding to concerns raised by a third party

Peers or flat mates of a student with possible mental health difficulties might approach you. This can raise a series of issues:

1. Listen to their specific concerns
2. Explore whether they will give consent for you to use the information they provide
3. Respect the confidentiality of the student/individual with possible mental health difficulties if they are already known to you
4. Advise how the third party might get support for themselves and more specific/expert advice on how to manage particular difficulties with such an individual, from the Student Counselling and Mental Health Advice Service or the Health Centre.

Dealing with a crisis

- Stay calm
- Ensure your safety and that of others, including the student involved
- Assess whether you need immediate support
- Ensure the appropriate agencies are contacted
- Engage with the student – if possible or appropriate
- Be clear and direct, yet non-confrontational or threatening
- Ensure that you have someone to talk to after the event – you may wish to speak to a professional.

[With acknowledgments to: Bath University, Sussex University, Leeds Trinity University]

If you consider the student to be at risk of imminent self-harm:

1. Consult the **Emergency Contact Guideline** (page 4)
2. If the situation is violent or potentially violent, remain as calm as possible and contact College Security (extension **4444** or **020 7589 1000**) giving your name, the name of the student, your contact telephone number and your exact location.
3. It is important to try and distinguish between those students who are simply having violent thoughts and those who are likely to act; the former may be dealt with using the guidelines above.
4. If there is any uncertainty, contact College Security.
5. It is also appropriate to seek Security's help if an ambulance is required (this is the case for any circumstance requiring the emergency services); Security can then help the ambulance get to the right place.

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The best way to defuse a violent situation is to prevent its development.

- If you feel uncomfortable about an individual, do not meet them alone; meet in a public place and let someone know where you are; take a mobile telephone
- If you do have to meet in a private space, try and position yourself nearer to the door
- Listen carefully, encourage the student to seek professional help, have the contact details of appropriate agencies with you
- If the temperature of the meeting rises, remain calm and talk to the student.
- If the situation continues to escalate, extricate yourself from the situation and/or call for immediate help

If a student refuses help and you do not feel they are imminently at risk respect their decision and offer an open invitation to them to talk to you in the future.

If you remain concerned, discuss the situation with the duty doctor at the Health Centre (24-hour telephone **020 7584 6301**) or Security (extension **4444** or **020 7589 1000**).

If the student's behaviour is persistently disrupting other students, let them know this is unacceptable and may be subject to disciplinary action and that you will need to discuss the matter with their Senior Tutor (UG or PG).

If there is sufficient concern in a Department about a student that invoking Regulation 9 is under consideration (student suspended from College until s/he is fit to continue, or required to withdraw from College), a College Tutor /College Senior Tutor and the Academic Registrar should be consulted.

Advice can also be sought from Mental Health First Aiders who are trained to understand mental wellbeing and to support individuals who may show signs that they are experiencing a mental health problem, and give them information on where they can get help.

<http://www.imperial.ac.uk/student-space/bounce-back/mental-health-difficulties/>

If the student appears seriously mentally ill and is declining help discuss with the duty doctor at the Health Centre (24-hour telephone **020 7584 6301**).

Debriefing

Once the crisis has passed, it is normal to experience strong feelings about the event and ponder other strategies or conclusions.

If you would like to talk about the impact on you of the situation, you are welcome to contact the Student Counselling and Mental Health Advice Service or the Imperial College Health Centre (Appendix 2). The Counsellors in both services are trained and professionally supported, and could help you process your experience of the situation. Alternatively, talk with your own GP or a trusted friend.

There is also an external counselling, information and advice service for staff: Confidential Care – which operates 24 hours a day, every day of the year (Tel. 0800 085 4764).

Emergency Contact Guideline

Who do I contact if a student tells me they are intending to seriously self-harm?

All staff who deal with students could potentially build up a relationship such that a student may confide in a staff member that they are feeling deeply unhappy. Rarely, the student might indicate that they are intending to seriously harm themselves, perhaps that they have suicidal thoughts. This situation is likely to evoke a feeling of fear in the listener, and perhaps a sense of powerlessness and not knowing what to do.

Since individual situations differ, it is impossible to indicate exactly what a listener should do. However, this **guideline** is intended to suggest a possible course of action. It will be important to use discretion as the situation allows.

Take the person seriously: they need to feel heard. If they are really intending to seriously harm themselves, they might indicate this to you.

The following algorithm can be applied:

1. **Assess risk of violence** - if immediately seen to be significant: remain as calm as possible and contact College Security for support (extension **4444** or **020 7589 1000**) giving your name, the student's name, your contact telephone number and exact location; also contact Security if an ambulance is required (the procedure for any circumstance requiring the emergency services); Security can then help the ambulance get to the right place. **You may also decide to contact Security after further assessment, below.**
2. **Listen, assess risk of self-harm** - if it feels possible **ask** them if they have definite plans to harm themselves. If someone is really intending to seriously harm themselves, they often make plans, e.g. overdose, jumping in front of a Tube train.
3. **If insignificant imminent risk** - advise on sources of support (Appendix 1).
4. **If significant /not sure** - express concern, seek consent to discuss (see 5).
5. **If they say 'yes'** - phone Imperial College Health Centre on extension 49375 /49376 (or 020 7584 6301). Tell the receptionist that the situation is urgent and you need to speak with the Duty Doctor now. Explain to the Duty Doctor that you have the person and what the problem is. If the Health Centre is closed follow the instructions on the answerphone and discuss the situation with the emergency service.
6. **If they say 'no'** - give the student contact details for the Health Centre, the Student Counselling and Mental Health Advice Service, the Samaritans and London Nightline. Contact details for these and other facilities are given in Appendix 1. Explain that they could also go to an Accident & Emergency department of a local hospital. Explain that if they change their mind, you would be happy to call the Health Centre for them. **If you would like advice on how to proceed**, contact the Duty Doctor at Imperial College Health Centre (see above) and discuss the matter anonymously (i.e. without giving the name of the student).

Appendix 1

External Support Services

Health

Imperial College NHS Health Centre
Southside, South Kensington Campus
Reception: 020 7594 9375/6
24-hour telephone 020 7584 6301
healthcentre@imperial.ac.uk
<http://www.imperialcollegehealthcentre.co.uk>

Cloisters Road Surgery (for Woodward Buildings)
41-43 Cloister Road, W3 0DF
Reception: 020 8992 4331
<http://www.cloisterroadsurgery.co.uk/>

Kings Corner Surgery, Sunninghill (for Silwood Park)
Weekly surgery at Silwood Park. To arrange an appointment, phone Kings Corner Surgery and ask for 'Surgery at Silwood Park'.
Short code 1365 from Silwood Park Campus or 01344 623181.

London Nightline

Confidential telephone helpline offering listening, support and information to students in London during term time from 18.00–08.00 hours; staffed by trained university students from the London area.

020 7631 0101
listening@nightline.org.uk
via Skype or online at www.nightline.org.uk

Samaritans

Central London Samaritans
46 Marshall Street, W1F 9BF (nearest Tube station is Oxford Circus) Emergency number – 24 hours a day – 020 7734 2800
Visitors welcome from 09.00 to 21.00
National number – 24 hours a day – 08457 90 90 90
To locate the nearest Samaritans branch look in the phone book, or visit www.samaritans.org/talk/face2face.html

Early intervention team

Works with people aged 14-35 experiencing their first episode of psychosis. Once referred, service users can remain with the team for three to five years <http://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/services/mental-health-services/community-recovery/early-Intervention/>

Maytree

A registered charity supporting people in suicidal crisis in a non-medical setting.
020 7263 7070
maytree@maytree.org.uk
<http://www.maytree.org.uk/>

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The Havens

Specialist centres in London for people who have been raped or sexually assaulted.
Telephone: 020 3299 6900 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <https://www.thehavens.org.uk/>

Students Against Depression

A website offering advice, information, guidance and resources to those affected by low mood, depression and suicidal thinking. Alongside clinically validated information and resources it presents the experiences, strategies and advice of students.
<http://studentsagainstdepression.org/>

Sane

A leading UK mental health charity that works to improve quality of life for anyone affected by mental illness. They have a helpline: 0845 767 8000 and also offer text and forum support.
<http://www.sane.org.uk/>

NHS 111

Offers 24hour medical advice and information. Contact NHS 111 Service by telephone on 111

Mind

A charity that offers advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They have a number of information pages about a range of topics. <http://www.mind.org.uk/>

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

A professional body and registered charity that sets standards for therapeutic practice and holds a register of accredited private therapists.
<http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk/>

Support facilities at Imperial College

Student Hub

Level 3, Sherfield Building
South Kensington campus
020 759 49444
student.hub@imperial.ac.uk
www.imperial.ac.uk/studenthub

Student Space website

<http://www.imperial.ac.uk/student-space/>

Student Advice Centre

Level 2
Imperial College Student Union
Beit Quad
South Kensington Campus
020 759 48060
advice@imperial.ac.uk
<https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/advice>

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Chaplaincy Multi-Faith Centre

10 Prince's Gardens
South Kensington Campus
+44 (0) 20 7594 9600
chaplaincy@imperial.ac.uk
www.imperial.ac.uk/chaplaincy

College Tutors

<http://www.imperial.ac.uk/student-space/here-for-you/college-tutors-and-departmental-support/>
college-tutors@imperial.ac.uk

Disability Advisory Service

Level 5, Sherfield Building South Kensington Campus
Reception: 020 7594 9755
disabilities@imperial.ac.uk
www.imperial.ac.uk/disabilityadvisoryservice

Hall Wardens (Undergraduates)

Contact the Warden or call the hall duty mobile phone [18:00-08:00 hours weekdays; 24 hours Saturday/Sunday]
<http://www.imperial.ac.uk/student-space/here-for-you/wardens/>
[links to each hall at bottom of page]

International Student Support

Level 3, Sherfield Building South
Kensington Campus
020 7594 8040
international@imperial.ac.uk www.imperial.ac.uk/international

Student Counselling and Mental Health Advice Service

Level 4, Sherfield Building
South Kensington Campus
020 7594 9637
counselling@imperial.ac.uk
www.imperial.ac.uk/counselling

Student Financial Support Registry, Level 3, Sherfield Building

South Kensington Campus
<http://www.imperial.ac.uk/students/fees-and-funding/student-support-fund/>