University Counsellors offer free and confidential counselling to students who want to talk through and change areas of difficulty, conflict or crisis in their lives - assisting students to achieve their academic goals. Counselling staff can help students with any new, ongoing or intermittent issues that negatively affect them and their studies.

UWS is committed to providing appropriate support and resources to students with a disability. Disability advisers can provide advice on how particular disabilities affect university study and information on resources available at the university for assisting students with a disability. Students with a mental health difficulty are now one of the largest categories of disability requiring assistance.

Students who register as having a disability can receive support in the form of peer note-taking, sign language interpreters, reader assistance, individual examination arrangements, special resources and equipment and alternative forms of assessment.

**SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES**

- Academic integration plans.
- Regular support for students experiencing difficulties.
- Advocacy.
- Targeted group programs, eg, public speaking anxiety, depression, orientation.
- Crisis appointments.

**RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS**

Staying Sane on Campus: Tips and Strategies for Students with Mental Health Issues—a booklet for students with diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health issues.  
www.services.unimelb.edu.au/ellp/publications

Towards Success in Tertiary Study is a series of guides for students with a range of disabilities including Asperger Syndrome, psychiatric conditions and learning disabilities.  
www.services.unimelb.edu.au/ellp/publications/towards.html

**SUPPORT FOR STAFF**

- Information kits, resources, web based information.
- Training programs for staff in mental health awareness and response.
- Consultation to and support for staff who may have concerns about a student’s illness, performance or behaviour.
RECOGNISING STUDENTS IN TROUBLE
How do you know that there is a problem?
How should you respond?

Please see the attached Flow Chart which gives a description of the process for identification of and response to students who may be experiencing a mental health difficulty.

WHEN SHOULD YOU REFER A STUDENT FOR COUNSELLING?

There is no hard and fast rule about this. It will depend very much on how comfortable you feel with your ‘pastoral role’ in relation to students. Whether you feel comfortable or not discussing emotional problems or mental health issues with students, it is important to be able to point them in the right directions when they ask for help. When you are encouraging students to seek the assistance of the Counselling and Disability Services, it might be helpful to bear the following advice in mind:

- Introduce the idea gently;
- Give them a leaflet about the Counselling and Disability Services;
- Give them time to think about it;
- Be clear about the limit of your involvement (eg, availability of time);
- Explain how counselling might help;
- Discuss how much information, if any, the student wants passed on;
- Phone the service while the student is present to make an appointment or encourage them to make contact themselves;
- Reassure them of the confidentiality of the counselling relationship.

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

At times you may find yourself dealing with students who present in a state of emotional crisis. It is important to refer to the Counselling Service as above, but obviously more important that the student is able to get a counselling appointment as soon as possible. To facilitate this, we suggest that you:

- Phone the Counselling Service and advise that you have a student in a state of high emotional distress;
- Accompany the student to the Counselling Service yourself.

While the University Counselling Service operates on an appointment basis, if someone needs to be seen urgently, they can usually be given a ‘crisis’ appointment which means that they can be seen on the same day or the following day.

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

What constitutes an emergency?

Whilst very rare, there will be instances where a student’s behaviour gives cause for grave concern. Such instances will vary from concern about self-harm or suicidal intentions by a student, to incidents of extreme or bizarre behaviour where there is cause to believe that the students themselves or others may be harmed or in immediate danger.

When you assess that a student is at risk of harm to themselves or others and needs assistance:

- Where there are immediate concerns, Security should be called;
- Where the concerns are less immediate and there is time to consider the most appropriate intervention, the Counselling Service can be contacted for consultation or assistance.

“Thank you very much for your help and support over the past few years. It has been a long, hard battle to get there, and the fact that I have finished my studies is in large part due to the support of my lecturers and yourself.”

From a mature age student with dissociative disorder and depression. This 50 year old woman completed her BA on a part-time basis, and then undertook postgraduate study which took her extra time to complete. She was a Credit average student, and at one time needed an extended period of leave from her studies.
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT THERE IS A PROBLEM?

**CONSIDER**

- Is the student’s behaviour causing concern?
  - Is the student:
    - Failing to complete coursework?
    - Doing too much work?
    - Missing lectures?
  - Is there anything odd or unpredictable about the student’s behaviour that makes you feel uneasy?

- How does the student seem?
  - Is the student:
    - Tense/irritable?
    - Sad/miserable?
    - Behaving erratically, illogically or in a bizarre manner?
    - Unkempt?
    - Smelling of alcohol or cannabis?
    - Withdrewn or very quiet?
    - Agitated?
    - Very loud/disinhibited?
    - Talking incoherently?

- Is there other information?
  - For example:
    - Is the student trying to talk to you about his/her problem or concerns?
    - Have other staff voiced concerns?
    - Is there information from friends, classmates or housemates?

**COMPARE**

- Is this different from your previous experience of this student?
  - Is there a significant change in appearance (weight change, declining personal hygiene, etc)?
  - Has his/her behaviour changed (attendance at lectures, work handed in late, etc)?

**WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?**

- Do you need more information from the student?
  - How does she/he feel?
  - Is there something wrong?
  - Has there been a problem in the past?

- Do you need more information from others?
  - Has anyone else noticed a problem?
  - How is the student functioning academically?

- Would it be helpful to seek advice from someone else?
  - Should you talk to your Head of Department/School/Supervisor/etc?
  - Could staff in the Counselling Service assist?

**WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?**

Adapted from University of Leicester Student Psychological Health Project, 1999
Supporting students with mental health difficulties

HOW SHOULD YOU RESPOND?

Is the problem urgent?
Do you think that:
- There is a risk of suicide?
- The student may be at risk of hurting her/himself or others?
- The student is seriously physically ill?
- She/he has stopped functioning academically or in other areas of life (eg, cannot get out of bed in the morning)?
- The student is behaving in a bizarre manner so that you suspect a possible mental illness?

If the student will accept help:
- Refer him/her directly to the Counselling & Disability Service.
- Support the student in referring him/her, but check later with the student that he/she has done this.

If the student will not accept help:
Telephone the Counselling Service.

Could you help the student?
- Do you have the time and/or the skill?

If you are clear about the help that the student requires, then provide the student with the appropriate information.
If you are unsure, then seek further advice from the Counselling & Disability Service.

Other appropriate support
This might include:
- Listening to the student’s concerns.
- Offering practical advice.
- Providing reassurance.
- Showing your concern by following up your conversation at another time.

Beware of getting out of your depth or of role confusion.

Refer the student to someone else
If you are clear about the help that the student requires, then provide the student with the appropriate information.
If you are unsure, then seek further advice from the Counselling & Disability Service.

NO

YES

YES

NO

Adapted from University of Leicester Student Psychological Health Project, 1999