

Helping someone you are concerned about

You may find this leaflet useful if you are worried about the emotional or mental health of someone you know. It offers practical guidelines for students as to what you can do in this situation and how you can get help, both for the person concerned and yourself. There are also some suggestions as to how to get help in a real emergency.

What's causing you to worry?

- has he or she told you there is a problem?
- have there been any dramatic changes in your friend's appearance (for example, weight loss/gain, decline in personal hygiene)?
- are they drinking alcohol or taking drugs to a degree that worries you?
- do you notice changes in, or heightened, mood (e.g. more sad, withdrawn, hyperactive, aggressive)?
- have other people expressed concern about this person?
- have there been changes in behaviour or attitudes, for example towards work, friends or other commitments?

What to do if you are concerned

It can be very difficult or even embarrassing to raise these issues with the person concerned. You may be worried about being dismissed or rejected, or that your friend will get angry with you. However, try not to avoid the situation or pretend that nothing is wrong. If everyone does this, the problem is likely to persist for longer. Remember that people in distress ultimately respond to people being straightforward and honest with them.

Try to talk to them and tell them you're concerned about them – this may open up the way for them to begin talking to you. However, asking too many questions just makes most people feel like clamming up. If they don't want to talk, you have to respect their privacy.

Be prepared to listen, sympathetically and without offering advice. But also try to be aware of what **you** can take, being with someone in a personal or emotional crisis is exhausting and time consuming. Don't jeopardise your own health and wellbeing.

Express concern but remember you're not their therapist or counsellor. You may feel there's very little you can do, but just being able to talk to someone is often very important to someone with a problem. You don't have to come up with a solution.

If you think it's appropriate, encourage them to seek professional help - see below for ideas as to whom you might suggest they contact.

If you are seriously worried and feel you need to tell someone else, try to get your friend's consent. Explain what is making you so concerned and how you think telling someone could help. Be honest about this – it will help to gain your friend's trust.

If your friend refuses help and you're still worried, speak to someone in a specialist support service or someone else you trust. If you don't have your friend's permission to divulge details, you can still get support for yourself without breaking your friend's confidence, –you do not need to mention their name.

However, in exceptional circumstances, where you feel your friend's personal safety, or that of others, is at risk, you may need to act without their consent. Do look after yourself and get appropriate help and support from others.

What to do in a crisis

A situation becomes a crisis when someone's feelings are outside their control, and they behave unpredictably and dangerously. They might be suicidal or harming themselves, or incapable of ensuring their own safety, or you might be worried they will hurt someone else.

Crisis situations are very rare, and it's difficult to give firm guidelines, – it is in the nature of crises to be unpredictable. The course of action you take will depend on the circumstances, – what is happening with the person concerned, how you think the situation is likely to develop, and where you are (what help is available).

In all crisis situations, ensuring your own safety and that of others is paramount

The following suggestions may help, when you encounter a situation where someone is on the verge of harming themselves or others:

- **try to remain calm and adopt a non threatening approach.** Don't approach the student from behind or stare at them – this feels threatening to the person concerned. Give them room to breathe; do not touch them unless you're sure they are not frightened of you
- **be very straightforward, tell them you know they're upset and that you're going to make sure they get help.** Be reassuring. Often people in a crisis are very frightened of what they might do and find it helpful when someone takes charge of the situation
- **it may be that this will result in the person calming down enough to be able to think with you what help would be useful.**
- You can suggest they consult a member of the student support team (counsellor, mental health adviser or welfare advice team) or their GP. Then help them to access these services
- **if the person continues to behave in a way that threatens their own safety or that of others, you need to contact the emergency services.**
- This will normally be the ambulance service, or in extreme cases of violent behaviour, the police. Dial 999
- **if you are on campus get a member of the University staff to help you do this,** for example, depending on circumstances, staff in halls, student support and advice, UniHelp, reception, University security, or any other member of staff. Explain what has happened and get them to call for help.
- **Security or the UniHelp Desk** will put you in touch with the Safeguarding Officer who works closely with the student support services. For more information please visit: unihub.mdx.ac.uk/cause-for-concern
- **otherwise, dial 999 and ask for the ambulance service**

- **in the event of a suspected overdose, or someone unconscious from too much alcohol or drugs, call an ambulance immediately. Don't leave them to sleep it off alone**
- **If you are concerned about the health, wellbeing, safety or vulnerability of a fellow student,** call security on 020 8411 6200 and ask to speak to the Duty Safeguarding Officer (available Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm). Alternatively email: cause-for-concern@mdx.ac.uk

After the crisis has passed, it may help to talk over what had happened with a member of the student support team such as a counsellor.

These situations can be very shocking and upsetting – you may need support for yourself, or just a chance to reflect on what has happened.

Getting help/useful telephone numbers

Security or the UniHelp Desk will put you in touch with the Safeguarding Officer who works closely with the student support services. For more information please visit: unihub.mdx.ac.uk/cause-for-concern

For more information about the Counselling and Mental Health Service, please see the website at: unihub.mdx.ac.uk/cmh

Emergency services

999

Samaritans

116 123

Saneline

0300 304 7000

(for advice on mental health issues)

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