



Identifying and responding to students in difficulty

A guide for staff

The University of Nottingham has made every effort to ensure that the information in this brochure was accurate when published. Please note, however, that the nature of the content means that it is subject to change from time to time, and you should therefore consider the information to be guiding rather than definitive.

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Useful contacts

Information about standards of behaviour, policies, and reporting harassment:

nott.ac/standards-of-behaviour

Consent page:

nott.ac/lets-be-clear-on-consent

Health and welfare page:

nott.ac/healthwelfare

Support and wellbeing team:

nott.ac/support-and-wellbeing

Security:

nottingham.ac.uk/security

Counselling Service:

nottingham.ac.uk/counselling

Mental Health Advisory Service:

nott.ac/mental-health-advisory

Report and Support:

reportandsupport.nottingham.ac.uk

Residential Experience Team:

nottingham.ac.uk/go/resx

University Health Centre:

nott.ac/generalhealth

Concerned about suicide:

nott.ac/concerned-about-suicide

Designated Safeguarding Officer – Student and Campus Life Director

[0115 951 5758](tel:01159515758), (internal extension 15758)

br-safeguarding@nottingham.ac.uk

Full details of the policy can be found online at:

nottingham.ac.uk/governance/policy-finder

Call security

If there are serious concerns, or if the student's behaviour is causing problems for others, consult a line manager or another senior colleague. If you feel the situation is urgent and/or unsafe, call Security:

[Internal: 18888](tel:18888)

[External: 0115 951 8888](tel:01159518888)

**Assessing
the support
needed**

[See page 26](#)

**Steps to
take having
identified a
concern**

[See page 35](#)

Introduction

A number of students will encounter problems during their time studying with us and members of staff may be called on to provide some help. This is true for all students, regardless of where they study from or where they are in the course of their academic studies. This guide is designed to support all students—full-time undergraduate, postgraduate, part-time, those studying or working abroad and distance learning students.

The problems may be academic, personal or practical—and difficulties in one area can often have an impact on other areas of the student's life. Some students may directly approach staff members to ask for support. Others may be reluctant to ask and try to struggle on, but problems may become apparent.

What to do about a student in difficulty

The approach needed will depend on:

- your role in the university and whether you have a specific responsibility for supporting students
- the seriousness and urgency of the situation
- your level of skill and experience in helping others
- the amount of time and resources available.

Some members of staff (for example, personal tutors, Support and Wellbeing Officers, Disability Liaison Officers, Residential Experience co-ordinators) have a defined role in supporting students. Those who do not have this formal role but who have contact with students may notice that something is wrong or be approached by students with personal difficulties. The actions for people in these roles are described in this section.

How this guide will support staff

This guide is intended to help members of staff to:

- clarify their role and the limits of their responsibility towards students in difficulty
- work out when (and when not) to intervene
- identify problems
- decide what to do about them

It also aims to provide some strategies for dealing with more complex and difficult situations.

How to identify that there may be a problem

The signs that follow are to help you consider if a student may be in difficulty but not to diagnose or identify their potential problems.

Signs a student may be struggling with their mental health

- Behaving differently than they normally do
- Crying or tearful
- Problems sleeping – usually sleep is less and broken, but sometimes can be sleeping too much
- Changes to appetite – usually a loss of appetite but can be overeating
- Loss of concentration and poor memory
- Feeling very negative about themselves, their studies, the world about them
- Becoming socially isolated and withdrawn
- Feeling anxious – having panic attacks
- Drinking too much alcohol, using drugs
- Change in appearance – especially self-neglect
- Bizarre behaviour, not making sense
- Paranoia

Signs a student may be experiencing domestic violence

- Unexplained bruising and signs of possible physical violence
- Loss of confidence/change in behaviour
- They have become isolated from friends and family
- They have stopped attending lectures, completing work
- They receive high number of messages and calls from their partner when not together and constantly check their phone, must respond immediately and check in
- They seem very controlled by their partner
- Their partner may put them down, humiliate them in front of others
- Limited or no access to finances

Your responsibility towards students in difficulty

For many students, simply knowing that there is someone they can go to if necessary (and indeed, someone who knows their name), can help them to feel confident to resolve any issues or problems they encounter without seeking additional support. That said, there are a variety of staff members with different roles who can help identify and respond to a student in difficulty who does need more help and support.

Staff with a specific supportive role

Personal tutors

The university regards this role as having central importance to the support of students' progress and development on an individual basis. The personal tutor fulfils key developmental and pastoral functions, often closely interrelated, by providing a clear and crucial point of contact for the individual student in their interactions with the institution.

Along with other members of staff, the personal tutor has a responsibility to respond to students who ask for help. This may involve offering direct support (particularly if the problem is a course-related issue) or helping the student to obtain appropriate support elsewhere.

Students do not always express problems directly or ask for help. They may feel embarrassed or concerned about the consequences of telling someone in their school or department or simply hope that the problem will go away. It is, therefore, an important part of the personal tutor's role to provide opportunities and a safe environment to encourage disclosure when there may be problems which are impeding the student's progress (academic or personal) which are not raised directly by the student.

There may be indications via student's academic progress record that all is not well. The personal tutor is the only person who has an overview of the student's academic progress record and personal development and is therefore in the best position to recognise when there may be a problem. Other indicators of problems can be found in the Introduction [Signs to help you identify that there may be a problem.](#)

It is not always possible to know that something is wrong, particularly if the difficulties predate the student's university career, and there is no observable change in behaviour or appearance. Some students may be particularly reluctant to seek help, particularly postgraduate and part-time students. Tutors are not expected to do the impossible, but they are in a good position to be aware of what is happening to their tutees. Support and consultation are available to tutors from the Senior Tutor, Head of School, School Support and Wellbeing Team and other experienced colleagues within the institution.

Summary of responsibilities of personal tutors when a student may be in or experiencing difficulty:

- Maintaining regular contact with tutees may help to contain any concerns and so prevent problems from developing
- Identifying problems (where possible)
- Assessing the situation
- Deciding what to do next, with consultation if needed
- Referring on, where necessary, to the appropriate service
- Checking regularly as to whether the tutee has a Support Plan in the Academic WorkCentre

Support and Wellbeing Team

Whilst students are encouraged to see their tutor or supervisor within their School for any problems they may face, each School also has a Support and Wellbeing Officer, whose role is to provide dedicated support to students in difficulty.

The Support and Wellbeing Team can offer advice about services available to any student in difficulty and will work closely with tutors and supervisors. Co-ordinated support will ensure that advice is realistic and in line with University and external regulations.

Support and Wellbeing Officers can help students to access more specialist services including referring on to central university support services as required. Students will also be supported to make informed decisions when managing complex situations.



Students can contact their faculty [Support and Wellbeing Officers](#) by email.

Or book an [online consultation](#)

Students may also be referred on to the team by tutors or supervisors.

Residential Experience Team

(This service has replaced the previous Hall Pastoral Warden service)

The Residential Experience Team cover all university halls and third-party accommodation where our students reside. They are on hand from 9am to 3.30am every day to provide pastoral support as well as arranging a programme of residential activities to build a sense of community and promote belonging and social engagement and a sense of community in and across halls.

The team consists of full time Resident Managers and Coordinators, evening and overnight Residential Support Managers and live in Resident Assistants (RAs, current students residing in halls) who are available each evening 6pm until 10pm to provide peer to peer support, escalation and referrals for follow up back to the Residential Experience team and organise a calendar of social events. This is especially helpful in the first few weeks and months when students are adjusting to life at the university.

The Residential Experience team play an important part in the welcoming process. On the first day when they meet and greet the new arrivals, the entire team will be on hand so that students know who their residential experience and support team is. The Residential Assistants will hold meet and greet sessions to introduce themselves to their students and be present in hubs each evening from 6pm until 10pm so that students know where to go for help, advice and information or just drop in for a chat. If the RA cannot assist or feels that the matter needs referring they will encourage the student to talk to a Residential Manager or Coordinator.

Up until 6pm the day time team will be on hand to deal with any issues. Urgent matters in the evening will be dealt with immediately by one of the Residential Support Managers from 6pm and throughout the night or the on call Residential Experience Manager if necessary (until 8pm). Non urgent matters will be logged and followed up the next day by one of the full time Residential Managers or Coordinators.

It can be very tempting when welcoming new students to tell them what a good time they are going to have. More realistically, it is better to let them know that it is also a normal part of student life to encounter difficulties. Most students in difficulty believe that they are part of a tiny minority of people who 'can't cope'. It can be enormously reassuring to hear that lots of people have difficulty settling in during the first few weeks and months or that they may encounter difficulties at any point during their time at university.

For many students, simply knowing that there is someone they can go to if necessary (and indeed, someone who knows their name) can help them to find the confidence to give themselves time and opportunity to settle into their new home.

The Residential Assistants located in hubs in halls will be available for students who want to drop in and talk to them between published hours. **New for this year is the launch of one phone number (accessible 24 hours and 7 days 0115 748 7600).** This provides access to not only the Residential Experience team but the halls operations teams too to deal with any estates operational issues/faults.

This phone number will be answered by the Residential Experience team during the day and through to 3.30am to respond to any serious matters that occur. It will then divert to security.

In addition the resx@nottingham.ac.uk email is available for any student or staff to email the team about anything. This will be monitored from 9am until 3.30am but is likely to be for non-urgent matters and queries. This in box will be monitored by the ResX team and responded to within 24 hours.

Support and consultation appointments are available with the ResX team, who will in turn make any necessary referrals to specialist services. Emergency support is also available out of hours from the Security team.

Residential Experience Managers and Coordinators

The Residential Experience daytime Managers and Coordinators are available for students to meet with should a student wish to take their problem directly to them. They can be contacted through the email or phone number (above) or maybe referred by a Resident Assistant or the overnight manager. Generally they will become involved directly in more complex or serious situations. They will also deal with behavioural issues and the disciplinary process.

The Residential Experience Coordinators will also respond to student concerns and may help to contain worries and prevent problems. Typically the team may deal with:

- Identifying indicators of major problems – for example, when a student stays in their room for long periods.
- Responding to problems students present by making an initial assessment and deciding on a course of action, with consultation where needed.
- Responding to concerns about students brought by others – for example, friends or other hall / university staff. Concerns may also come from friends and family outside the university.
- Referring on to the personal tutor, School Support and Wellbeing Officers or one or more of the specialist services as appropriate.
- Consulting with the Residential Experience Manager as soon as possible if a problem seems urgent regarding further action.

Disability Liaison Officers

Each School appoints a Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) to provide a source of reference, advice and guidance for students in the School about disability issues and support. The DLO also provides advice and guidance for staff supporting disabled students.

Students who are concerned about a disability may approach the DLO directly or may be referred by another member of staff. The role of the DLO is to liaise with colleagues to ensure that the School responds appropriately to the needs of the student and that they are referred to other sources of support as necessary. For example, students with long term (lasting a year or more) diagnosed mental health difficulties may be referred to the team at Disability Support Services for advice about study resources and reasonable adjustments, and to their GP or the university Counselling Service for medical or psychological support or to the Mental Health Advisers.

There may be times when students bring personal problems to the DLO, especially if a positive relationship has been established. An initial sympathetic response may be sufficient. Still if further support is needed, information about other relevant sources of specialist help should be provided, so that the student can be appropriately referred.

Summary of responsibilities of Disability Liaison Officers

- Acting as a referral, advice and information point about disability issues and support, indicating available sources of information about managing the teaching and learning environment in an appropriate way. Also, taking the lead within the School/ Department in assisting with any necessary disability-related arrangements for a student anticipating a period of study abroad or clinical/work placement.
- Where necessary, liaising with the student's personal tutor about referral for specialist help.
- Responding to problems presented directly by students by making an initial assessment and deciding on a course of action.
- Referring on to the student's personal tutor or others in specialist services as appropriate.
- Liaise as appropriate with the team at Disability Support Services.
- Contribute to the Disability Liaison Officer Network and Training events by attending meetings to discuss and share good practice.

Mental Health First Aiders

The university is training a number of staff across the university in Mental Health First Aid. Mental Health First Aiders in the university are a point of contact for member of staff or students who may be struggling. This interaction could range from having an initial conversation through to helping someone to identify where they can access more help.

MHFAiders are provided with a good awareness of mental health to enable them to have a conversation to support someone in getting the help they need. It is important to recognise that this is not training that enables the MHFAider to provide any kind of intervention or advice – this is the role of professionals. All MHFAiders should refer to university guidance to identify who they should speak to when they are concerned about a student or member of staff.

On completion of the two-day course Mental Health First Aiders can:

- start a supportive conversation with a student or colleague
- listen to the person non-judgementally
- provide information to enable staff and students to access available support for example the university Counselling Service or Employee Assistance Programme
- follow the Identifying and Responding to Students in Difficulty guidance to signpost and guide individuals to appropriate professional support
- maintain confidentiality as appropriate.

Staff who support students as a first point of contact

A number of staff members in the university, particularly in schools, departments and residences, have an informal role in supporting students. Students may often find it easier to talk to someone who is not directly involved in assessing their work and who may appear more approachable. This group includes administrative and secretarial staff such as in Student Service Centres, libraries, schools and departments.

The university sees this role as being a first point of contact – someone who will listen sympathetically, offer some practical advice within their own area of work and refer the student on to another member of staff or service if necessary.

Summary of responsibility for staff who support students as a first point of contact

- Responding to requests for advice and information when this falls within the staff member's role.
- Listening sympathetically when students bring problems or express emotional distress.
- Making an assessment as to whether this is enough to resolve the situation or whether more is needed. Often just allowing a student to express their distress and identify possible solutions will be all the support they require.
- Consulting with others if needed to complete this assessment and identify any action needed.
- Referring on where necessary to the appropriate person or service. Informing the student's personal tutor if there is concern or if the problem is affecting the student's academic work (staff in schools and departments) or informing the Residential Experience Team if the student is living in a hall of residence.

Staff in specialist services



The university has a number of specialist services – see [Specialist Services in section 9 of this guide to find out more.](#)

Staff in these services work in their own area of expertise but also have a role in signposting students to other relevant sources of help. If a student has formed a positive relationship with a staff member in one service, they may disclose other problems, which should then be referred on to the appropriate service.

Technicians

The majority of technicians in the university are in student-facing roles and their technical expertise and practical support is an essential part of the teaching and learning experience here at Nottingham. Additionally, technicians can often be the first to get to know students more informally in their respective learning and research environments.

The frontline nature of their roles means that they can often be the first to notice a student who may be struggling, and they might be the first staff member a student reaches out to. Consequently, they are providing important pastoral support, contributing to students' personal, social and wellbeing needs. They also act as positive role models, supporting research team resilience and signposting to social and academic support systems. Alongside the role of academic colleagues, this pastoral care is crucial to providing students with routes to access the support they need.

As part of the university's Technician Commitment, Campus Life staff are working with technical colleagues to ensure they are supported and provided with appropriate skills and knowledge to respond and appropriately signpost when they identify someone experiencing difficulties.



Staff with no formal supportive role but who have regular contact with students

Some staff members in the university have regular informal contact with students and may get to know them quite well. This applies particularly to staff in residences – for example, cleaning, catering and bar staff and porters.

In spite of having no formal role, or perhaps because of this, students may talk to members of staff in these groups because they seem approachable. Having staff members around who are willing to listen can make a university of this size seem a friendlier place.

Summary of responsibilities

- Listen sympathetically – this may be sufficient.
- If more help is needed, encourage the student to talk to someone who has a responsibility for student support. This may be their Residential Experience Team, personal tutor or School Support and Wellbeing officer.
- If in doubt, or you are worried about a student, seek advice.
- If there are serious concerns about the student, a line manager should be alerted, but if they are not available speak to another member of staff in the area you work for example, a member of Security, or hall manager.

Staff with no formal supportive role who are on call to respond to difficult situations

Security staff

Security staff may be called to deal with situations where a student is disturbing others or causing concern. Students may present in difficulty for a range of reasons and the Security Team can begin to identify what is the underlying cause of the situation, for example, has the student had too much to drink, are they under the influence of drugs, are they in distress or crisis? It can be difficult for staff who have no previous knowledge of the student to know what may be happening as there could be a number of issues contributing to the situation. It can be helpful to speak to other people who can provide information – for example, whether this behaviour is out of character, whether people are aware of any issues that have contributed to the situation or if there have been previous concerns about the student. The Security team are first aid trained and mental health first aid trained to help them to manage the difficult situations that can arise.

Situations involving drunkenness or drugs are most likely to occur in the evenings and at night. As long as there is no obvious risk to the student or others, the main focus will be to get the student home safely, possibly with help from friends or housemates, and from the Residential Experience Team if the student is living in halls of residence with Residential Experience support.

If neither alcohol nor drugs appear to be the main problem, it will be important to try to obtain further information about the student from hall staff or friends.

Summary of responsibilities

- Deal with any immediate risk to the student, other people or property by taking appropriate action – for example, applying first aid or contacting the emergency services.
- If there does not appear to be an immediate risk, make a judgement about what is going on, based on direct observation and any information which can be obtained from others.
- Contact the residential experience team if the student is living in a hall of residence.
- If there are concerns about the student's mental health but there does not appear to be an immediate risk, it may be possible to help the student to calm down by encouraging them to talk about what it is that is distressing them and then suggesting where further help may be obtained.
- If the concerns are more immediate, it may be possible to contact a member of staff who knows the student and who can take responsibility for deciding what to do next. If it is not possible to do this and you are not certain of the best course of action, advice can be obtained from the following sources: during normal surgery hours you can contact the university Health Centre and/or the university Mental Health Advisors. If the student is not registered with the university Health Centre and you cannot identify their GP, or if it is outside normal surgery hours, contact NHS 111. If the situation needs an urgent response, the student can go to the Emergency Department at the Queen's Medical Centre if it appears to be safe for them to do so. If not, contact the emergency services to send an ambulance.
- Follow normal policies on reporting the situation.

Initial responses to a request for help

Listening

In busy lives, listening can often be fairly casual. We may be distracted by work or other pressures. When we are talking to someone else we can usually tell if the person is attentive.

When a student asks to talk to someone about a personal difficulty, it is important to try to switch off the other pressures and to listen in a more focused way.

- Make clear how much time is available. This may also help the student to work out how much time they need. If there is an urgent deadline or an imminent appointment, say so and offer time later. In most situations this will be acceptable to the student. It is usually better to offer a specific time, rather than simply to ask the person to come back later, which they will often experience as a brush-off.
- If the person appears to be very agitated or upset and is unable or unwilling to wait, a brief meeting should be offered immediately, if possible, to be followed up at a specified time soon afterwards. Alternatively the student could be directed to someone who can offer time immediately (after checking this out with the colleague concerned).
- Try to ensure that the time offered is free from interruptions and that there is a private space. This is not always possible for staff who do not have their own offices.
- Listening can be therapeutic in itself and may be enough to help the student work out their own way of dealing with the situation.
- Ensure that you are clear with the student about confidentiality and its limits (see guidance on confidentiality) so the student is aware you may need to share information they disclose to you in certain circumstances.

Assessment

When listening to the student, part of the task is to make sense of what is being said and to decide what kind of response might be helpful. It can be useful to focus on the following questions as the basis of a rough and ready assessment. These are questions to reflect on, rather than to directly ask the student. Staff members are not expected to diagnose mental health problems.

What is going on?

- What seems to be the main issue? Is the problem as presented by the student the whole story or are there other problems which are not being directly expressed?
- Does the problem seem to be serious? Is it having a major impact on the student's wellbeing?
- How urgent is the problem? Is the student at risk in some way?

What to do next?

- Can the situation be resolved by a brief intervention – for example, advice or sympathetic listening?
- Is it appropriate to your role to offer this? Do you have the time and ability to do so?
- Is specialist help required? If so, from whom?
- Is there a need to act quickly?
- Is there a need to inform or consult with someone else? If in doubt, it is always best to consult.

Mental health problems

Mental health is not fixed and static but varies for all of us over time. On some days we feel better than others, as also happens with physical health. The two are often linked. Our mental health will vary in response to stress and distress and this would only be identified as problematic if the variation is out of context, greater than we would expect, discordant with the situation, or is impacting on the functioning of the individual in an unmanageable way.

In differentiating mental ill health from the normal range of human emotions, the following criteria may be helpful:

- **Unusual or unexplained symptoms:** for example, hallucinations or delusions which do not follow the use of any mind-altering substances.
- **A sudden and dramatic change in behaviour or personality.**
- **Duration of symptoms:** for example, persistence of depressive symptoms or of high levels of anxiety.
- **Intensity:** the feelings or symptoms may seem overwhelming or unmanageable.
- **Effects:** the symptoms interfere with normal functioning, for example, decline in engagement with studies and student life, rapid loss of weight, self-neglect, self-medication with alcohol and/or drugs.
- **Evidence of self-harm and/or suicidal thoughts.**

Concerns of a serious nature

Naturally, all concerns about the wellbeing of a student are important. But some concerns because of their nature require a more sensitive response. Where a concern is of a serious nature, specific safeguarding interventions may be required to appropriately support the student and those connected to them. Examples of serious concerns would include:

- Where it is identified that the student has been the victim of any form of assault or abuse
- Where it is identified that the student is the victim of sexual abuse and/or domestic abuse
- Where it is identified that the student is vulnerable to on-going abuse
- Where it is identified that the student may have impaired ability to protect or look after themselves but would be deemed as having capacity and as not 'vulnerable' under the law
- Where it is identified that the student is at risk of being drawn into radicalisation
- Where it is identified that the student has been arrested or is subject to any form of investigation by the police or other statutory service
- Where it is identified that the student is of potential risk to themselves or others including risk of serious self-harm or suicide

This list is presented for illustration and is not exhaustive. If you are unsure as to whether a situation would be classified as serious in nature, advice can be sought from the Associate Director (Student Wellbeing), the Head of Security, or the Student and Campus Life Director.

Please consult the university [safeguarding policy](#).

Preventing radicalisation

Preventing violent extremism by countering the ideology of extremism and identifying those who are being drawn into radicalism has for some time formed part of the university's approach to safeguarding its students. The Counter-terrorism and Security Act 2015 now imposes a duty on a wide range of bodies including all universities and schools.

The university will continue its approach of managing *Prevent* as part of its welfare and safeguarding activities. We are committed to maintaining an inclusive and supportive environment where all members of the university community are encouraged to engage in debate and to pursue both academic and non-academic interests. At the heart of this, we will continue to encourage a culture whereby all members of the university community feel involved and socially included in university life and support others to do the same. We consider this the most effective means of reducing the likelihood of individuals becoming isolated and vulnerable to the risk of radicalisation.

If you have a concern that a student may be at risk of radicalisation, this should be treated in the same manner as any other welfare case. This means that:

- For non-urgent cases, the concern should be referred to the School Support and Wellbeing team or other welfare services such as the Counselling Service or Mental Health Advisory Service.
- For urgent cases, the concern should be referred to the Head of university Security.

We encourage a culture of openness where people feel able to speak up about their concerns knowing that support will be forthcoming and without fear of recrimination. Requirements of the Prevent duty are on the institution, not the individual. We are not expecting you to make decisions about individuals yourself without support. Where you have a question, please ask one of the following people who will be able to advise you:

Head of Security

Stuart Croy
stuart.croy@nottingham.ac.uk
 Internal: 13597

Student and Campus Life Director

Emma Rowsell
emma.rowsell@nottingham.ac.uk
 Internal: 15758

Associate Director (Student Wellbeing)

Claire Thompson
claire.thompson@nottingham.ac.uk
 Internal: 67908

Harassment and bullying

The University of Nottingham is committed to ensuring we do everything we can to provide a safe and supportive environment for all our students. This includes the digital and online environments that students engage with whilst studying with the university. If a student tells you they have been subject to any disrespectful harassment, abuse, or assault, please encourage them to report this to the university.

Students and staff can report via our specialist reporting platform: [Report + Support](#)

The university takes all reports of incidents very seriously. We will listen. We won't judge. We will understand their concern. Then we will act as quickly as possible to support them, investigate their concern and to make sure that the problem is dealt with.

If the reported issue is serious, please seek advice from Security, Associate Director (Student Wellbeing) or Director of Student and Campus Life.

Distance learners

A growing number of students at the University of Nottingham are Distance Learners. The nature of their engagement with the institution can be very different from someone who is present on campus for most of their learning experience. Whilst there will likely be some limitations to how we can directly support these students, they can seek help and advice from university services.

If you are working with a Distance Learner who you identify as experiencing distress, they can be advised to access university welfare services who can provide virtual advice and support, and help them to consider what services local to them they may benefit from accessing. It will often be important that distance students access local support and services when they are in difficulty. You are also able to contact the services and colleagues outlined within this guide to see what can be done to support them and to identify what local services they may be able to access.

If a student is at risk or unsafe, they can contact Security 24 hours a day, seven days a week for advice and support, wherever they may be in the world.



Quick links to contacts

Reporting platform for students and staff:

reportandsupport.nottingham.ac.uk

24-7 Security service for students at risk or unsafe

Internal: 18888

External: 0115 951 8888



Your guide to referrals

Staff members have a responsibility to ensure that appropriate help is offered to the student, not to resolve the problem. It is important to communicate concerns about a student to a line manager or other colleagues as appropriate and not to take sole responsibility for the situation.

Two referral approaches

1. Talking informally to a student about a particular service and encouraging them to make contact.
2. Making a more formal approach to a service on behalf of a student by telephone or in writing.

When to refer?

- When the problem needs specialist help
- When the problem is complex or serious
- When there would be a conflict with other aspects of your role if you offer support yourself
- When the situation needs more time than you can offer

Where to refer?

It is not always possible to know what the best source of support might be. There may be more than one problem or the initial problem may not be the most central. What is most important in the first instance is to guide the student to a service that is acceptable to them. A further referral can be made later if appropriate.

A list of example situations with suggested referral routes can be found in the [Assessing the support needed](#) section of this guide.

Usually this will be to one of the specialist services on campus and staff in these services will refer on to other sources of help if they think it appropriate. If a student does not want to use on-campus services, they can be helped to find appropriate support elsewhere.

A list of useful off-campus services can be found in the [Off-Campus Specialist Services](#) section 9 of this guide. It is also useful to look at the comprehensive information on services available on the website:

 nott.ac/healthyu

How to refer?

It is usually best if a student can take the initiative to approach a service. There may, however, be times when this seems too difficult for the student. It may then be helpful for the staff member concerned to take a more active role in either telephoning or writing to the appropriate service to make an appointment on their behalf.

Those who do not have a formal student support role may encourage the student to talk to someone (for example, Support and Wellbeing Officer or member of the residential experience team) who does have this role and who may be able to help those students who want help but do not feel able to approach the [specialist services](#) directly.

When a student doesn't want to be referred but wants to continue to talk to you

It may be that, even after you have referred the student onto another, more appropriate service to address their need, the student tells you that you have been so helpful and sympathetic that they would prefer to talk to you than to see someone else. It is important that you maintain an appropriate relationship with the student by taking the following steps:

Explaining your role

It is often enough to explain to the student that you are not in a position to offer further help since it isn't appropriate to your role or that you lack the specialist expertise or the time to give ongoing support.

Exploring the student's concerns

If the student is worried about going to see someone else, it may help to explore this in more detail. For example, a student may be worried about talking to someone involved in assessing their work or believe that there would be a stigma attached to seeing a counsellor. If it is not possible to reassure the student, try to suggest an alternative person for them to talk to from the list of specialist services available within the university (see [Specialist Services](#) section 9 of this guide).

Setting clear limits

Having revealed personal difficulties, the student may wish/expect to continue to receive further support from you and ask for quite a lot of your time. If they are unwilling to be referred to someone in a more appropriate role, you may experience quite a lot of pressure to provide this support directly. You may feel concern for the student and worry that they may feel rejected if you do not offer support. It can also feel flattering to be sought out in this way. It is, however, important to set some limits, otherwise you may end up feeling out of your depth and spending more time than you can afford on one student. This can be done in a positive way by letting the student know how much time can be offered and making clear the limits to the support that you can offer.

Personal tutors, for example, need to make it clear that their role is to help the student with academic difficulties created by the situation, not to deal with personal problems directly. It may be necessary to keep reminding the student of the specialist help available to them.

Providing information

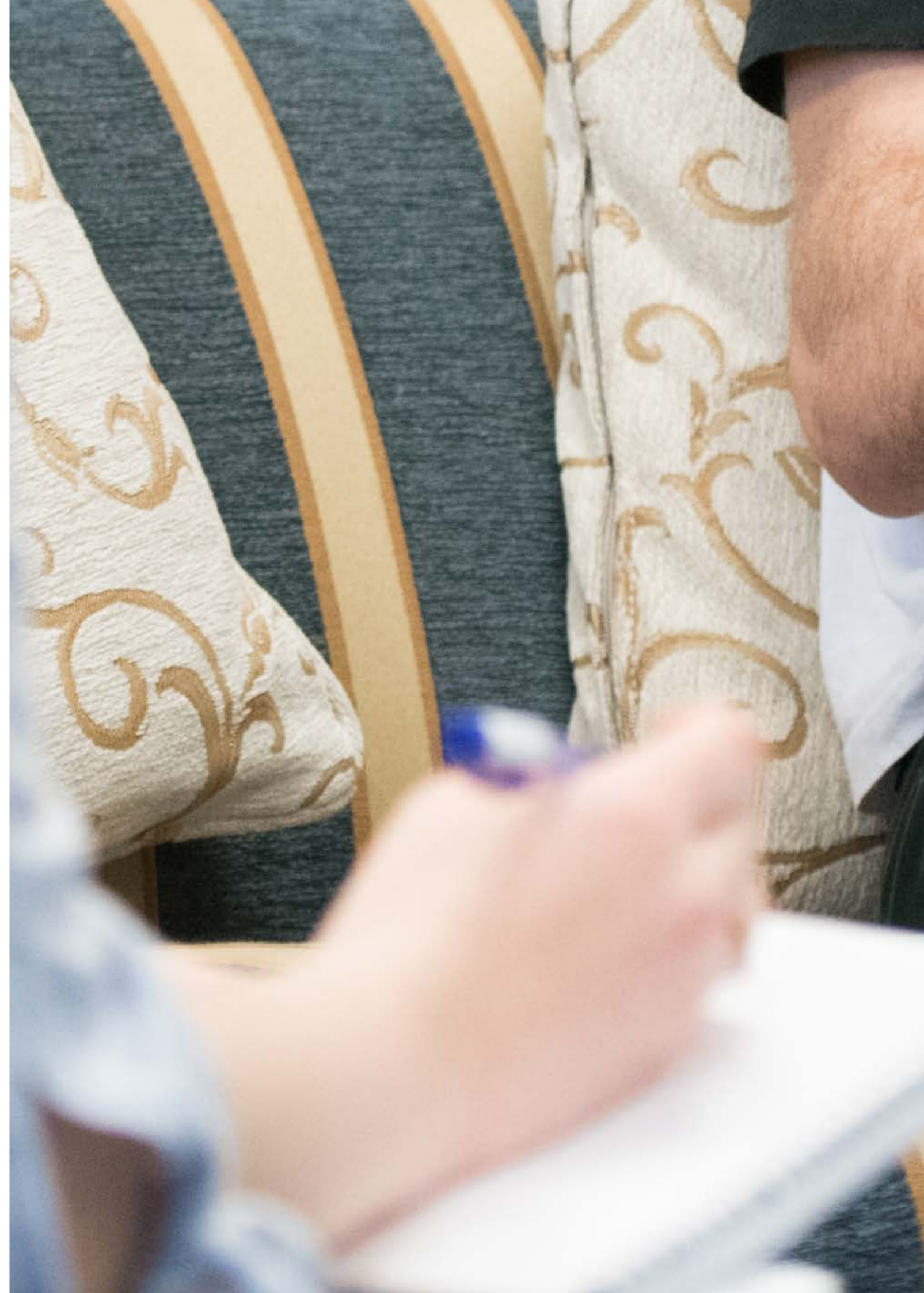
It can be useful to guide the student towards sources of information about their specific difficulty. The [university Counselling Service](#) has produced a series of leaflets on issues such as bereavement, anxiety, depression and eating difficulties and [HealthyU](#) has a range of resources on issues such as drug and alcohol advice, sexual consent, sexual health etc. These are available in various places across the university. Copies can be obtained from the university Counselling Service or accessed from their website and the [university Welfare Service](#) and [HealthyU](#) websites. More details can be found in the final section of this guide. Self-help courses are also available via [Togetherall](#) on the [Mental health and wellbeing pages](#).

When to ask for help

If a student continues to seek your help inappropriately it is important to seek advice from your line manager or one of the specialist services, as the situation may be unhelpful for both the student and for you.

Quick links to contacts

-  nott.ac/bodymind
-  nottingham.ac.uk/counselling
-  nott.ac/healthyu
-  nott.ac/healthwelfare
-  togetherall.com/en-gb



Assessing the support needed

Difficulties students may encounter (listed alphabetically) and who to refer them to.

Academic and course-related

Academic misconduct or have some other course-based difficulty

- Students' Union Advice
- Support and Wellbeing Team

Disability-related

Disability-related issue

- Disability Support Services Team
- School Disability Liaison Officer

Employment advice

Employment situation

- Students' Union Advice

Financial and funding

Bursary, scholarship, student loan or support funds

- Financial Support Team (via Student Services)

Financial difficulties or have a query about money

- Students' Union Advice
- Financial Support Team

Housing and accommodation

Housing or accommodation (including problems with their housemates)

- Students' Union Advice
- Off-campus Student Affairs Team
- Residential Experience team (if in university supported accommodation)
- University accommodation office

International student specific

International student experiencing practical problems concerning immigration or academic issues

- Student Services – Visa and Immigration Team
- Personal tutor
- Support and Wellbeing Team

Mental health and wellbeing

Anxiety about a study problem or academic issue

- Personal Tutor
- Support and Wellbeing Team
- Disability Support Service if the student has a declared disability

Health problem

- GP or Cripps Health Centre

Loss of motivation or difficulty concentrating

- University Counselling Service
- GP or Cripps Health Centre

Mental health crisis (not requiring support from Security but immediate and urgent assistance is needed)

- Mental Health Advisory Service duty worker

Mental health difficulty (other support options have been tried or are not appropriate)

- Mental Health Advisory Service
- GP or Cripps Health Centre
- Disability Support Services

Personal problem (for example bereavement, relationship breakdown)

- Residential Experience Team
- Personal tutor
- Support and Wellbeing Team
- University Chaplaincy
- University Counselling Service

Psychological wellbeing

- University Counselling Service
- Mental Health Advisory Service
- GP or Cripps Health Centre

Use of alcohol or drugs

- GP or Cripps Health Centre
- University Counselling Service
- Recovery in Nottingham

Victim of assault, harassment, or a hate crime

- Report and Support
- Security
- Support and Wellbeing Team
- Off-campus Student Affairs Team
- Residential Experience Team

Religious or spiritual

Religious or spiritual beliefs

- University Chaplaincy
- University Counselling Service

Responding to more complex situations

If concerns are raised by others

From time to time staff may be approached by students who are concerned about a friend or by a student's family. Concerns may also be raised by colleagues who do not have a formal support role. There are a number of possible courses of action:

- Use your own observation of the situation to help you to decide if/when to intervene.
- Encourage those who approached you to persuade the person to seek help directly, either from you or another appropriate person. It may help to provide them with some relevant information (a leaflet, for example) to give to the student.
- Talk to the student yourself, either by enquiring generally about their wellbeing or, with the agreement of those who approached you, let them know that concerns have been expressed.
- Make a note of the information and the course of action you took.

Please remember the importance of maintaining confidentiality if speaking to family and friends. You can listen to their concerns, but you cannot share any information with them, not even to confirm a student is studying with us. It can help to explain confidentiality, share generic information and ensure it is understood that no feedback can be given in response to their concerns without the consent of the student. It can be helpful to encourage them to ring again if their worries continue or worsen.

You can direct friends and family to the advice on the university website:

 nott.ac/faq-family-and-friends

If the student denies there is a problem

It may be helpful to challenge their denial gently by letting the student know that this is not how the situation appears. Let them know why there are concerns; for example, if there has been a deterioration in the quality of academic work, or if they have changed in some important way.

If the student refuses to acknowledge the problem or discuss the situation, it may still be helpful to pass on sources of information and support so the student can access this later. In addition, you may wish to discuss the situation with one of the Mental Health Advisors or the university Counselling Service if you are concerned about the student and/or their impact on others. Students, if they become very mentally unwell, can lose the capacity to understand that they are in significant difficulty and in these circumstances, we may need to intervene on their behalf.

If there are serious concerns, or if the student's behaviour is causing problems for others, consult a line manager or another senior colleague. If you feel the situation is urgent and/or unsafe, call Security:

 **Internal: 18888**

 **External: 0115 951 8888**

Urgent situations

The first step in the process of assessment is to ascertain whether the concern requires a prompt response.

High risk situations

A prompt response is required if there is reason to believe that:

- a student may be at risk of attempting suicide.
- they may be at risk of hurting themselves or someone else.
- their behaviour appears to be significantly odd and either this is not part of a longstanding problem or there may be a longstanding problem which has deteriorated: for example, the person appears highly agitated and out of touch with reality.
- the student is not functioning effectively and is vulnerable to significant self-neglect or exploitation by others.
- the student has been the recent victim of, or is at risk of, serious assault.

In situations where there is an immediate risk of significant harm to the student or others, call Security

 **Internal: 18888**

 **External: 0115 951 8888**

This line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can be contacted from anywhere in the world.

The Security team will make an urgent response, including contacting emergency services as required. They will also ensure that appropriate staff members such as the Associate Director Student Wellbeing are drawn into the response.

In situations where there is no immediate risk but where the concern is of a serious nature (as defined in section 2 of this document: [Initial responses to a request for help](#)), colleagues should refer the matter to the Associate Director (Student Wellbeing), who will make a judgment about appropriate next steps. If the Associate Director (Student Wellbeing) is not available, the duty Mental Health Advisor should be contacted.

In any other situation

Staff who have a specific supportive role should consider taking the following steps:

- Allowing the student space to discuss what is distressing them. If there is only limited time available, there may be a need to provide a brief intervention and offer more time later. Offer support to any other students who may have been affected by the situation.
- Planning with the student where they can access support in the future to help to avert further crises.
- If the student is agitated or angry, it will help to try to appear calm and in control of the situation, even if you don't feel that way. It may help to sit down and persuade the student to do likewise. If you feel the situation is escalating and risk is increasing, you should withdraw from the situation and call Security.
- When the student is under the influence of alcohol or drugs it will not be possible to resolve any problems. It will be helpful to encourage them to come back and talk to you or another member of staff when they are calmer. If the student is creating a disturbance, or if you are concerned about your personal safety, contact Security.
- It should not be necessary to spend hours sitting with a student. Giving the student some time and then following this up later can often be more useful as it is giving a message that the anxiety/ distress can be managed.

Staff who do not have a formal support role should:

- Inform a line manager or a senior colleague as soon as possible. The person informed should either act on the guidelines directly or inform someone who will.

A flowchart to help you assess what steps to take can be found on [page 35](#).

Responding to students in a heightened emotional state

From time to time staff may be called on to deal with a student who is agitated, angry or upset. Drugs or alcohol may be a factor or the student may have attempted harming themselves. These situations are most frequently encountered in student residences. In such circumstances, the university has a legal as well as moral responsibility to act in the best interests of the student, especially if the student lacks the ability to do so.

If there is any injury on campus, ensure that the student receives appropriate medical attention by contacting Security who are first aid trained. If off-campus, ring local emergency services. If they refuse, a judgement will have to be made as to the seriousness of the situation (i.e. whether to override the student's refusal of help and call for an ambulance via Security).

If you think the student is at risk, the GP can be contacted with or without the student's consent. In situations where students are unwilling or unable to say who their GP is, the doctors at the university Health Centre have agreed that they will see such students in an emergency.

In this scenario, ensure that relevant colleagues are informed about the situation. Where possible, you may wish to involve someone else in helping you to deal with the situation. Problems occurring at night can be particularly difficult as there are fewer resources available to call on for support and incidents can often seem worse at night. Advice on physical or psychological concerns can be obtained from NHS 111. The university Security Team is available 24 hours a day.

When a student appears to be suicidal

Situations can occur where a student may indicate that they are planning a suicide attempt. It is important to try to ensure that the student gets medical help as soon as possible. How this is achieved will depend on the circumstances.

During surgery opening hours, and if the student is willing to see a doctor, it may be enough to contact the surgery to explain the situation and make an emergency appointment. Check with the student that they feel safe to go alone. Having someone listen and take them seriously may be sufficient containment for the student to get help. If you do not think it is safe to leave the student alone, you will need to find someone to accompany the student or to stay until a GP can visit. You may decide to do this yourself, but it is important that you only do this if you feel safe to do so. If you have any concerns about personal safety, contact Security.

The Mental Health Advisory Service operates a duty system in office hours for crisis situations arising on and off-campus and can offer support and guidance in situations where a student appears to be suicidal.

Outside surgery and office hours, urgent medical and psychiatric help can be obtained from the Emergency Department at the Queen's Medical Centre.

If you believe there is an immediate risk to life, call Security

 **Internal: 18888**

 **External: 0115 951 8888**

What to do if you are concerned and the person refuses medical help

A person's consent can be overridden if you think that they are at risk or lack capacity to make decisions such as if they are very intoxicated by drugs and/or alcohol.

- Contact the person's GP (or [Cripps Health Centre](#) if the GP is not known) and ask for an urgent visit. Ideally, someone should stay with the person until the GP arrives. If you do not feel it would be safe for you to do so, contact Security.
- If the student is actively behaving in a suicidal way, notify Security on extension 18888. It will help if you can do this discreetly so as not to alarm the student. If possible, and it feels safe to do so, ask another member of staff who knows the student to stay with them while you arrange this.

When the risk appears to be less imminent, but a student reveals suicidal feelings, it is important to take the person seriously, even if you have some doubts as to whether a suicide attempt will be made. It is important to encourage the student to see a GP, to go to the university [Counselling Service](#), refer them to the [Mental Health Advisory Service](#) or to obtain some other psychological support that is acceptable to them. If the student is unwilling to access help it is advisable to discuss the situation with one of the Mental Health Advisors.

It is not always possible to prevent suicide. Even when a great deal of care and support is offered someone who is very determined may still go ahead. It is important not to feel personally responsible for the situation.

If you have been involved with a student who has killed themselves or who has made a suicide attempt, it may be helpful to talk with one of the counsellors or chaplains or someone in a similar role. The chaplains offer support to all members of the university community, people of all faith and no faith. They can also put people in touch with contacts for other faiths not represented within the multi-faith Chaplaincy.

 nottingham.ac.uk/chaplaincy

You can also access support from the [Tomorrow project](#) and you can find helpful information on the [Healthy U website](#) and in the [booklet Help is at Hand](#).

 nott.ac.uk/concerned-about-suicide

Quick links to contacts

 unhs.co.uk

 nottingham.ac.uk/counselling

 nott.ac.uk/healthyu

 nott.ac.uk/mental-health-advisory

 nott.ac.uk/concerned-about-suicide

Responding to students reporting sexual violence

The university has specific guidance available to students to help understand consent and how to report sexual assault. This is a useful resource for staff to use with students who approach them for support and can be found on the website [Let's Be Clear on Consent](#).

It can be helpful to get the student to look at the information to help them understand what has happened and their routes to support and reporting. Try not to ask them too many questions about what has happened but help them to access specialist university or external services who can support their disclosure.

Our aim is to ensure students reporting feel safe, believed and empowered to seek expert help, and if possible, report. The university can assist in reporting to the Police and/or accessing [Topaz](#) via [Security](#) or [Report and Support](#).

It is helpful to encourage a student who is concerned that they have experienced sexual assault to report via [Report and Support](#) or ask them if you can make a referral on their behalf. It is helpful to explain to the student that in making a report via the system they are seeking advice and help and are not making a formal report at this point. The student will then be offered an appointment with a [Sexual Violence Liaison Officer](#).

The student may prefer to speak to external services, rather than the university, in which case please help them to access the information about the services via [Let's Be Clear on Consent](#) or [Report and Support](#). The Sexual Advice Referral Centre (SARC) in Nottingham is [Topaz \(The Topaz Centre - Home\)](#) and is one of the best services for students to contact who have been recently sexually assaulted.

If a student is at immediate risk, please contact security and/or the emergency services and following this, discuss the case urgently with the designated safeguarding lead, their deputy.

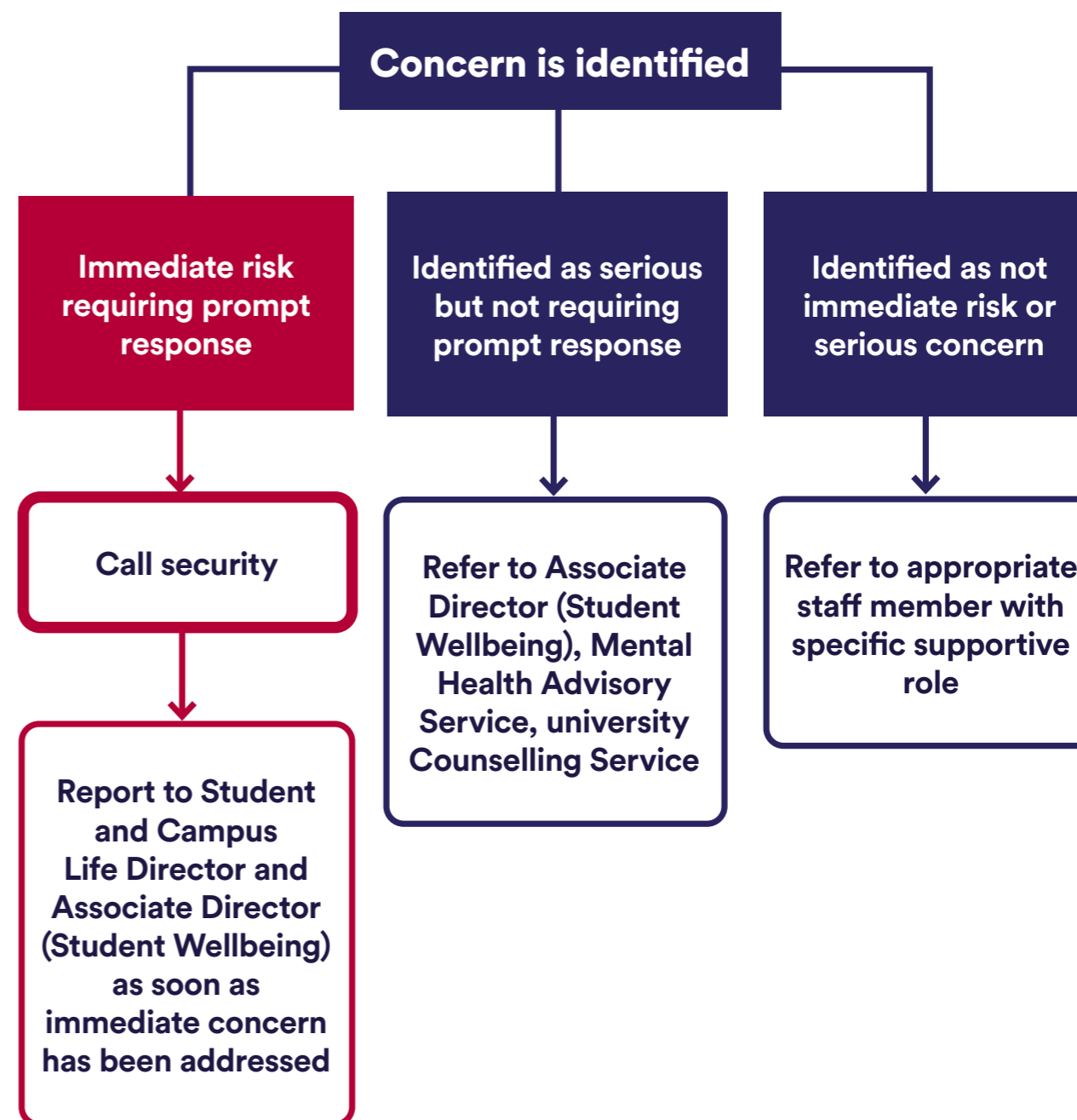
If the student disclosing is under 18, the Student and Campus Life Director must be informed irrespective of whether the student wishes to report the assault, as the university has a legal duty to report.

Responding to the sudden death of a student

It is fortunately relatively rare that the university is faced with the death of one of its students. Given that this can happen the university has in place a clear procedure which establishes the appropriate level of response, recognises the distress experienced by the family, friends, and members of the university community, and establishes clear responsibilities and lines of communication. The guidance in that document applies to student deaths on university premises and also deaths which occur off-campus and outside term-time.

If you become aware of a student who has died, please inform the Head of Security, the registrar, the director of student and campus life or the associate director (student wellbeing) as soon as possible to enable the situation to be managed appropriately and support to be offered to affected staff and students.

Steps to take having identified a concern with a student



Section 6

Confidentiality and its limits

When a student discusses personal problems with a member of staff, it is important for them to feel that the information they share will be treated respectfully.

It is important to be clear with the student what level of confidentiality you can offer to them and indicate who you might speak to if you are worried about their welfare. Staff in specialist welfare roles such as Counselling and Mental Health Advisory support have clear confidentiality policies within their services.

Most members of staff do not, however, have a professional duty to maintain absolute confidentiality within the university and indeed it is important to be able to consult when necessary. What is important is discretion, which means passing on personal information only on a 'need-to-know' basis. It is essential that staff do not hold on to difficult information shared with them that causes them worry and concern as this can become harmful to the member of staff and indicate that the student needs more help.

There are always limits to confidentiality and if a student shares information that indicates that they, or others are at significant risk, duty of care will over-ride confidentiality and the information will be passed on to the relevant services. It is helpful to make these clear to a student at the beginning of any conversation as this prevents a student asking you to keep a confidence that you cannot.

If a student insists that they need to talk to someone in confidence it is advisable to direct them to the services on campus which are professionally bound to maintain a higher level of confidentiality: the GPs, Chaplains, Counsellors, the Mental Health Advisers, and Advisers within the Students' Union Advice Centre.

Talking to parents, next of kin, or significant others

It is not uncommon for staff in schools and halls of residence to be asked to speak to concerned parents, next of kin, or significant others. While it may be helpful for these individuals to be offered a sympathetic ear, the university's position under the Data Protection Act is that personal information must not be disclosed to anyone outside the university, not even confirming if a student studies at the university. Enquiries may be answered with an offer to forward a message to the student concerned. It will be important to make clear that it will not be possible to report back on any contact with the student. If the concerned party expresses particular concern, an offer to talk to the student and check how they are may be helpful.

A [FAQs for Family and Friends](#) page is available on the university's website and covers a range of topics including who they can contact in an emergency, who they can contact if they are worried about how their loved one is doing, and what support is available. Similarly, more details on Data Protection and the university's responsibilities under law can be found on the [university's website](#).

Section 7

When to consult

As mentioned previously, staff members have a responsibility to ensure that appropriate help is offered to the student, not to resolve the problem. It is also not expected that staff members will know exactly what to do in every situation. From specialist services such as the university Counselling Service and the Mental Health Advisers, through welfare support staff members in schools to the Head of Student Welfare, there are a number of individuals you can approach for consultation when identifying and responding to a student in difficulty.

You should also look to inform your line manager or another senior colleague if:

- you have serious concerns about a student
- you feel you are getting out of your depth
- the issue is impacting on your mental wellbeing
- you think there may be legal issues
- you are not sure of the best course of action

Whether to check where might be the best place to refer a student or whether to talk over the situation more generally, don't be afraid to consult with colleagues. **If in doubt, ask.**

Section 8

Key points to remember

- Consult with others if you think the student's problems may be serious or if you are uncertain what action to take.
- Be clear about what is realistic for you to deal with yourself. Decisions about what support to offer will depend on your role, whether you have relevant expertise and the time available to you.
- Situations requiring immediate action are rare.
- If you are in doubt about how to respond to a student, it is nearly always possible to give yourself time by saying that you need to think over what is the best way to help and arranging to see the person again.
- Ensure that you have information about other support services on campus which you can pass on to students.

Section 9

Specialist services inside and outside of the university

There are a range of specialist services available within the university and in the local community. For the most up to date list of available services visit [HealthyU](#).

- **The university Counselling Service** provides confidential, professional counselling support for personal, emotional and/or mental health problems to students and staff studying and working at the university. [Register for a Consultation](#). The service also provides advice to staff with a non-urgent concern about a student and you can arrange a consultation by booking via [Information for Staff](#).
- **The Mental Health Advisory Service** is a referral only service that offers support, advice and guidance to students experiencing significant mental health difficulties. Please see the [faq sheet](#) for further details. If you are working with a student you think needs support from this team, please email BR-MH-Support@nottingham.ac.uk to discuss your referral with an Advisor
- **The Mental Health Advisory Service** additionally operates a duty system in office hours for crisis situations arising on and off-campus and can offer support and guidance in situations where a student appears to be in a mental health crisis. You can contact the team for urgent advice by emailing them at BR-MH-Support@nottingham.ac.uk or by ringing 0115 7484652
- **Security staff are trained Mental Health First Aiders**. They provide out of hours support to students on campus. For incidences off campus, they can facilitate support via the emergency services or arrange follow up contact with key staff at the university): 0115 951 3013 Emergency number: 0115 951 8888
- **University of Nottingham Health Service at [Cripps Health Centre](#)** (GPs can refer on to specialist services): 0115 846 8888

Appendices

Appendix 1

University Safeguarding Policy

It is important that we safeguard all of our community at the university from abuse and harm and to ensure this, staff need to be familiar with the [university safeguarding policy](#) and any safeguarding concerns staff have must be raised promptly and in line with the policy.

The majority of the students in the community are over 18 and do not meet the definition of ‘vulnerability’ under the Care Act 2014, and as such, safeguarding issues that are most likely to be encountered are those which ‘usually’ involve more than one person a ‘victim’ and a ‘perpetrator’ or ‘perpetrators’ (although these terms are contested).




Abuse and harm can include: physical abuse, domestic violence (including so-called ‘honour’ based violence and coercion and control, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, financial or material abuse, modern slavery, discriminatory abuse, organisational abuse and neglect).

If you are concerned that a student is at risk of abuse and harm, please seek advice and raise your concerns as quickly as possible. If you feel the student is at urgent risk, please contact Security and/ or the emergency services immediately and following this, please contact the university designated safeguarding lead or deputy safeguarding lead.

The university is currently revising the safeguarding policy and processes so please refer back to the policy each time you have concerns to ensure you are following the latest guidance.

If you make a report to [Report and Support](#) on behalf of a student who has experienced abuse, please do so by asking to ‘Speak to an advisor’, and not anonymously, which will ensure you provide your details as the person making the report.

It is important to be informed about safeguarding and you can increase your knowledge by completing relevant university online courses including:

-  [Safeguarding in Higher Education \(Online Course\)](#)
-  [Inclusive Campus - Safeguarding and Awareness of Extremism \(Online Course\)](#)
-  [Prevent Duty Online course](#)

Designated Safeguarding Officer – Student and Campus Life Director

 **0115 951 5758, (internal extension 15758)**

 **br-safeguarding@nottingham.ac.uk**

Full details of the policy can be found online at:

 **nottingham.ac.uk/governance/policy-finder**

Appendix 2

Student referral to Mental Health Advisory Service

Form to be sent to admin team by email or fax:

BR-MH-Support@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk

Or

Phone: 0115 7484 652

Date of referral	
Name of student and preferred pronouns	
Address	
Saturn ID number (If known) or Date of Birth	
Mobile phone number	
Email	
Student's preferred method of contact	
Reason for referral and level of priority	
Contact with other agencies/ professionals etc?	
Referrer name and contact details	
(Email and telephone number)	

[Download the MHAS referral form](#)
[FAQs for referrers](#)

