

# Role of Staff in Assisting Students Facing Emotional Distress

This is a guide for staff and other members working at the university to help and support students facing different emotional challenges.

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## Introduction:

The University experience can be exciting and fun, and most students tend to look back on their time as being a positive experience. However, adapting to new life experience such as financial concerns, leaving from home for the first time, and the pursuit of academic excellence can all contribute to the transitional stress experienced during university life.

All our students are engaged in their journey towards independent adulthood, each in varying degrees. Many are navigating the realms of career development, interpersonal relationships, life aspirations, and self-identity. These situational and developmental difficulties frequently intersect with their academic performance.

While some students independently seek counselling services when stress hampers their personal and academic objectives, staff (HoDs, programme and module leaders, teaching assistants, professional service staff, etc) are often the first to notice when a student is struggling academically or emotionally.

Students may turn to staff due to their positions and, quite often, staff members will try to handle these challenging situations themselves. Although such interactions may be infrequent, their significance remains substantial.

Given your role as a member of staff you are well-positioned to identify emotionally distressed students. Notably, you might observe heightened anxiety among students during specific periods, such as exams, presentations, and holidays. Changes in student behaviour, particularly when inconsistent with your prior experiences with them, could signify an unspoken plea for assistance – a subtle "cry for help."

## Indicators of Distress include but are not limited to:

- Restlessness
- Agitation
- Heightened irritability, excessive aggression, or abrasive conduct
- Frequent delays and/or incomplete work
- Irregular class attendance
- Depression and/or diminished energy
- Noticeable decline in personal hygiene
- Withdrawal and/or apprehension
- Reliance on others (e.g., excessively seeking your presence or scheduling frequent appointments)
- Indecisiveness, confusion
- Peculiar, concerning, or hazardous actions

## Guidelines for Interaction:

Expressing your awareness of a student's distress, along with sincere concern for their well-being, can wield a profound impact. Whenever feasible, it is advisable to directly engage with a student who appears to be struggling academically and/or emotionally.

- Request a private meeting with the student.
- Briefly acknowledge your observations and perceptions of their situation, while candidly expressing your concerns.
- Attentively listen to the student's concerns, striving to comprehend their perspective without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing.
- Do not disregard odd or inappropriate behaviour. Privately communicate to the student that such actions are distracting and unsuitable.
- Being open to a disconnected student will enable them to respond more effectively to your concerns.
- Engage only within your comfort limits. In trying to aid a distressed student, you may occasionally become more involved than time or expertise allows.

## Consultation:

If uncertain about how to respond to a particular student, seek advice from the Counselling and Wellbeing Advisor. They can propose strategies for interacting with the student and facilitate the referral process.

The Counselling and Wellbeing Advisor is dedicated to assisting students in enhancing their abilities and resources to confront academic and interpersonal challenges and to mature into accountable, productive adults.

The service is free, confidential, encompasses 1-2-1 counselling and referrals to external services.

## Referring a student:

If you believe counselling could be beneficial, direct the student to Counselling and Wellbeing Services. Clearly communicate your belief that intervention could provide assistance in their situation. Inform the student that this service is both confidential and free. A collaborative decision-making approach is preferable.

If the student reacts defensively, reiterate your concerns and suggestions without imposing the matter. If the student responds positively, you can suggest they book for an appointment through the Student Hub website: <https://old.bue.edu.eg/student-counselling/>. You might offer to contact the Counselling and Wellbeing Services and provide relevant background information. In urgent situations, you should contact the Key Contacts provided in the Mental Health Policy.

You might also refer the student to our wellbeing guides for tips about different problems; found here: <https://old.bue.edu.eg/student-wellbeing-and-support-guides/>