



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

Students in Distress

GUIDELINE FOR STAFF RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

The past year has presented many challenges to us all. For students the impacts of the pandemic is on top of their participation at University and the need to juggle competing personal and academic responsibilities.

Students encounter a range of common challenges during their time at University, from setbacks related to assessment, to financial hardship and associated impacts, and personal and social challenges.

You may be the first person to have noticed that a student is experiencing difficulty. You may also be the first person that a student reaches out to when distressed.

This guideline provides general advice to staff on identifying and responding to students in distress. It is important to note that this cannot cover all situations, and will need adjustment and or consultation with UOW expertise depending upon the situation.

ACCESS TRAINING

[Mental Health First Aid](#)

[QPR \(Question, Persuade, Refer\) online training course](#)

[Sexual harassment and sexual assault: What are the drivers and how can staff respond?](#)

PROACTIVELY RECOGNISING DISTRESS

Some distressed students may seek help and advice, but others may need you to reach out to them.

Some signs that a student may be struggling include

- Lacking direction, or disengaged/ing from studies
- Appears to lack social connection within University
- Avoiding discussion of their academic progress or assessment
- Failing to attend classes, or submit assessments and/or examinations
- Engaging in negative self-talk
- Describing feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- Describing issues of life stressors outside or inside University

HELPING A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

LISTEN – listen to students. Talk in private. You don't necessarily need to offer solutions. Listening is important. People often say they're fine when asked - ***R U OK provides practical advice about how to ask the question.*** You may alert them to options available to them, such as reaching out to their subject coordinator, or tutor, or UOW's free ***counselling service.***

LET THEM RETAIN OR GAIN CONTROL – it is important to provide space for students to attempt to address their situation independently, to have control over what they wish to do. This may need you to show your support for them, even when their decision differs from the one you would make if you were in their situation.

BE KIND, NON-JUDGMENTAL AND CALM – this is the time to listen rather than ask them to act or to come up with suggestions. Non-judgmental listening is not easy (see ***Mental Health First Aid tips on being an effective non-judgmental listener***), and takes practice.

ACCESSING IMMEDIATE HELP

IN AN EMERGENCY

- **Call Triple Zero (000) for Police and/or Ambulance.** Always call Triple Zero (000) in situations where a life is in danger, a crime is taking place, or the situation is critical.
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency department where medical and counselling support will be provided for you.
- **If you are on any Campus, call 02 4221 4900 for UOW Security.** If you have the [UOW SafeZone](#) app, use it to contact the UOW Security team. Security will know your location on campus, respond and seek assistance from emergency services. If you are outside of the SafeZone, the app will prompt you and tell you. You can make a triple zero 000 telephone call as prompted.
- For a Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) provide call -1300 655 010. Website: [TIS](#)

Need immediate support call our free 24 hours

UOW Student Wellbeing Support Line

Call 1300 036 149

Text 0488 884 164

Available 365 days of the year including public holidays

NB: this includes support for staff who are responding to a student in distress

UOW Sexual Assault & Sexual Harassment advice - call **02 4298 1135** for information on support, UOW policies procedures and Investigation processes

Student Residences - On Call Manager **0438 898 042**

Access to a range of **free external services** including tailored services such as



If you are within Australia and are worried you might hurt yourself or feel you need to talk to someone and get immediate support you can call Lifeline at ANY time night or day.

Call 13 11 14



[headspace](#) provides free online and telephone support and counselling to young people 12 - 25 and their families and friends. If you're based in Australia and going through a tough time,

RELEVANT UOW POLICIES

- [Academic Advice to Students Policy](#)
- [Bullying Prevention Policy](#)
- [Compassionate or Compelling Circumstances Guidelines](#)
- [Critical Incident Guidelines](#)
- [Disability Policy - Students](#)
- [Grievance Policy](#)
- [Outbound Student Mobility Critical Incident Procedure](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Respect for Diversity Policy](#)
- [Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy](#)
- [Student Health Assessment and Leave Policy](#)