

Reality Check

*Steps for Identifying and Supporting
Students “At Risk” or In Distress*

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Legislation

The University has an obligation under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 to ensure the workplace health and safety of its staff, and to ensure that other persons (such as students, visitors, contractors) are not exposed to risks to their health and safety arising out of the University's activities.

Under legislation [Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992 and the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act 1991] it is unlawful to discriminate against, harass or victimise people with disabilities. Failure to make reasonable adjustments for a student with mental illness may constitute direct or indirect discrimination.

The Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 (HES Framework) includes a Section on wellbeing and safety that requires providers to provide timely and accurate advice on access to student support services and to promote and foster a safe environment on campus and online.

These Guidelines are to assist you to identify 'distressed' or 'at risk' students and to provide information about how to offer support and make referrals.

Background

University students can encounter significant challenges whilst completing their academic program. These challenges may be of an academic, social, health, family, work and/or financial nature. They can affect academic performance and persistence.

2007 and 2012 surveys by the ABS utilised the Kessler-10 scale of psychological distress. They stated that 70% of the population reported low distress, around 20% report moderate distress while 10% report high to very high distress. Australian studies (Stallman, 2010) indicate the levels of moderate to high psychological distress among University students to be in vicinity of 65%, and very high distress at 18%: compared to the general population of 26% and 3% respectively. Further, Stallman (2010) reported that only 34% of students with moderate to high risk of mental illness consulted a health professional.

Many students find adjusting to university takes time, and some find coping with the demands of university life stressful and challenging. When students experience a high level of stress, this can pose a serious threat to academic progress and personal wellbeing.

These students are at risk of dropping out or being placed on probation. Many students do not seek help early, and find their situation escalates and negatively impacts on their academic performance.

Many of the problems faced by students can be overcome or managed if they access relevant resources within or outside the University. To increase the likelihood that students will achieve their academic goals and to improve retention rates, it is important to provide timely assistance and accurate information that will address their issues or concerns.

Staff working directly with students (e.g. tutors, Student Success Advisors, HDR supervisors) are often in a position to recognise those who are in 'distress' or 'at risk', either personally or academically. Recognising the signs of emotional distress early, responding with genuine interest and concern in a timely manner, and linking students with the relevant support services can be essential to supporting students effectively.

Behaviour that puts the person or others "at risk" physically or psychologically, or that has a negative impact on the ability of others to work or study needs to be addressed quickly and fairly. The issues surrounding the behaviour need to be resolved, whether or not the behaviour is associated with acute or longer term mental illness.

Related Policies and Procedures

- *Practical Wisdom—Steps for Managing Disruptive Student Behaviour*
- *Student Sexual Assault, Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination Policy*
- *Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Student Sexual Assault, Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination*
- *Student Wellbeing and Safety Policy*
- *Domestic and Family Violence Support Policy*
- *Health and Safety Policy*
- *Equal Opportunities Policy*
- *International Student Critical Incident Management Policy and Procedure Student Charter*
- *Students with Disabilities Policy*
- *Student Administration Policy*

*** Check the Policy Library for updates.**

These Guidelines are to assist you to identify 'distressed' or 'at risk' students and provide information about how to offer support and make referrals.

1 Recognising Students in Distress and/or At Risk

Students can experience mental, emotional or physical distress in response to situational stressors, complex trauma, mental health condition and/or difficult personal circumstances. In rare instances they may be subject to acute episodes of mental illness with the potential to harm themselves and/or others.

Common signs which indicate students are suffering from distress can be evident in academic performance, physical appearance, personal and social behaviour or in evidence of or perceived threat to self/others.

Some examples include:

Early Indicators

- *asking staff directly for help with the situation causing the distress*
- *being overly dependent on academic or administrative staff beyond what seems reasonable*
- *uncharacteristically poor performance or preparation, or marked decline in grades*
- *repeated requests for special consideration or deadline extensions*
- *failure to submit assessment items*
- *excessive unexplained absences from class*
- *expressed intention to drop out, transfer to another course, or worrying about failure*
- *noticeable changes in personal hygiene or appearance*
- *sudden changes in attitude or behaviour, including disruptive or aggressive behaviour¹*
- *noticeable changes in energy level, including loss of motivation, signs of anxiety, agitation, depression or low self esteem*
- *neglect of personal responsibilities*
- *unexplained crying, anger or outbursts*
- *hypervigilance*
- *symptoms of anxiety or depression*
- *direct or indirect suicidal threats*

More Extreme Indicators

- *withdrawing socially or verbally, and appearing to be isolated from help*
- *panic attacks*

- *irrational conversation—garbled and disjointed thoughts or speech*
- *auditory or visual hallucinations*
- *disorientation*
- *disturbing material on academic assignments*
- *bizarre, paranoid or threatening behaviour*
- *behaviour that regularly interferes with the effective management of class*
- *inability to express or communicate effectively*
- *expressed feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and a belief that things are out of control*
- *severe depression*
- *inconsolable grief*
- *history of suicide attempts.*

Case Study 1

An international student sends an email to a tutor applying for an extension on an assessment item and discloses distressing personal information. The tutor is unsure how to respond appropriately to the email, and is concerned for the student's wellbeing. The tutor speaks with a counsellor regarding drafting their email reply, and includes in their response referral information for Counselling and Wellbeing and Health and Medical Services, and suggests the student make contact with an International Student Advisor. The tutor also invites the student to come to see them regarding any academic matters. The student comes to see the tutor to discuss the assessment item and volunteers that they are feeling better and more able to manage uni. The tutor follows up with the student via an email a week later to check in.

¹ See Practical Wisdom—Steps for Managing Disruptive Behaviour

2 Ways You Can Help

Offer to discuss or correspond privately with the student

- *This is more conducive to student disclosure, and will minimise embarrassment and defensiveness. It will also allow an increased understanding of what difficult issues the student is experiencing.*

Express your concern

- *In a compassionate manner, discuss your observations using non-judgmental terms and express your reasons. Describe the behaviours that give you cause for concern. For example, "I've noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned" Or asking "Are you okay?".*

Listen

- *Listen carefully to what the student says, remain calm and genuinely try to understand the student's situation, without agreeing or disagreeing.*
- *Be open minded and non-judgmental as this facilitates increased disclosure from the student.*

Give hope and offer support

- *Restate the student's concerns to check your own understanding of the issue.*
- *Support the student to identify options for action and explore the possible consequences.*
- *Advise students that support is available for them.*
- *Link students with the most appropriate support services as soon as possible.*

Set clear limits

- *Be honest about the limits on your ability to help, as it is important to stay within your scope of practice and comfort level in terms of involvement, skills and time commitment.*
- *Healthy limits enable you to intervene and assist students in an effective and personally satisfying manner.*

Remember

- *You do not need to solve the problem.*

- *Don't deal with a crisis alone.*
- *Look after yourself and seek help and support from others.*
- *Inform a supervisor, Head of School or senior person if appropriate.*
- *If a student's behaviour becomes disruptive to the normal business of other students and of staff, you need to take action. Refer to Guidelines for Promoting a Positive Learning Environment through Managing Disruptive Student Behaviour.*

Case Study 2

A student speaks to their lecturer about struggling with an upcoming assessment. During this discussion the student finds themselves disclosing that last month they were sexually assaulted by another student. The student states that they have not told anyone else about this and they start to cry. The student reports that they tried to “forget everything and move on” but they are not sleeping well and realise they are really struggling to concentrate on their course work and upcoming assessments. The student also discloses that they are fearful of seeing the other student (alleged perpetrator) while attending University so they have been staying at home and avoiding the University as much as possible.

The lecturer thanks the student for speaking out about this. The lecturer advised the student that sexual assault is not tolerated at Griffith University and there are a number of options to report internally (formally or informally) if they want to. The lecturer shows the student the Safe Campuses website and briefly explains their option, advising that the decision is completely up to the student. The lecturer suggests the student see Counselling and Wellbeing for support / Counsellor, Violence Response and Prevention for support and to discuss reporting and anything else that might be relevant following sexual assault. The student eventually says that this might be a good idea and calls the Sexual Harassment and Assault Counselling line for a priority appointment.

The lecturer also suggests that the student apply for an extension on the upcoming assessment and to consider applying for special consideration. The lecturer suggests that the student also consider similar for any other courses (as needed).

The lecturer emails the student the following week to check in as previously arranged. The student advises that they are engaged with counselling and are considering applying for special consideration. The lecturer advised the student to touch base again if needed.

3 Referral to Services on Campus

Services available during business hours

Counselling and Wellbeing

Gold Coast	5552 8734
Logan	3382 1159
Mount Gravatt	3735 5669
Nathan	3735 7470
South Bank QCA	3735 7470
South Bank QCGU	3735 7470

Personal Violence 5552 9600

Counselling / Support (priority appointments)

Health and Medical Services

Gold Coast	5552 8734
Nathan	3735 7299

When to refer

- the student discloses personal violence (current, recent or historical)
- the student's level of distress is significantly interrupting their ability to learn and/or their day to day functioning.
- the problem is more serious than you feel comfortable handling.
- you have helped as much as you can and further assistance is needed.
- you are concerned about the safety of the student or others.

How to refer

- Advise the student that you are concerned and suggest that they consider the services available on campus. Example: “I can see that you are really distressed by this and I am concerned about you. I would really encourage you to consider talking to one of the counsellors from Counselling and Wellbeing. Their services are strictly confidential, free of charge and voluntary.”
- Encourage the student to contact Counselling and Wellbeing directly and immediately.
- Inform the student that services are free of charge and confidential.
- If the student is reluctant or hesitant, with their permission offer to make the call on their behalf, and/or offer to walk them over.
- Provide the student with contact details for Counselling and Wellbeing, as well as after hours crisis support.
- Follow up to ensure that they have the necessary support—remember though that their attendance is confidential and the student has the right not to disclose if they have accessed the service.

4 Crisis and/or After Hour Support

If you are concerned about the student's mental wellbeing or consider they may cause harm to themselves or others, take appropriate and immediate action including:

- Ensure you have the student's name (and contact details if possible).
- Alert your supervisor.
- Contact security on your campus if necessary.
- Ring the police or ambulance on 000 if necessary.
- Contact Counselling and Wellbeing and/or Health and Medical Service for referral or support.
- If the student is an international student, contact an international student advisor.
- Stay with the student if safe to do so and if possible.
- Afterwards, complete an incident report.

Campus Support Team (Security)

Internal Phone Number (All Campuses) 7777

Gold Coast	5552 7777
Logan	3382 1717
Mount Gravatt	3735 7777
Nathan	3735 7777
South Bank QCA	3735 6226
South Bank QCGU	3735 6226

Griffith University Crisis Support Service

5 pm—9 am weekdays, 24/7 weekends and public holidays.

Call 1300 785 442 or text 0488 868 742

External Support Services (after hours/crisis lines)

Lifeline Telephone Counselling (24hrs)	13 11 14
Acute Care Service (Mental Health)	5537 0660
DV Connect (24hr Women's line)	1800 811 811
DV Connect (24hr Men's line)	1800 600 636
Sexual Assault Line (24hr)	1800 010 120
Mensline (24hrs)	1300 789 978
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467

5 If the Student Declines Support/Referral

- Provide student with contact details for future reference / support (internal options and crisis support number/s)
- Respect the rights of the student if they do not want to talk to anyone or seek help, as long as they are not a threat to their own safety or to others.
- If you are concerned the student may harm themselves or others, you need to inform the student that as part of your duty of care you are obliged to discuss your concerns with your supervisor or other relevant staff.
- If you are still concerned about the student or the matter is serious, consult your supervisor, Head of Department, Counselling and Wellbeing and / or Health and Medical Services.
- If the student's behaviour is disruptive to the learning environment refer to Practical Wisdom—Steps for Managing Disruptive Student Behaviour.
- Document your interactions with the student (brief overview).

Client Confidentiality

It is often a good idea to follow up with students after the referral is made to show your concern about outcomes.

Counselling and Wellbeing works within ethical limits of confidentiality and therefore cannot release information about the student or specifics about the situation to anyone, inside or outside of the University, without written permission from the student, or if required by law, or if there is imminent danger to the student or to others.

Counselling and Wellbeing can answer your general questions about making referrals, offer you information about psychological concerns and problems in general, and take information from you about the student.

Referring to Other Support Offered

Presenting yourself as knowledgeable about the range of support services available at Griffith University can ease a student's discomfort about seeking help. By being familiar with Student Health, Counselling and Wellbeing you can refer students to the most appropriate help and in a timely manner.

Contact Counselling and Wellbeing if the student has an issue or concern relating to:

- *their mental health and wellbeing*
- *personal or relationship problems*
- *personal violence (including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic and family violence)*
- *finding the balance between uni and family/work*
- *adjusting to University*
- *housing or accommodation*
- *money, loans and fees (including financial cost of studying)*
- *selecting the right course*
- *establishing a career or needing part-time or vacation work*
- *needing to consult a nurse or doctor for health information or assessment*
- *extra tutoring or a disability that may affect study*
- *being treated unfairly (bullying, harassment, discrimination)*
- *requiring pastoral care or spiritual guidance.*

Case Study 3

In a first year seminar, a female student who rarely contributes much to the discussion, talks about self-harming. The lecturer is very concerned about this and other students are obviously very uncomfortable with what has been said. The lecturer manages the situation in the class by acknowledging the seriousness of her comments,

but is unsure about their role in addressing this issue with the student after the class, so she rings the Head, Counselling and Wellbeing. Together they identify an appropriate course of action for support and referral and the outcome is very positive for the student. The lecturer also decides to attend Mental Health First Aid Training offered by the University to build her confidence in dealing with such issues in the future.

6 Training and Development

There is a range of seminars, training and resources available for staff and students to promote and develop personal and academic wellbeing. Improvements in personal functioning impact significantly on academic success by strengthening student engagement, commitment, purpose, efficacy, and persistence.

An Introduction to Mental Health

- *This three hour introductory Mental Health workshop includes information about signs of mental illness, appropriate responses and referral options. This workshop can be tailored to cover specific issues of relevance to your group.*

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

All Griffith staff are encouraged to undertake Mental Health First Aid Training offered by the University, currently at no costs to elements. This nationally recognised training builds awareness, skills and confidence in responding to people who are exhibiting behaviours that cause concern. Students in leadership positions can also be supported to undertake this training.

The two day MHFA workshop can help you to:

- *strengthen mental health literacy*
- *recognise signs and symptoms in someone with a mental health problem*
- *respond to various mental health crisis situations*
- *engage with and support the person*
- *direct people to appropriate professional help.*

Topics covered include:

- *common mental health disorders including anxiety, depression, substance use and psychosis*
- *the MHFA action plan*
- *responding to crisis situations such as suicide, panic attacks and psychotic states*
- *referral pathways.*

See APPENDIX 1 for a Ready Reference Guide

Personal Violence

There are a range of education sessions available for staff and students to raise awareness and gain confidence in responding effectively to disclosures of personal violence and being an active bystander within the community.

- ***'MATE' Bystander Program*** is an education and intervention program teaching us all to be leaders in the prevention of violence and harmful behaviour. It is designed to teach community members how to recognise abuse and have the confidence to speak out and offer help.
- ***'Responding to Disclosures of Personal Violence'*** focuses on increasing knowledge and confidence in responding to disclosures of personal violence (including sexual violence, domestic and family violence, childhood trauma).

Promoting Wellbeing and Success workshops

- *This suite of wellbeing workshops can be offered as a 'one-off' or series to your students. Workshops can be offered during, before or after lectures, or as a component of common time, orientation, mentoring, leadership and other programs. Topics include stress management, self-care, building resilience, preparing for placement, relaxation and improving focus. Workshops can also be developed on topics of specific interest to your students.*
- *More information about these programs is available from Counselling and Wellbeing.*

Case Study 4

A second year student fails an assessment piece and stops attending classes. The lecturer bumps into the student on campus and notices the student is looking very tired and dishevelled. The student reports they haven't attended classes as they can't afford the bus fare to campus and becomes teary throughout the discussion, disclosing that they feel overwhelmed and depressed. The lecturer offers to speak with the student in their office. The lecturer listens to the student describe their current circumstances and feelings. The student feels uncomfortable with the lecturer's suggestion of counselling, but is open to talking with a Welfare and Student Liaison Officer regarding their financial problems. The student books an appointment from the lecturer's office. The Welfare and Student Liaison Officer is able to help the student with financial issues and supports the student to make a counselling appointment. As discussed and agreed, in following days the lecturer follows up with the student by email and the student reports that both the counselling and welfare appointments were helpful, and that they are feeling more hopeful. They arrange to meet to discuss the student's academic progress.

APPENDIX 1. Ready Reference Guide

The following list may assist as a ready reference to support and development services on campus offered by Student Health, Counselling and Wellbeing griffith.edu.au/health-counselling-wellbeing

Note: one phone number and email address have been provided — this contact person can direct you or the student to the most appropriate service provider, or you can contact the relevant office on your campus.

Student's support need and/or development interest	Contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> highly anxious about, or having difficulties with their academic performance or specific assessment items having difficulty relating to other students (and this is a problem for them, or for group work) experiencing relationship or personal problems impacting on their studies finding it hard to discuss their difficulties with you or other academic staff struggling with aspects of self identity (cultural, ethnic, sexual etc) wanting to build interpersonal skills experiencing mental health issues recent, historical or ongoing sexual assault or sexual harassment recent, historical or ongoing domestic and family violence ongoing intimate partner violence 	<p>Counselling and Wellbeing</p> <p>07 3735 7299 (Nathan)</p> <p>07 5552 8734 (GC)</p> <p>counsellor@griffith.edu.au</p> <p>Personal Violence priority appointments: 5552 9600</p> <p>Griffith University Crisis Support Service 5 pm—9 am weekdays, 24/7 weekends and public holidays.</p> <p>Call 1300 785 442 or</p> <p>Text 0488 884 146</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in financial difficulty experiencing accommodation/tenancy problems affecting their studies needing information regarding appeals or grievances 	<p>Student Financial Support</p> <p>07 3735 7470</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uncertain about their choice of program wanting assurance regarding positive career outcomes for their program being keen to start their career management in first year... or to get work experience needing help finding a part-time job to continue their studies 	<p>Careers and Employment Service</p> <p>Student Success</p> <p>07 3735 7470</p> <p>t.dobinson@griffith.edu.au</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have health issues impacting on study including mental health concerns or conditions 	<p>Health and Medical Services</p> <p>Student Services</p> <p>07 3735 7299</p> <p>emma.morgan@griffith.edu.au</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have some form of learning disability (not disclosed) need special accommodations / alternative arrangements due to disability 	<p>Student Disability and Accessibility</p> <p>07 3735 9282</p> <p>c.easte@griffith.edu.au</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> experiencing harassment, discrimination or bullying 	<p>A list of trained staff HDCOs is available on the Griffith phonebook. Contact your student association (SRC, Student Guild, GUPSA or GCAP) for trained student HDCOs and other advocacy information</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have suffered a significant loss (family member, close friend) need to talk to someone about spirituality/faith issues 	<p>Pastoral Care</p> <p>07 3735 7113</p> <p>chaplain@griffith.edu.au</p>

Counselling and Wellbeing

- promotes wellbeing and raises awareness regarding mental health and illness for all members of the Griffith community
- useful links to relevant Griffith policies and procedures.

Links to community, specialist and emergency resources and services.

griffith.edu.au/counselling

Safe Campuses

The site makes clear, Griffith's zero tolerance approach to incidents of sexual assault, sexual harassment, bullying, harassment and discrimination and provides information under the themes:

Frequently Asked Questions; Available Support; Reporting options; Responding to disclosures; Creating respectful campus communities; and Taskforce information.

griffith.edu.au/safe-campus

Learning Services

A range of free workshops, consultations and self-help resources to help students succeed at university including:

- **Academic skills**—Develop strategies for effective reading and study, time management, academic website writing, critical thinking and more
- **Computing skills**—Brush up on Word, Excel, Access, PowerPoint, and EndNote and other software. For new and advanced computer users.
- **Library research skills**—Get a head start with finding items and researching effectively for assignments.

griffith.edu.au/library/student#help

International Office

- Enrolment, orientation and transition assistance for International Degree students
- Study Abroad programs for overseas students who wish to study at Griffith University
- Student Exchange provide domestic students with opportunities to study overseas
- English language programs
- Information regarding scholarships, financial aid and sponsorships.

griffith.edu.au/international

GUMURRII Student Support Unit

- Enrolment, orientation and transition support for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Academic support via personal tutoring to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous Australian students
- Help with applications for grants and scholarships
- Assistance with transition to and engagement with the Griffith community.

griffith.edu.au/gumurrii-student-support-unit

Mentoring

- Assistance and resources for staff and students to establish, manage and sustain effective and successful mentoring programs.
- Information about mentoring and leadership activity and programs across Griffith University and beyond.

griffith.edu.au/student-mentoring

All Services

my.griffith.edu.au

New Students

griffith.edu.au/first-trimester

Financial Support

griffith.edu.au/student-support/financial-support



Griffith University acknowledges the people who are the traditional custodians of the land, pays respect to Elders, past and present, and extends that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.