

# Student Mental Health & Wellbeing Guidelines for Supervisors and Nominated Personal Tutors of Post-Graduate Research Students

These guidelines aim to:

- 1. Support staff to identify students experiencing difficulties;**
- 2. Provide guidance on how to respond to students experiencing difficulties;**
- 3. Detail the support services available to students at the University;**
- 4. Explain how to refer PhD students to the University's Wellbeing Support Services.**

## **1 What signs do I look out for?**

- Isolation/withdrawal, e.g. lack of response to emails and failing to turn-up to pre-arranged meetings with supervisors.
- Changes in physical appearance, e.g. unkempt appearance, weight gain or loss, signs of chronic fatigue or exhaustion.
- Lack of interest in study or declining academic performance – this might include failing to meet previously agreed deadlines (e.g. for upgrade or annual review panels) or avoidance of work.
- Intense or unhealthy level of interest in study, e.g. changes to students' usual pattern of study spending excessive time studying at the expense of other activities such as sleep, eating and socialising.
- Unusual changes in behaviour including exhibiting signs of anxiety or anger. Student may mention experiencing sleep problems, or show clear signs of unease or distress.
- Sharing thoughts of harming themselves or others. Take this seriously and refer the student immediately to the appropriate student support service/s (see below). If inferred by the student e.g. "I don't see the point anymore" or "I don't know if I can carry on" or "Everyone would be better off without me" – ask the student to clarify what they mean: "I am concerned about what you've just said, do you feel able to keep yourself safe?"

## 2 How should I respond?

- Listen to what the student has to say if they are sharing details. Explain that anything they share will be treated discreetly, but if further assistance is required, you may share some details on a 'need to know' basis to ensure they receive the best support and – if necessary – to make reasonable adjustments to study. Inform the student if anything is shared, copying them into any referral email you send.
- Avoid using complex language when explaining or discussing the situation with the student, especially if the student's first language is not English. Check they have understood the process of sharing any information they have disclosed.
- When listening and responding to the student try to:
  - Face the student and maintain eye contact;
  - Put items – e.g. computer, mobile phone, pen – to one side whilst you are listening;
  - Be attentive, but relaxed;
  - If you need to make a brief note, ask permission to do so, jot down your note and put the pen down again to refocus attention on the student;
  - Keep an open mind – avoid making judgements;
  - Don't interrupt and don't impose your own 'solutions';
  - Wait for the student to pause before asking any clarifying questions;
  - Ask questions only to ensure understanding, e.g. "Has something happened that has made you feel this way?"; "Have you approached any support services for assistance?"
- Maintain boundaries: supervisors are not trained counsellors or mental health professionals. It is not necessary for you to offer further guidance – outside of academic supervision, and routine personal support – instead **refer the student to the relevant support service**.
- If the student is meeting you 1:1 for a supervisory meeting, but begins to explain challenges or difficulties that you find uncomfortable or unable to respond to in an appropriate way, ask if they would be comfortable with you bringing someone else into the room. This may be the student's nominated Personal Tutor, the departmental Senior Tutor, or the co-supervisor. Always seek the student's permission to do this.
- There may be specific issues that they are not comfortable discussing with you as their supervisor - this could be due to gender, ethnicity, personality, fit...etc. Be understanding and support the student in finding a relevant individual with whom they feel comfortable enough to have these conversations.
- If they are having issues with their physical or mental health, always suggest they make an appointment with their GP, who can provide a good source of support initially, and refer them to relevant support services on-campus.
- Consider if you need to make Programme staff aware of the student's difficulties.
- Arrange a follow-up meeting with the student to monitor the situation and ensure they are receiving any academic support they require.

### Ways to start a conversation:

"I have noticed that... (describe concerning behaviour) and I am concerned about you." (It is generally recommended to start with this phrase).

"I have been feeling concerned about you lately."

"I am concerned about what you've just said; do you feel able to keep yourself safe?"

"Recently, I have noticed some differences in you and wondered how you are doing."

"I wanted to check in with you because you have seemed more (describe behaviour e.g. isolated/reserved/upset) lately."

### Questions you can ask:

"When did you begin feeling like this?"

"Did something happen that made you start feeling this way?"

"How can I best support you right now?"

"Have you thought about getting help?"

### What you can say to help:

"You are not alone in this. I'm here to help support you with your studies."

"I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I am concerned for you and want to help."

If a student speaks or behaves in a way that might indicate they are thinking of harming themselves (including thoughts of suicide) this can be a very concerning situation to deal with. Suicidal thoughts are common, with around 20.6% of the adult population admitting they have had thoughts of ending their lives (NHS Digital, 2016). If there are concerns that a student may be experiencing suicidal thoughts, try to initiate a conversation to ascertain if they need immediate professional support to keep them safe. So for example, if the student said: "I don't know if I can carry on" it would be important to say something like, "I am concerned about what you have just said, do you feel unsafe?" If the student reports that they have been thinking seriously about suicide and cannot keep safe, it would be imperative to immediately contact Wellbeing Support Services (see Sections 3 and 4 below).

You may also find it useful to refer to the [University's Safeguarding Policy](#), which also includes a link to the Student Support Referral Pathway.

### 3 What Wellbeing Support Services are available at the University?

**Student Support.** Effectively acts as a portal to other support services available at the University. Initial referrals can be made to the Student Support team who will forward the referral to the appropriate support service at the University.

Website: [warwick.ac.uk/services/studentsupport](http://warwick.ac.uk/services/studentsupport)

Tel: 024 7657 5570 (Ext 75570) Email: [studentsupport@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:studentsupport@warwick.ac.uk)

**Counselling Service.** Works with students to help them think through their psychological/emotional difficulties and effect change. The services provided by the University include face-to-face individual counselling, email counselling, group therapy and workshops. Examples of workshops run by the service include Managing Procrastination, Study Life Balance, Stress and Anxiety Reduction and Maintaining Motivation.

Website: [warwick.ac.uk/services/counselling](http://warwick.ac.uk/services/counselling)

Tel: 024 7652 3761 (Ext 23761) Email: [counselling@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:counselling@warwick.ac.uk)

**Mental Health and Wellbeing Team.** Mental Health Co-ordinators form the core of this team, meeting with students diagnosed with a mental health condition or who have a severe and/or enduring mental health difficulty/disability. They work with students to:

- identify support needs and arrange reasonable adjustments to study where students are affected by a mental health disability;
- provide guidance on Disabled Students' Allowances applications;
- arrange access to Mental Health Mentoring for students in receipt of funding, where mentoring has been recommended;
- liaise with academic and other departments on behalf of students, where agreed;
- discuss strategies for managing student life and provide information and access to other services within the University and local mental health services.

[Wellbeing Co-ordinators, and Outreach Wellbeing Advisors](#), are available to advise on a number of strategies which may help students improve their wellbeing, resulting in a more productive and enjoyable time at Warwick. They offer Wellbeing Lounge sessions, at various times during the week – details on their website.

Mental Health Mentors, provide specialist mental health mentoring for students with mental health disabilities who receive Disabled Students' Allowances. They also offer Wellbeing workshop sessions to help students manage stress and anxiety more effectively.

Website: [warwick.ac.uk/services/mentalhealth](http://warwick.ac.uk/services/mentalhealth)

**Disability Services.** Work with students who declare any disability or learning difference to ensure that appropriate reasonable adjustments are made for the duration of their studies. They also signpost students to other appropriate support services, if additional support is required.

Website: [warwick.ac.uk/services/disability](http://warwick.ac.uk/services/disability)

Tel: 024 7615 0641 (Ext 50641)      Email: [disability@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:disability@warwick.ac.uk)

### **Other Support Services:**

**Health Centre.** A University General Practitioner (GP) practice situated in the heart of the campus serving the Students and Staff (plus their families) who live on campus or within the catchment area. Registered students are allocated to one of the two practices based at the Health Centre known as the Blue Practice or Pink Practice.

Website: <https://www.uwhc.org.uk/>

Tel: 024 7652 4888 (Ext 24888)      Online contact form [here](#).

**Chaplaincy.** The Chaplaincy provides a free space for students, without judgment, where they are free to drop in and make themselves a hot drink. There are seats in the lounge space, and friends are welcome. Chaplains are located at the Chaplaincy and can lend a sympathetic ear for students, whatever their beliefs or faith.

Website: [warwick.ac.uk/services/chaplaincy](http://warwick.ac.uk/services/chaplaincy)

Tel: 024 7652 3519 (Ext 23519)

**Campus Security.** The Campus Security team is part of the People Group and has a primary focus on safeguarding everyone within the campus community. They are trained to deal with mental health and wellbeing issues so should be the first point of contact during an emergency.

Website: [warwick.ac.uk/services/campus-security](http://warwick.ac.uk/services/campus-security)

Tel:     Control Centre (general enquiries) 024 7652 2083 (Ext 22083)

          Emergency only 024 7652 2222 (Ext 22222)

Concerns about **radicalisation/extremism.**

Website: [warwick.ac.uk/services/supportservices/prevent](http://warwick.ac.uk/services/supportservices/prevent)

**Residential Life Team.** The RLT live alongside students within the Halls of Residence and are a key part of welfare and support.

Website: [warwick.ac.uk/services/residentiallife](http://warwick.ac.uk/services/residentiallife)

Tel: 024 7657 5570 (Ext 75570)      Email: [residentialteam@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:residentialteam@warwick.ac.uk)

**Warwick Students' Union Advice Centre.** Students facing challenges may find the [SU Advice Centre](#) particularly helpful. The Advice Centre is a free, confidential, impartial and non-judgmental service, independent of the University and available to all students. They provide practical support, advice and signposting on personal issues, accommodation matters, course-related problems, funding and finances, immigration issues, or complaints and disciplinary proceedings.

Website: <https://www.warwicksu.com/>

Tel: 024 7657 2824 (Ext 72824)      Email: [advice@warwicksu.com](mailto:advice@warwicksu.com)

#### **4      How do I refer a student to Wellbeing Support Services?**

Be supportive and talk through your concerns with the student directly. During this discussion, you may want to briefly share information about the various support services available to students at the University and encourage them to engage with or access these services directly. If you feel they are unlikely to engage with the services of their own volition, you are able to refer the student on their behalf – with their permission. However, if there are serious concerns that the student may be at risk or pose a risk of harm to others, then it may be necessary to refer the student to Wellbeing Support Services (or Campus Security if there is an imminent risk of harm) without the student's permission.

These referrals can be via email or phone using the contact details provided in Section 3 above. Student Support is generally the best initial portal for engagement with Wellbeing Support Services.

#### **Need further advice and support?**

If you need further support or guidance, you can contact your departmental Senior Tutor. You can find a list of all departmental senior tutors [here](#). The departmental Senior Tutor is the local expert on personal tutoring matters, so is a good source of information and advice. You can also refer on more complex student cases to your departmental Senior Tutor, or to your [Faculty Senior Tutor](#) within the Dean of Students' Office.