



WESTERN SYDNEY  
UNIVERSITY

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

RESOURCES FOR STAFF





# 1. WHY MENTAL HEALTH?

Western Sydney University aims to provide a safe, supportive and healthy environment for all members of the Western Sydney University community.

Mental health is everyone's business and we are likely to be affected by mental health changes, concerns or difficulties either personally or professionally through our work and association with students, staff and colleagues.

Achieving and maintaining good mental health and wellbeing is important for everyone. The information in this booklet will give you strategies to support yourself and others. For more information about these resources, email **counselling@westernsydney.edu.au**.

## 2. DEFINING MENTAL HEALTH/WELLBEING AND MENTAL ILLNESS

**Mental health** is more than the absence of mental disorder or disability. It is a ‘state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community’ (World Health Organisation, WHO, 2018).

**Wellbeing** is a state of mental and physical health characterised by comfort and happiness. Mental health changes can occur in stressful times. They can affect the way you think, handle everyday situations and work, and they can impact on your relationships. It is important to be aware of these changes and to get the right support at the right time. About one in four Australians will experience mental health changes at some time in their lives.

Some people may experience mental health changes that may be defined as ill-health. **Mental ill-health** is defined as the spectrum of experiences that contributes to a compromise of mental wellbeing and can prevent a person from getting on with their life as usual. Mental ill-health can significantly affect how a person thinks, behaves and interacts with others. It will impact a person’s ability to perform everyday activities like work and study. When faced with distressing, concerning, disturbing, or aggressive behaviour, it is often hard to know how to respond. The Mental Health and Wellbeing team have developed this resource so you can respond with greater knowledge and understanding of mental health.

# 3. RISK/VULNERABLE GROUPS

University can be a stressful time for students. Not only is it a strange environment for many, but the stress associated with assessments and exams as well as feelings of inadequacy and not fitting in, coupled with the pressure that exists in everyday life such as employment, finance and family concerns, can lead many students to experience mental health issues.

There are a number of risk factors which make the prevalence of mental health issues greater amongst university students, such as;

- Travel
- Finances
- Work/Study/Family balance
- Increased Stress
- Increased workload
- Deadlines
- Relationship issues
- Study skills
- First in family to study
- Time management
- Isolation (international students)
- Drug and Alcohol use
- Poor diet
- Lack of sleep

Further, particular students may face significant challenges, particularly during transition and adjustment to university, these include;

- International students
- Rural/regional students
- Students from low socio economic backgrounds (many of these students are the first in their family to attend university).
- Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander students
- Students with disabilities.
- Students who identify as LGBTIQ

# 4. WARNING SIGNS

As a member of staff you are well positioned to notice changes in student and colleagues' behaviour. If you have any concerns about the behaviour of a student or colleague, please don't hesitate to contact the University Counselling Service on 1300 668 370 to discuss your concerns with a member of the Mental Health and Wellbeing team.

Some common signs to look out for are:

- Declining class attendance,
- Social Withdrawal
- Assignments not submitted
- Displaying unusual behaviours or out of character behaviours.
- Changes in mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Unusual restlessness/ agitation
- Sending of unusual emails (content and quantity)
- Changes in appearance

# 5. **RECOGNISING DISTRESSING, CONCERNING OR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS**

Examples of distressed behaviour may include:

- being tearful, sad, worried
- having low self esteem
- having low motivation
- changes in mood and appearance
- having difficulty concentrating
- unusual restlessness or agitation.

Examples of concerning behaviour may include:

- out of character behaviour
- confusing or inappropriate behaviours (Concerning behaviour may include: Behaviour that is out of character, confusing or inappropriate).

# 6.

## HOW TO RESPOND TO DISTRESSING, CONCERNING AND/OR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS

1. Consider the safety of yourself and others at all times.
2. Offer support through diffusing the situation by locating a quiet place to support and discuss concerns (if safe to do so).
3. Use positive communication strategies:
  - a. Listen actively
  - b. Clearly explain information
  - c. You may consider asking 'how can I help?'
  - d. You may like to offer support contacts or appropriate services
  - e. Try to have one main person chatting to the distressed individual.
4. General good practice principles when meeting with people causing concern or displaying distressed behaviours include:
  - a. Keeping the office door open during meetings
  - b. Sitting closest to the door with no obstacles in the way between you and the door
  - c. Removing items from desk that may potentially cause harm to self or others (e.g. scissors) before the meeting
  - d. Alerting another staff member of your meeting, and if necessary, invite another staff member to be present or in the vicinity
  - e. Requesting a Western Sydney University Campus Safety and Security Officer to be present if you're unsure or feel unsafe



# 7. STRATEGIES TO USE WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH CONCERNING OR DISTRESSED PEOPLE INCLUDE THE DEFUSE AND SUDS PRINCIPLES

## **DEFUSE Principle**

### **DEFUSE**

- D**o stay calm
- E**stablish some ground rules
- F**ocus on positive outcomes
- U**ncover what the person wants
- S**peak slowly and listen
- E**ncourage the person to seek options

## **SUDS Principle**

### **SUDS**

- S**tay calm
- U**se open, non-aggressive body language
- D**o not raise your voice
- S**ecurity should be contacted immediately on **1300 737 003**

# 8.

## SUICIDAL BEHAVIOURS

**Suicide is the leading cause of death for Australians aged 15-44years (Blackdog, 2019).**

The reasons for suicide are complex and multifaceted, influenced by the vulnerabilities, risk factors and events in a person's life and their interactions with other social, cultural, economic and environmental factors (Everymind, 2018). As suicide impacts not only the person who is suicidal, but also their family, friends, carers, workplaces, schools and communities, suicide prevention is in every person and community's interests.

Western Sydney University is committed not only to reducing the risks factors associated with suicide but to also enhance the protective factors that prevent suicide and suicidal behaviours. These factors can include, but are not limited to; enhancing a sense of belonging or feeling of connectedness, reducing mental health stigma, developing skills to support someone in crisis and providing social supports or referrals to appropriate services (Everymind, 2018).

# 9.

## RESPONDING TO SUICIDAL BEHAVIOURS

Ensuring the Safety of the WSU community is paramount, if you are not 100% sure that someone is going to be safe, call Campus Safety and Security on **1300 737 003** or **2300** from an internal fixed phone. If the student/ colleague is not on campus, call Emergency Services on **000**.

Further, below are a number of things to consider:

- You are not responsible for saving the student or the situation
- Talking to someone about suicide will not encourage them to act on suicidal thoughts
- Be direct and talk openly
- Listen actively, take the person seriously
- Ensure safety
- Help with follow up with the student, accompany them to the counselling office, be active with referrals
- Debrief after with someone from the counselling service or EAP

# 10.

## IDENTIFYING POTENTIALLY AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS

If you perceive there to be imminent harm to yourself or someone else contact Campus Safety and Security immediately on **1300 737 003**. If harm is not imminent use the DEFUSE and SUDS principles.

### STAMP

#### Staring

- prolonged glaring
- absence of eye contact

#### Tone and volume of voice

- sharp or caustic retorts
- sarcasm
- demeaning inflection
- increase in volume

#### Anxiety

- flushed appearance
- hyperventilation
- rapid speech
- dilated pupils
- confusion and disorientation
- expressed lack of understanding

### Mumbling

- talking under their breath
- criticising staff or the University just loudly enough to be heard
- repetition of the same or similar questions or requests
- slurring or incoherent speech

### Pacing

- walking around confined areas
- walking back and forth

Reference:

Luck, L, Jackson, D and Usher, K. 2007.'STAMP: components of observable behaviour that indicate potential for violence in emergency departments'. Journal of Advanced Nursing 59(1), pp11-19

# 11.

## RESPONDING TO AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS

### Be safe

- have a clear, safe exit
- position yourself to be out of reach to avoid physical injury
- remove anything that could be used as a weapon

### Be available

- use active listening
- use reflective listening
- be attentive
- be empathetic

### Be respectful

- ask what they'd like you to call them and remember to use that
- build a good rapport
- have a calm demeanour
- use non-threatening body language
- be assertive

### Be supportive

- make them feel comfortable

### Be responsive

- give them space
- remove other people or things if they're upset or overwhelmed by them
- provide a comfortable and safe environment

### Reference:

Luck, L, Jackson, D and Usher, K. 2007. Conveying caring: Nurse attributes to avert violence in the ED. International Journal of Nursing Practice 15, pp 205-212

## 12. RESPONDING TO HARM

If you perceive there to be imminent harm to yourself or someone else, contact Western Sydney University Campus Safety and Security immediately on **1300 737 003**.

If harm is not imminent, use the principles of both **DEFUSE** and **SUDS** – stated previously in this booklet

## 13. RESPONDING TO ACTS OF VIOLENCE, PROPERTY DAMAGE, OR WEAPONS

1. Withdraw from danger and find a safe space
2. Contact Western Sydney University **Campus Safety and Security** immediately on **1300 737 003**
3. Contact Police on **000**
4. Alert staff to relocate – seek a safe place immediately.

# MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE FLOWCHART

## HOW TO RECOGNISE AND RESPOND APPROPRIATELY TO PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS.

### How to Read the Guidelines

These guidelines are not a diagnostic tool. They should be used as a guide to identify and assist students or staff having difficulties in order to minimize disruption to their studies or work place.

#### ■ GREEN

The green guidelines represent overall positive mental health and wellbeing. The response and recommendations section details suggestions for maintaining positive wellbeing and mental health.

#### ■ AMBER

The amber guidelines represent early changes in mental health or wellbeing, which require identification and management to prevent further distress and promote recovery.

#### ■ RED

The red guidelines represent changes which are known to increase distress to themselves or those in their family and workplace. If you identify these changes in yourself or others, it is important to discuss a plan with the Counselling Service (for students), supervisor, HR or EAP (for staff members). People can also discuss the issues with their GP who can recommend additional support via the Medicare mental health plan.

LEVEL OF FUNCTIONING	COGNITIVE AND ACADEMIC FUNCTIONING	SOCIAL FUNCTIONING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Superior/good functioning in a wide range of activities</li> <li>→ Can identify short and longer term plans for the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ High achieving</li> <li>→ Performing well in the workplace/ studies</li> <li>→ Concentrates on tasks and seems alert</li> <li>→ Generally attends university/work on time</li> <li>→ Study/work capacity fulfilled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Engaged in a range of activities</li> <li>→ Positive relationships with peers or colleagues</li> <li>→ Displays emotional warmth</li> <li>→ Spends time in social activities</li> <li>→ Energy to perform the majority of daily tasks required</li> </ul>
LEVEL OF FUNCTIONING	COGNITIVE AND ACADEMIC FUNCTIONING	SOCIAL FUNCTIONING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Temporary impairment</li> <li>→ Symptoms may be understandable in the circumstances (e.g. exam stress, bereavement)</li> <li>→ Generally functioning in several areas of life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Capable student/staff member who is experiencing transient problems</li> <li>→ May have temporary setback due to challenge of unfamiliar academic/work task</li> <li>→ May demonstrate reduced self confidence/decreased self esteem</li> <li>→ May use avoidance as a safety mechanism</li> <li>→ May have reduced level of concentration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Occasional arguments</li> <li>→ Minor ups and downs in relationships</li> <li>→ Engaged in a social network</li> <li>→ May withdraw briefly</li> </ul>
LEVEL OF FUNCTIONING	COGNITIVE AND ACADEMIC FUNCTIONING	SOCIAL FUNCTIONING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ May appear disorganised and unreliable</li> <li>→ May be denying any problems or responsibility for behaviours</li> <li>→ Unlikely those issues will resolve without intervention</li> <li>→ Action required to prevent further distress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Impaired study/work ability due to reduced concentration and learning capacity</li> <li>→ Unable to prioritise tasks</li> <li>→ Difficulty meeting course/working requirements</li> <li>→ Conflict in group/team tasks or meetings</li> <li>→ Altered decision making</li> <li>→ Inconsistent behaviour</li> <li>→ Worrying or anxious thoughts</li> <li>→ May appear vague</li> <li>→ Changing beliefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Few friends, limited integration in team processes</li> <li>→ Conflict with peers/team</li> <li>→ May be withdrawn or isolated</li> <li>→ Increased hours engaged on internet</li> <li>→ Behaviour may be having a negative effect on others</li> <li>→ Others may express concern or make complaints</li> <li>→ Generating rumours which cause concern to others</li> <li>→ Low level use of written, verbal or physical abuse (e.g. pushing or shoving)</li> <li>→ Concerning or unwelcome comments of a sexual nature or relationship seeking</li> <li>→ Out of character behaviours/out of context behaviours</li> </ul>



## COPING BEHAVIOURS

- Positive coping skills
- Good functioning overall
- Able to consider problems/issues in an appropriate fashion

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING

- No or minimal symptoms, resilient, generally happy. May have mild anxiety in response to events (e.g. exams/work)
- Describes enjoyment in several different activities

## RESPONSE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Keep socially active
- Make plans for periods of enjoyment
- Consider limiting alcohol, caffeine and nicotine
- Nutrition is important for all aspects of health
- Regular physical exercise to help maintain mental wellbeing

## COPING BEHAVIOURS

- Understandable stress reaction to difficult situations
- Returns to normal once situation resolved
- Increase in level of irritability
- May increase use of alcohol or other drugs

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING

- Period of understandable low mood or irritability
- Anxiety symptoms such as brief sleep or appetite disturbance
- Worrying thoughts
- Thoughts of inability to cope

## RESPONSE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Offer support and problem solving/peer support
- Encourage to talk to a trusted friend
- Consider speaking to a professional – Western Sydney University Counsellor (for students), EAP (for staff) or GP (to get a mental health plan)

## COPING BEHAVIOURS

- Poor coping
- May be demanding of others to find solution
- Overall functioning compromised
- Inappropriate, changeable emotional expressions (e.g. tearful or aggressive outbursts)
- Excessive online chat and other internet activity
- Substance abuse
- Impulse control problems may lead to high risk behaviours (e.g. unsafe sex, overspending, gambling, self harm or harm to others)
- Intentional theft
- Damage to property
- Threatening communications which make you feel uncomfortable
- Sleeping on campus
- Recent improvement in mood or daily motivation after a period of low mood

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING

- Feel out of control or have panic attacks
- Increase/decrease sleep
- Self medicating
- Impaired judgement and decision making
- Impaired organisation
- May appear chaotic
- Fear regarding poor performance, letting others down
- Thoughts of escaping
- Any thoughts or expressions of suicide/any non-suicidal self injury/harm to others
- Difficulty making plans for longer term
- Limited/reduced hope for future
- Depression
- Change in levels of energy
- Thoughts/behaviours out of context or character
- Guilt
- Anger/blaming others for how they feel
- History of harm to self or others
- Past mental health presentations/admission to hospital
- High anxiety, distress/agitation

## RESPONSE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Needs psychological assessment and intervention
  - Encourage them to talk to their family and close friends for support
  - May help to discuss current or future workload
- During University work hours**
- Discuss with Western Sydney University Counselling Service (for students) or EAP (for staff)
  - Contact Campus Safety and Security if the situation makes you feel uncomfortable or fear for your safety
- Outside University work hours**
- Call Campus Safety and Security to manage the immediate/potential situation
  - Call an ambulance for physical or urgent mental health concerns
  - For clarification and/or consultation regarding these behaviours, call the 24 hour Mental Health Line on **1800 011 511** to speak with a Mental Health Professional

15.

## **SKILLS, TRAINING AND RESOURCES**

Consultation, support and training is available from the **Mental Health and Wellbeing team.**

Consult the Mental Health and Wellbeing website for further information and links to resources relevant to mental health and wellbeing.

# 16.

# SUPPORT

## STUDENT SUPPORT

Contact the University Wellbeing Service on **1300 668 370**.

## STAFF SUPPORT

Western Sydney University offers consultation and debriefing regarding any particular student concern or distressing situations you may have experienced.

Staff are encouraged to contact the Employee Assistance program (EAP) for their own support.

To make an appointment for counselling with EAP from anywhere in Australia during office hours call **1800 81 87 28**.

Alternatively, you can speak to the EAP on the phone. Just call and ask for a telephone appointment.

For Traumatic incident or crisis counselling, 24 hours, call **1800 81 87 28**.

Please visit the MHWB team webpage for information on relevant services and 24/7 help lines.

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