Student Mental Health at UCL - Advice for Staff

Student Disability Services

Mental Health support is available for students at UCL. Whether they have been diagnosed with a psychiatric condition or have a mental health difficulty such as anxiety or depression, Student Disability Services can provide specialist Mental Health support and we encourage you to contact us regarding students that you are concerned about.

If you are concerned about a student who is not diagnosed with a mental health difficulty but are concerned about some aspect or their mental wellbeing, emotions, behaviour or ability to cope, please also contact us.

Please call 0207 679 0100 or email disability@ucl.ac.uk for any enquiries.

In this guide, you will find information on the following:

1. **Student Mental Health**
   
   1.1 What kind of mental health difficulties may be affecting students at UCL?  
   
   1.2 What are the signs that a student may be developing a mental health difficulty?  
   
   1.3 What support is available at Student Disability Services?

2. **What could you do if you are concerned about a student?**
   
   2.1 Approaching the student
   
   2.2 Referring
   
   2.3 Adjustments that can be made for students with mental health difficulties

3. **Useful Contacts**
1. **Student Mental Health**

1.1 What kind of mental health difficulties may be affecting students at UCL?

Please see below a list of some common difficulties that affect students at UCL currently. *If you are viewing this file electronically please note that mental health conditions listed have hyperlinks to more detailed Mind information pages.*

**Anxiety**

This could be temporary and acute, for example around stressful periods such as exams. Alternatively it could be a long term diagnosed disorder that can have a significant impact on how the student finds day to day activities. Symptoms of anxiety could include panic attacks, persistent worrying and unpleasant physical and psychological symptoms.

**Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**

(OCD) is a mental health condition where a person has obsessive thoughts and/or compulsive activity that cause a significant impact on daily life.

**Depression**

Symptoms may include persistent feelings of sadness, guilt, helplessness and poor sleep to name a few. In its severest form it can be life threatening as people can suffer from and act on suicidal thoughts.

**Personality Disorders**

Mental health conditions that affect how people manage their feelings, emotions, thoughts, behaviour and how they relate to other people.

**Eating problems / Disorders**

Mental illnesses defined by abnormal eating habits or behaviour surrounding eating that negatively affect a person's physical or mental wellbeing.

**Schizophrenia**

A psychiatric diagnosis that could include: a lack of interest in doing things, being disconnected from feelings, difficulty concentrating, wanting to avoid people, hallucinations and hearing voices. Symptoms and severity can vary significantly in different people with this diagnosis.

**Bipolar Disorder**

A psychiatric disorder characterized by extreme changes in mood – from periods of overactive, excited behaviour – known as ‘mania’ or ‘manic episodes’ – to deep depression. Symptoms and severity can vary significantly in different people with this diagnosis.

**Self-harm**

Self-harm can be a way of dealing with very difficult feelings, old memories, or overwhelming situations and experiences. It can be a significant symptom of various mental health conditions including depression and personality disorders.

**Alcohol or Drug Misuse**

In regards to students, this refers to the problematic use of alcohol and/or drugs that adversely interferes with the individual’s health, work, study, safety or other social interactions. This could be substances that are deliberately used to alter perception or feelings and includes alcohol, illegal drugs, ‘legal highs’ and medication (when not used as medically prescribed). Drugs and Alcohol are known to be commonly used by students and arguably without significant detriment. Many students however, may be using substances to mitigate the symptoms of an
underlying mental health issue, to cope with stressful situations or because an addiction. Regardless of the reason ‘problematic’ alcohol or drug use can have a significant impact on a student’s life and warrants non-judgmental support.

1.2 What are the signs that a student may be developing a mental health difficulty?

- Spending an increasing amount of time alone, appearing to be isolated.
- Losing interest in activities and tasks that were previously enjoyed.
- Mood swings that are very extreme or out of character.
- Self-harming behaviour, such as cutting.
- Changes in eating habits and/or appetite: not eating, over-eating, bingeing.
- Sleep problems.
- Hearing and seeing things that others do not.
- Thoughts that people are against them or wish them harm.
- Excessive alcohol / drug use
- Changes in appearance (for example looking unusually dishevelled or poorly kempt)
- Not attending lectures/seminars.
- Inappropriate language/behaviour in conversation or correspondence with staff such overfamiliarity or anger - that is uncharacteristic.
- Concerns mentioned to you by the student’s peers
- Poor performance at work or university.
- Repeatedly requesting extensions on academic work or not submitting work on time.

All of these signs can vary in severity. Often they can be relatively minor, or pass quickly. However, if they are persistent, prolonged or represent a significant change in usual behaviour, the individual experiencing them may benefit from support.

1.3 What support is available at Student Disability Services?

Available support includes but is not limited to:

- A confidential appointment for non-judgemental support, advice and guidance from a Mental Health specialist.
  The opportunity for students to talk about their mental health and any subsequent difficulties that they may be having. When students register with Student Disability services they will be able to have regular contact with a mental health advisor for continuing support which can be through telephone contact, email or regular face-to-face meetings.

- Twice weekly drop-in sessions at the disability office where there is no need for an appointment – Monday and Wednesday 2pm-4pm.

- Support applying for special exam arrangements if the student’s symptoms impact their ability to take exams – such as smaller venues for examinations, additional time, or rest breaks.
Depending on their requirements we can support students to apply for special arrangements for exams (if they have up to date medical evidence). For example, some students may find that their mental health difficulties affect their exam performance through symptoms such as lack of concentration, confusion, panic attacks and other related symptoms. There are arrangements that can be made to help alleviate some of these symptoms such as extra time, rest breaks or ‘stop the clock’ in the event of a panic attack for example.

- **Regular one-to-one support from a specialist mental health mentor to assist with planning and managing your studies.**
  We have a dedicated service for students who have identified mental health difficulties called Student Mental Health Mentoring. This is a service where students can meet regularly (for example one hour weekly) with a mental health professional who will discuss their academic work and any symptoms or barriers as a result of their mental health difficulties that may be impacting their academic work.

- **Advice and guidance, for both students and academic departments, about the potential impact of their mental health difficulty on their studies and how this can be accommodated.**
  Our service is confidential, however students will have the opportunity to sign a consent form that states whether they give us permission to contact academic department or other relevant departments on a need to know basis. We can then complete a ‘Summary of Reasonable Adjustments’ that we can send to academic department so that they are prepared for any foreseeable issues that may impact the student’s attendance and academic work. We encourage students to do this, although please note it is entirely their decision.

- **Advice on how access further support such as UCL Psychological services and local health and psychiatric services.**
  It is important that students are registered with a General Practitioner (GP) in their local area. This is essential as any access to general healthcare and community mental health support will be arranged through a local Doctor. If the student lives close to campus (or in the London Borough of Camden) they can register with our local GP surgery – the Gower Place Practice.
  UCL also have a dedicated Student Psychological Service that offer students up to 6 free counselling sessions and access to group workshops. Students can register independently online and will subsequently contacted for an appointment.

- **Liaison with Student Accommodation about specific requirements or difficulties arising from their condition.**

- **Access to the Student Enabling IT (SEnIT) Suite.**
  A specialist private suite that is equipped with assistive technology.
2. What could you do if you are concerned about a student?

2.1 Approaching the student
When you are concerned about a student you may feel that you can help by talking to them and offering support. Students with mental health difficulties can often feel isolated and find it difficult to reach out for support so this can be very helpful. If you choose to do this, please find some tips below:

- Before approaching the student make sure you have discussed your concerns with a colleague or line manager.
- Approach the student in a sympathetic and understanding way. Remember to be sensitive to issues relating to sexuality, race, religion, culture and gender. If you simply ask the student how they are, this will give them the opportunity to discuss their concerns with you. The situation may only require empathetic listening.
- Be prepared to listen and give them some time. If there are constraints on your time, inform the student of this from the start.
- Make sure that the language you use is sympathetic. Although this is difficult to define, avoid using comments that put blame or responsibility on the student like ‘pull yourself together’.
- If you feel you need to tell someone else, try to obtain the student’s consent. Confidentiality is important however confidentiality can and should be breached if the student poses a serious risk of harm to themselves or others.
- If you feel you can support the student, do consider whether you have the time and/or the skills. Try not to offer help that is beyond your role or would cause you additional pressure. Be clear about your role and its boundaries.
- Be prepared that the student may not always identify that they have a problem or may not want to acknowledge it.
- Inform the student of the services available to them at UCL – namely Student Disability Services, Student Psychological Services and Gower Street Practice. If in crisis, students can always go to UCLH A&E department.

2.2 Referring
We strongly advise you to always look to refer a student on to an appropriate service as soon as possible if you are concerned about them.

- If the student tells you that they are struggling as a result of the mental health condition or are not coping, encourage them to contact their GP and signpost them to Student Disability Services.
- If student suggests that they need emotional support you can also refer them to UCL Student Psychological Services.
• If a student is reluctant to talk to UCL services but states that they would like someone to talk to, encourage them to contact helplines and forums such as Nightline, and ‘Big White Wall’ (see below in Contacts).

• You can always contact the Mental Health Coordinator at Student Disability services to book an appointment for a student (if the student consents) or for general advice.

• As mentioned previously, encourage the student to make an appointment with their GP as this will be their main source point of accessing medical support.

**Significant concerns:**

• If you are very concerned about a student’s wellbeing, refer to UCL Student Support and Wellbeing by completing a ‘Student of Concern form’ online. Alternatively you can email them on studentofconcern@ucl.ac.uk or call 0207 679 4545 (internal 24545). Please find the link to the online student of concern form below.

http://www.ucl.ac.uk/registry-admin/support/open

If a student discloses something very concerning to you and you do not feel it is safe to just refer the concern, for example if they have attempted to commit suicide or are actively planning to harm themselves or someone else - contact UCL security services to facilitate a call to emergency services. In some very rare situations it may be necessary for you to call emergency services yourself, however please always consult with a senior member of staff or colleague so that you are not dealing with the situation alone.

*Following any serious concern, please also complete a student of concerns form.*

### 2.3 Adjustments that can be made for students with mental health difficulties.

Under the Equality Act 2010 all Universities have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments to support disabled students (including students with a mental health condition) with their studies. When considering adjustments we look at what is reasonable for the student and the department on a case by case basis.

Where appropriate, you could:

• Incorporate inclusive teaching practices such as ensuring a variety of session timings (e.g. some afternoons as well as early morning sessions). Some students may find it difficult to attend early sessions as sleep problems are a common symptom of anxiety and depression. Also, a number of psychiatric medications have a sedating effect.

• Give students plenty of notice regarding deadlines and assessments and where possible, offer flexibility.

• Ensure course materials are available online and in advance where possible, so students can prepare for the session.

• Remind students of the procedures for applying for extensions and extenuating circumstances often. Also make any necessary applications or documentation for this easily accessible.
• Inform students that they may be eligible for special exam arrangements if they have a mental health condition or disability (signpost to Student Disability Services).

• Offer students regular timeslots where they can contact staff to discuss any problems or concerns.

• Be aware that some students may have extreme difficulties with presentation and public speaking. Where possible and feasible, try to offer alternatives or facilitate a less intimidating circumstances.

• Be aware that students that may need to sit near to exits so that they can leave easily (for example if they suffer from severe anxiety or panic attacks).

• Be aware that students with mental health conditions may have significant issues leading up to exams and deadlines. If possible try to be more available for contact and appointments to discuss any issues prior to and during such periods.

3. Useful Contacts:

UCL Student Psychological Services
Dedicated service that offer short term therapy helping UCL students with personal, emotional and psychological concerns.
Website: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/student-psychological-services/index_home
Tel: 020 7679 1487
Online Registration: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/sps/scsreg/register/

UCL Student Support and Wellbeing
‘Student of Concern’, Wellbeing appointments and ‘Return to study’.
Main Email: student.wellbeing@ucl.ac.uk
Website: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/our-services/student-support-and-wellbeing
Student of concern form: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/registry-admin/support/open

Gower Place Practice
Local GP surgery situated on campus for students who live in Camden borough. They book scheduled appointments and operate a drop in clinic for registered patients Monday to Friday 09:30 to 10:30 and 14:30 to 15:30.
Website: http://www.gowerplacepractice.nhs.uk/
Address: 3 Gower Place. London, WC1E 6BN
Tel: 020 7387 6306

UCL Student Funding Welfare Advisor
This service aims to help students discuss any confidential financial problems they may have in person. The adviser can also help with the basics of financial management and budgeting. Students should email studentfundingwelfare@ucl.ac.uk to enquire or book an appointment.

UCL International Student Support
Email: internationalsupport@ucl.ac.uk
Website: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/iss/welfare

UCL Chaplain & Interfaith Advisor
Provides pastoral care and support for all members of college, staff and students alike. Also provides information for those of all faiths and nationalities looking to find a place of worship to attend in London.
Email: c.ballinger@ucl.ac.uk
Tel: 020 3108 1339
UCL Student Disability Services
Mental Health Support
Tel: 020 7679 0100 Email: disability@ucl.ac.uk Web: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/disability

UCLU Welfare and International Officer
UCL student Union support
Email: w.officer@ucl.ac.uk
Tel: 020 7679 7931

London Nightline
Confidential listening, support and practical information service for students.
Tel: 0207 631 0101
Email: listening@nightline.org.uk
Skype Phone: londonnightline
Skype Chat: chat.nightline
Text: 07717 989 900

Big White Wall
A safe online community of people who are anxious, down or not coping who support and help each other by sharing what’s troubling them, guided by trained professionals.
Big White Wall is free for all residents in Camden aged over sixteen and is accessed simply by entering your Camden postcode.
It is professionally staffed by trained counsellors at all times.
www.bigwhitewall.com

The Brandon Centre
Long term counselling and Psychotherapy at the Brandon Centre (12-24 years). Also some sexual health services on a drop in basis.
Tel: 020 7267 4792
Website: http://brandon-centre.org.uk

Bipolar UK
A national charity that offer peer support groups quite close to UCL campus (Kings cross and Victoria). They welcome attendance from those who experience symptoms of mood disorders whether they have a formal diagnosis or not.
Tel: 020 7931 6480
Website: www.bipolaruk.org.uk

London Friend / Antidote
LGB&T Health and Wellbeing. Counselling, telephone support, sexual health and drug and alcohol support.
Tel: 020 7833 1674
Email: office@londonfriend.org.uk
Website: http://londonfriend.org.uk/

Grip Club Drugs Service
Specialist support to help deal with the problems associated with club drugs and stimulants. Includes individual drug counselling, group work, an evening clinic, mental health support and alternative therapies.
Address: The Margarete Centre, 108 Hampstead Road. London NW1 2LS
Tel: 020 3317 6000
Email: grip@candi.nhs.uk

For further mental health specific information, the following resources are particularly helpful:
Mind - http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/
Rethink - http://www.rethink.org/diagnosis-treatment/conditions
Mental Health Foundation - http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-a-z/
Student Minds - http://www.studentminds.org.uk/

Updated August 2015