

SUPPORTING SUICIDAL & DISTRESSED STUDENTS

A guide to help staff and students to understand emotional distress, and how to best respond to acute distress or suicidal and self-harm behaviours

Professional support for staff and students

Supporting a student who is experiencing emotional distress or exhibiting acute self-harm or suicidal behaviours can in turn affect your own mental and emotional health. It can be helpful to talk with your supervisor or to consult with the Counselling Centre about how you assisted the student and how that has affected you.

Some signs that indicate it may be useful for you to talk to someone include:

- Thinking or talking about a particular student more than usual.
- Experiencing strong emotions about the student that you helped.
- Not being able to move on from the event or from the student you helped.

Seeking professional support for yourself can help you process and understand what happened.

Staff can arrange to speak to the Adviser to Staff or one of the external Employee Assistance Program (EAP) providers. For more information visit <https://services.anu.edu.au/human-resources/wellbeing/employee-assistance-program>

If you are a staff member and have been involved in a critical event (as detailed above), please complete the online incident notification form from the Work Health and Safety branch and notify your supervisor.

Students can arrange to talk to someone from the ANU Counselling Centre or call the ANU Crisis and Support Line on 1300 050 327.

Recognising emotional distress and suicidal thoughts or self-harm behaviours

When a student is experiencing difficulty, staff, family or friends are often the first to notice. If we can recognise the signs of acute emotional distress, suicidal thoughts or self-harm behaviours, we can help the student receive the support they need to cope.

Students may be distressed for many reasons, including:

- study stress
- relationship difficulties
- poor health
- anxiety
- depression
- trauma
- grief
- sexual assault or harassment

Distress may be indicated by:

- avoidance
- tearfulness
- deterioration in appearance
- disturbing emails or assessment items
- increased tension
- reduced motivation
- self-harm behaviour

- thoughts of suicide

When responding to a student in distress, it is important to acknowledge their distress. Briefly acknowledging their situation and feelings in a calm and concerned manner may help the student feel supported and more able to cope. Building a connection will assist you to ensure that the student receives appropriate and timely support.

What you can do

Acknowledge: let the student know you are concerned for them and tell them why.

Listen: briefly encourage the student to talk about the distress they are experiencing.

Determine: check your understanding of the situation and whether the student has sufficient support and resources to cope, or if they need additional support.

Act: help the student to receive the appropriate support they need to cope (see below).

Imminent risk of self-harm, actual self-harm or active thoughts of suicide

If you believe a student is at imminent risk of self-harm or suicide, the following points may be helpful.

Remain: stay with the student and talk to them if it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Advise: let the student know that you are going to help them get the assistance they need.

Seek support: get support from others to assist, this includes emergency assistance if necessary. A list of useful contact numbers is on the back page of this brochure.

In an emergency dial 000.

Privacy

There are limits to the information that can be shared about students and with whom it can be shared. Privacy law (The Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and the Australian Privacy Principles guide how we consult in the case of suicidal or distressed students. Privacy legislation allows staff to discuss their concerns about a student with their supervisor or a colleague to help resolve a situation while protecting a student's confidentiality. Generally, you cannot disclose a person's personal information to anyone, including their family, without their prior consent.

The exception to requiring the person's prior consent to disclose their personal information is if the disclosure is reasonably necessary to lessen or prevent a serious threat to the life, health or safety of any individual or to public health or safety, and it is unreasonable or impracticable to get their consent first (e.g. asking their consent is likely to increase the threat to health or safety). More information is available at: https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_010007

Support for a student in distress

If you are concerned about a student who is experiencing distress, the following may help you to assist the student.

Note: if you have imminent concern about safety or risk, see information in the tinted box.

- Attempt to arrange a referral; ask if the student has anyone to talk to. You could suggest calling the ANU Crisis Support Line on 1300 050 327, or recommend that the student attend their GP or contact ANU Counselling. Help the student to find support only with consent.
- If the student does not consent, it is possible to consult more generally (protecting confidentiality; see information in Privacy) with a staff member, the Counselling Centre or ANU Crisis Support Line for assistance on what you could do.
- You may check in with the student at a later date and enquire how they are. At that point, you could suggest a referral if it is still warranted.

Useful numbers and internet links

To reach an outside line from an internal ANU phone, dial 0 first

ANU Security

T 612 52249

W <https://services.anu.edu.au/campus-environment/safety-security>

Police / Ambulance

T 000 (emergency)

T 131 444 (attendance for police)

Access Mental Health

T 1800 629 354 or 6205 1065

W <https://health.act.gov.au/services-and-programs/mental-health/mental-health-services>

Lifeline

T 131114

W <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Suicide Call Back Service

T 1300 659 467

W <https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/>

Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (present on and off campus)

T 6247 2525

W <http://www.crcc.org.au/>

National Health Co-op ANU

T 6125 3598

W www.nhc.coop/anu

ANU Counselling

T 6178 0455

W www.counselling.anu.edu.au

ANU Adviser to Staff

T 6125 3616 and 6125 8283

W <https://services.anu.edu.au/human-resources/wellbeing/employee-assistance-program>

ANU Dean of Students

T 612 54184
W www.anu.edu.au/dos

ANU Counselling Centre

Level 3, Health and Wellbeing Centre
Building 156 Joplin Lane,
Kambri, Acton, ACT 2601.

Australia

T +61 2 6178 0455

W counselling.anu.edu.au

CRICOS Provider #00120C