



Supporting Students with Mental Health

Student Services

**DISABILITY AND
DYSLEXIA SUPPORT**



Learning and
Professional
Development Centre

Keele
UNIVERSITY



Our mental health influences how we think, feel and behave; it affects our capacity to learn, communicate, form and end relationships; and, it impacts how we adapt to change and life events. **Mental Health affect approximately 1 in 4 people** and can cause significant adverse effects upon individuals' ability to carry out day-to-day activities. The types of mental health difficulties students may experience include: **depression**; bi-polar disorder; **social anxiety disorder** and other anxiety and stress disorders; **panic attacks**; obsessive compulsive disorder; schizophrenia; and eating disorders.

1) How might mental health affect someone at university?

- Problems concentrating and maintaining focus on studies due to psychological distress, which may lead to disorganisation, change in study habits, build-up of work load, additional pressure and a drop in academic performance.
- Decreased interest/involvement in classes, class discussions or the course in general.
- Low morale and lack of confidence.
- Consistent late arrivals, absences or ill health, evidence of fatigue, weight loss or gain.
- Difficulty communicating with others and anxiety in social situations leading to avoidance behaviours and withdrawal from social activities.
- Difficulty making decisions, forgetfulness and disorganised thoughts.
- Students may avoid classes for fear of being asked to express an opinion on the spot.
- Students may find large lecture theatres, crowded rooms and examination environments extremely anxiety provoking.
- Students may have medical, counselling or therapy appointments (inside or outside of Keele) which mean they need to miss some teaching sessions.
- Students may find it challenging to make initial contact in seeking help.

2) Suggested teaching and learning adjustments

General considerations

- If you are worried about a student the first step is usually to talk to them, find out a little more about what is going on, listen, reassure and be sensitive. Pointing the student in the direction of appropriate support services or assisting them to make contact (in person, via phone or email) may be all that is needed. They may already be in touch with their GP or Keele's [Counselling and Mental Health Support](#) team.
- When discussing mental health difficulties with students **only ask what is relevant**, you do not need to discuss everything or all details about their difficulties.
- **Do not hesitate to seek advice from other sources.** Although you must obtain students' consent to discuss confidential information with someone else, if a student does not give consent you can always seek advice without giving the student's name.
- When issues arise that indicate a **serious risk to a student or others**, explain that you cannot keep information confidential due to the university's Duty of Care for the student. **Contact security on 33004 or 888 and Critical Incident Support on 33335.** After 6pm contact security directly who will contact the on-call Critical Incident Support Coordinator. Emergency services may also need to be called.

Teaching resources/materials, classroom set-up and teaching practice

- **Give students time to prepare**, which may help to alleviate anxiety, by providing presentation slides (PowerPoint, Google slides, Keynote etc.), handouts and other teaching resources in advance of class sessions (i.e. upload to the KLE and send email reminders). This will allow students plenty of time to access, print and read materials.
- **Provide reading lists as far in advance as possible**, clearly highlighting and emphasising key chapters and articles as well as core from secondary readings, enabling students to prioritise.

Disability Support and Inclusive Teaching and Assessment at Keele

- **Support students to revisit and revise lecture content** by using lecture capture technology or allowing audio recording of lectures. If students have a reasonable adjustment in place to allow audio recording of lectures, this must be permitted.
- **Be understanding and accommodating of students' classroom preferences and coping strategies:**
 - Students may utilise **confidence building/coping strategies** whereby they find it easier to enter or leave buildings or classrooms after or before everybody else.
 - Students may also feel **more or less comfortable in certain classrooms**, with certain seating/table arrangements or seating locations in rooms.
 - A student who experiences anxiety in large lecture theatres may wish to **sit near an exit** so they can leave and return easily if needed without drawing attention.
 - Students **may become overwhelmed** and need to leave teaching classrooms.
- **Be understanding of difficulties faced during group work and class discussions:**
 - Undertaking group work and contributing to class discussions can be very problematic for students with social anxiety disorders. The **element of unexpectedness** regarding if and when they may need to contribute can compound anxiety and stress. **Being clear about expectations regarding class contribution**, as well as group work ground rules, may help students to manage anxieties and give them time to prepare their contributions in class.
 - Try to utilise small group approaches and activities which give all students the **chance to contribute if they feel comfortable**, but do not necessitate verbal contributions from all members or put any student on the spot.
 - **Asking students to work in pairs or small groups** and seeking feedback from the pair/small group can mitigate the need to put any student on the spot.
 - Try to **provide reassurance** to specific students that they will not be put in situations which they are uncomfortable with, which may improve confidence.
 - Students may find it **difficult to raise concerns about their studies** with other students present and as such 1:1 support should be offered if needed.
 - Students may be more comfortable if they are placed into a group with somebody familiar to them or may prefer to contribute to discussions using technological discussion tools, such as Socrative or Mentimeter.

Assessment and feedback

- As appropriate, provide assessment questions, details and deadlines **as far in advance as possible** using specific instructions and concise/simple language.
- Always use **clearly defined assessment criteria** which link to the module ILOs.
- **Notify changes** to assessments or deadlines in plenty of time.
- **1:1 meetings** may be beneficial in terms of aiding understanding surrounding assessment expectations. **Encouragement and appropriate direction** may help to increase a student's confidence in their work and alleviate anxiety.
- **Deadline extensions** may be needed to allow a student to stagger hand in of assignments which may be exacerbating mental health difficulties.
- Students may **require specific adjustments for exams and other assessments**, including the **provision of alternative forms of assessment** where necessary (e.g. a student may be unable to undertake oral presentations as a result of their difficulty). Discuss requirements with your local Disability Liaison Officer (DLO), examinations officer and as required, contact Disability and Dyslexia Support (DDS) for advice.
- Students may request to **defer an exam** to a time when they feel more stable and better prepared to take the exam.
- **Reassure and praise students** when they have challenged themselves, such as contributing to a group discussion. Students may prefer to receive this via email, rather than in a social setting.

3) Bibliography and additional reading

- [Student Minds](#) website

*This resource was produced in 2018, updated January 2022
Disability and Dyslexia Support*

