

SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL WELLBEING

A pocket guide for staff

2ND EDITION

ON THE **RED COUCH**



COMPILED BY | STUDENT COUNSELLING AND DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

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UFS
STUDENT COUNSELLING
AND DEVELOPMENT

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FOREWORD

Within the university space, the minds of young adults are shaped in preparation for executing their roles and responsibilities as citizens of our society. Although inspiring, student years can also be a period of heightened risk in an assortment of ways, as these young adults face a variety of crises that may include mental health challenges and traumatic experiences.

Promoting and supporting student mental wellbeing means managing the UFS environment and yielding an active, rather than a passive, approach to overcoming challenges and assisting students in reaching their optimal potential. As Student Counselling and Development, this is the culture we wish to instil in our UFS community, through building a holistic sense of wellbeing into life on campus. Accordingly, in creating a campus where mental wellbeing is valued, the whole UFS community is urged to be progressive in its approach to mental wellbeing and promote a culture that supports the destigmatisation of mental health difficulties. Furthermore, individual staff members are requested to be alert to student mental health distress, be in a position to offer an appropriate response to a student's declaration of such difficulties, and be able to refer students to relevant support, including encouraging the student to seek help from specialised support services.

FROM THE DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

On the *Red Couch* is a handy pocket guide developed by Student Counselling and Development (SCD), which forms part of the Division of Student Affairs (DSA).

It has been designed to equip UFS staff with the information needed to make good decisions concerning the mental health of students in our community.

Because we are dedicated to the emotional wellbeing and personal development of all UFS students, this guide offers a tool to aid in this endeavour. It points to student behaviours and indicators that warrant concern and suggests appropriate responses suited to each case. These guidelines support the DSA Humanising Strategy 2017-2022, which is implemented in conjunction with the UFS Strategy 2018-2022 and the UFS Integrated Transformation Plan to ensure student wellbeing and academic success.



We encourage staff to read through this booklet in its entirety so that, when situations concerning student mental health arise, the right course of action can be taken. *On the Red Couch* provides proactive, reactive and developmental routes to follow, depending on the circumstance, and lays out a guideline to assist students in times of need.

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Although this is a very useful guide, we recommend consulting the full UFS Mental Health Policy for more in-depth information regarding our policies and procedures related to student mental health.

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A crisis can be deemed an opportunity when it drives an individual to seek help.

The purpose of this pocket guide is to equip staff with information, guidance and skills to provide consistent and effective support to students experiencing mental health distress and to foster wellbeing.



If this opportunity is seized, the subsequent intervention can facilitate the process of self-growth and self-realisation.

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STUDENT COUNSELLING AND DEVELOPMENT (SCD)

Student Counselling and Development has proudly served UFS students since 1977.

VISION

To promote, enable and optimise the students' self-actualisation and sense of community.

MISSION

- Acknowledging and fostering the holistic development of a student
- Responsiveness to and advocacy for varying student needs
- Resolution of individual challenges that impede the fulfilment of a student's potential
- Creating a conducive environment for the development and achievement of individual, academic and career goals
- Modelling, promoting and encouraging responsible social interactions

VALUES

- Human-centredness
- Accountability and integrity
- Performance-driven excellence
- Self-development
- Passion
- Balance

MOTTO

Clear mind, clear path!

SCD is staffed by a team of registered psychologists and other mental health practitioners.

MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL DISTRESS

MENTAL HEALTH

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines 'mental health' as a state of wellbeing, in which every individual:

- realises their own potential;
- can cope with the normal stresses of life;
- can work productively and fruitfully; and
- is able to make a contribution to their community.

The positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO's definition of health, as contained in its constitution:

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

MENTAL DISTRESS

Mental distress is a general term used to describe an assortment of experiences, symptoms, unpleasant emotions and psychological discomfort that impacts an individual's level of daily functioning. Mental distress can bring about negative views of the self, the environment and others.

MENTAL ILLNESS

Mental illness, as defined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders and relates to health conditions involving:

- significant changes in thinking, emotion and/or behaviour; and/or
- distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities.

Mental distress can accompany mental illness. However, it is important to note that experiencing mental distress does not always indicate the presence of a serious mental health issue or mental illness.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Registered mental health practitioners (referred to as practitioners from hereon) follow a strict code of ethics, and confidentiality is one of the most important components of this code. Any information received from the student is confidential unless the student has given written permission for the information to be disclosed. In certain exceptional situations, however, legal or professional rules may require the practitioner to disclose information.

THESE INCLUDE:

- 1. Emergency situations** – Should a situation develop where the practitioner believes that there is a real risk that students may harm themselves or any other person, the practitioner will be compelled to take the necessary steps to prevent such harm, even if this entails breaching confidentiality.
- 2. Court orders** – A court order may require the practitioner to disclose confidential information.

SERVICES OFFERED

At SCD, the following services are offered to registered UFS students at no cost.

INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING

Short-term counselling interventions that are responsive to the diverse needs of students experiencing psychological, behavioural or emotional difficulties. These sessions are on an appointment basis and waiting times vary according to demand. In some cases, referrals to other medical specialists (such as general practitioners, psychiatrists and neurologists) are made. In severe cases, students can also be referred to psychiatric facilities for more intensive treatment.

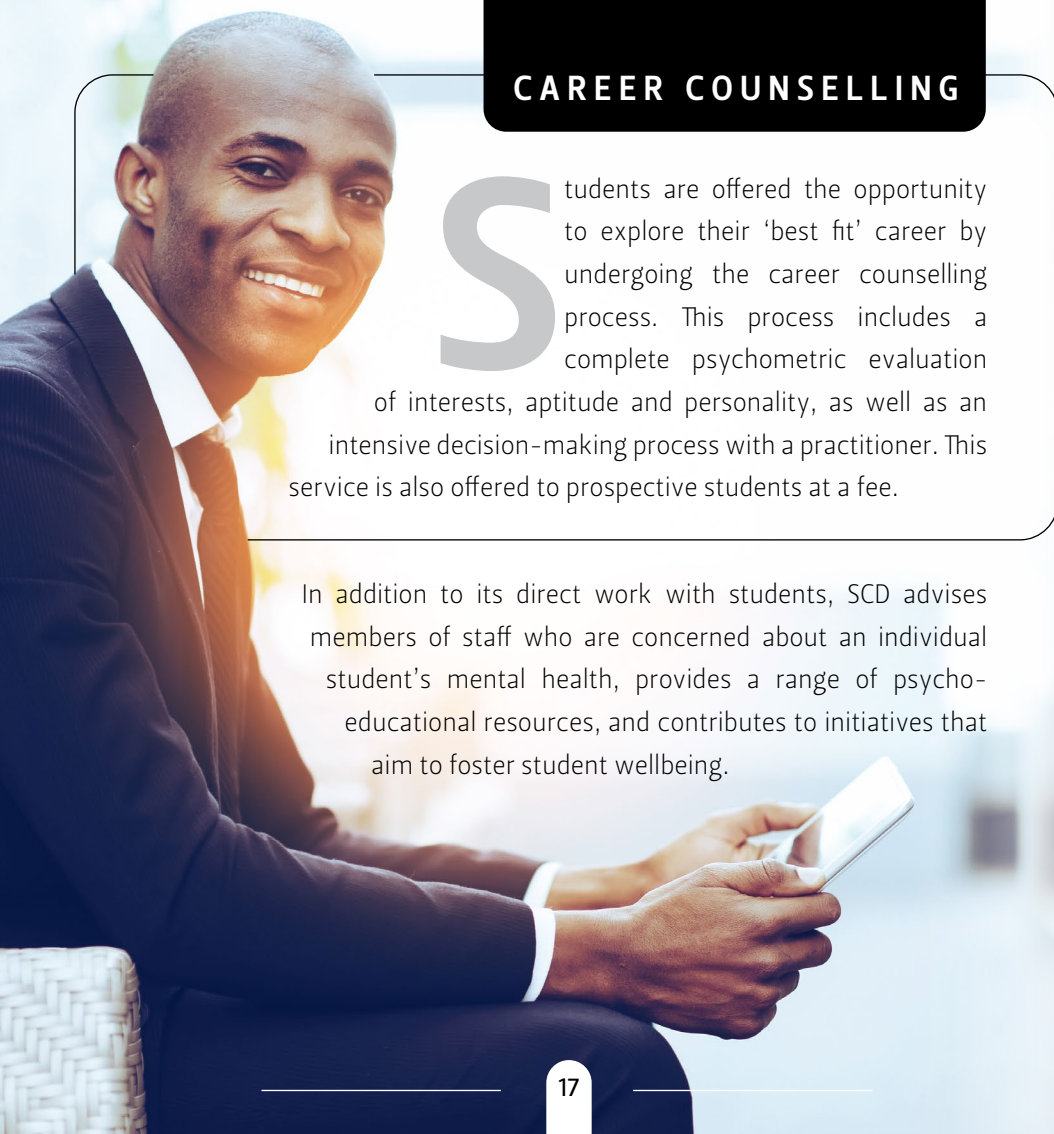
GROUP COUNSELLING

Group interventions that are developmental in nature and preventative in design.

THESE INCLUDE:

- Mental health skills-based workshops (one session)
- Mental health programmes (multiple sessions)

**DECIDE
COMMIT
FOCUS
SUCCEED**



CAREER COUNSELLING

Students are offered the opportunity to explore their 'best fit' career by undergoing the career counselling process. This process includes a complete psychometric evaluation of interests, aptitude and personality, as well as an intensive decision-making process with a practitioner. This service is also offered to prospective students at a fee.

In addition to its direct work with students, SCD advises members of staff who are concerned about an individual student's mental health, provides a range of psycho-educational resources, and contributes to initiatives that aim to foster student wellbeing.

HOW DOES COUNSELLING WORK?

PROACTIVELY

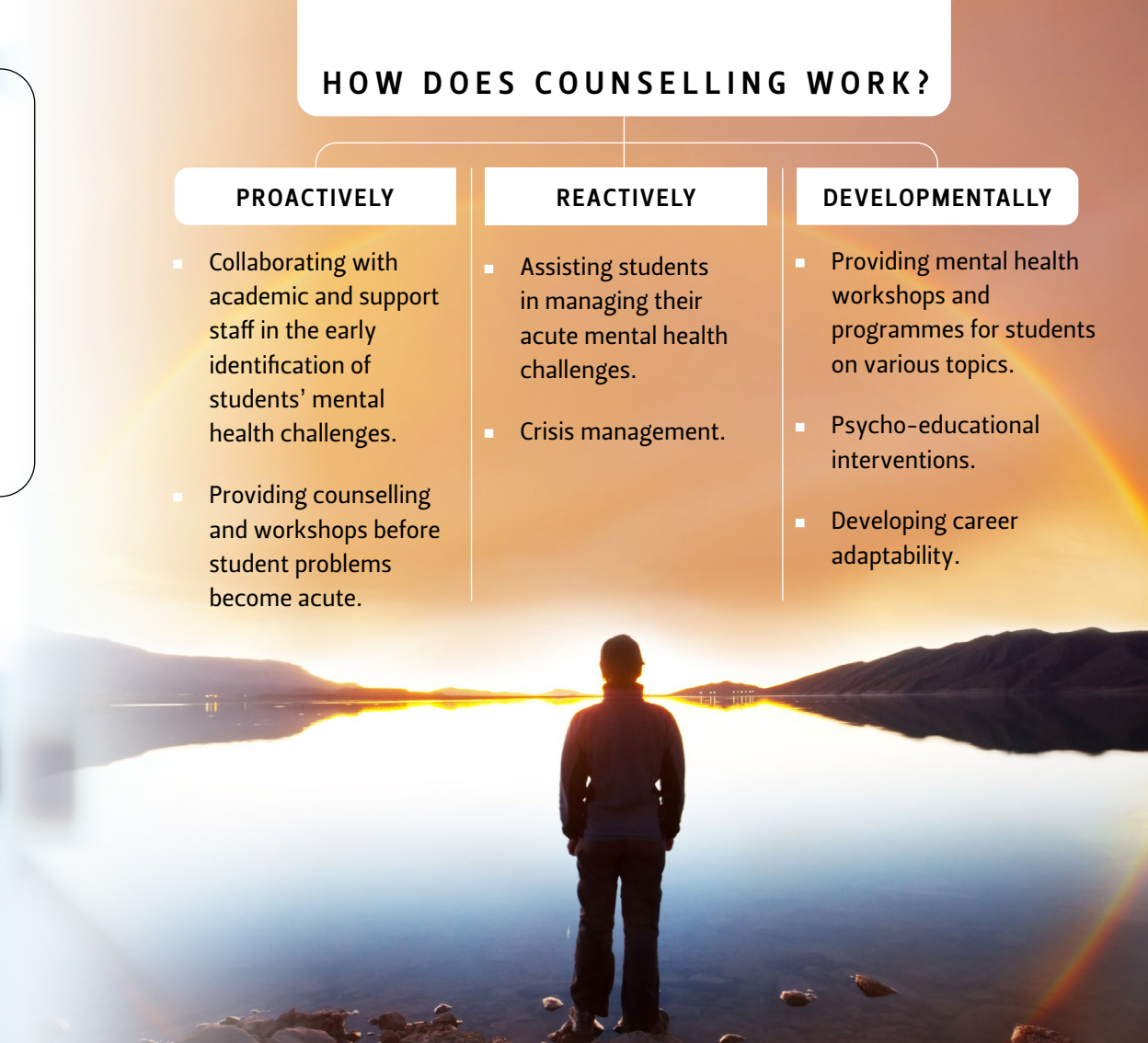
- Collaborating with academic and support staff in the early identification of students' mental health challenges.
- Providing counselling and workshops before student problems become acute.

REACTIVELY

- Assisting students in managing their acute mental health challenges.
- Crisis management.

DEVELOPMENTALLY

- Providing mental health workshops and programmes for students on various topics.
- Psycho-educational interventions.
- Developing career adaptability.



RECOGNISING A STUDENT IN MENTAL DISTRESS

Many a time, there are signs that a student is experiencing difficulties well ahead of the situation escalating to a crisis. Those in constant contact with students are often the first to notice that a student may be experiencing some challenges. The first point of contact for students in need of support often serves to either encourage or discourage them from seeking further guidance, and thus your role should never be underestimated.

You will not be taking on the role of a therapist or the person diagnosing the student. You need only be alert to and recognise the signs of difficulty or impending distress, and then to:

- communicate these concerns to your supervisor; or
- chat directly with the student to convey your care and concern, gather more information and offer the relevant referral information.

As a UFS staff member or student leader, you should constantly remain aware of your own professional limitations and the boundaries of your role. It is not your responsibility to counsel or advise the student with regards to mental health, but if mental health challenges can be identified and an early referral can be made, the benefits for the student as well as the academic institution can be substantial.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A STUDENT IN MENTAL DISTRESS

In most cases, there are certain signs and symptoms that indicate the possibility of mental distress. The following table may assist you in identifying these.

PHYSICAL	ACADEMIC	BEHAVIOURAL & EMOTIONAL	OTHER
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Deterioration in physical appearance or personal hygiene■ Frequent illness■ Often falling asleep/being fatigued in class■ Noticeable bruises or cuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Deterioration in work■ Repeated absenteeism■ Repeated missed assignments and tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Extreme anger or aggressive outbursts■ Expressing feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness and frequently crying■ Demanding or dependent behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Concerns from friends or colleagues regarding student■ Lack of response to outreach from staff

Continue on next page >>

PHYSICAL

- Disorganised speech and confusion
- Changes in behaviour/ character
- Extreme weight changes
- Noticeable substance abuse

ACADEMIC

- Extreme disorganisation or erratic performance
- Continuous help-seeking behaviour or special provisions
- Maladaptive perfectionism (e.g. *can't accept anything less than an A symbol*)
- Decreased/ lack of concentration
- Observed impairments in academic functioning (e.g. *illegible handwriting*)

BEHAVIOURAL & EMOTIONAL

- Severe anxiety, frustration or irritability
- Self-isolation
- Expressions of despair, loneliness, suicidal thoughts or extreme aggression

OTHER

- When in doubt, rather err on the side of caution and investigate further

SEVERITY OF THE SITUATION

EMERGENCY

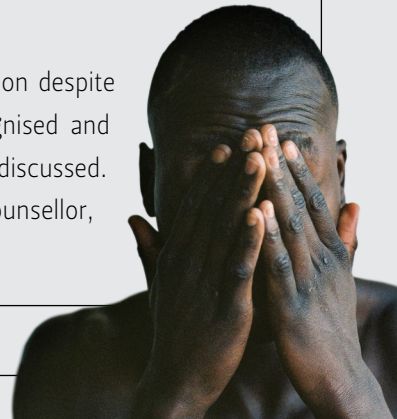
Is the student severely at risk of harming themselves or others (e.g. acute psychosis or major depression with suicide intent)? This situation is treated as any other emergency and might involve hospitalisation and liaison with a mental healthcare facility.

URGENCY

This situation does not involve any immediate threat to life, but requires an active intervention to prevent significant suffering or deterioration in the functioning of the student. This will involve contact with a local mental health service or crisis assessment team, and following up with the student within hours or days.

CONCERN

The student is experiencing distress, but is able to function despite these difficulties. The student's distress should be recognised and acknowledged, and possible treatment options should be discussed. This could involve referral to a psychiatrist, psychologist, counsellor, social worker or local mental health service.



RESPONDING TO A STUDENT IN MENTAL DISTRESS

SITUATIONS OF CONCERN / URGENCY

Members of staff who become concerned about a student who appears low in mood, tearful, withdrawn or overly anxious, or who exhibits a deterioration in academic performance, should consider one or more of the following courses of action:

- You need only listen, show support and offer available resource information. You are not required to take on the role of a therapist.
- Communicate your concern to the student in a positive tone, pointing out the specific signs you have observed.
- Ask how the student is coping and listen attentively to their response. Allow the student time to tell their story and do not be afraid of silences.

- Ask open-ended questions directly related to the concern and do not show any judgement.
- Encourage the student to consider obtaining the necessary support and suggest resources and referrals.
- Assure the student that discussions are confidential and will remain so, unless you have good reason to believe them to be a danger to themselves or others.
- If signs of a safety risk are present, ask the student directly if they are considering suicide. If a student is not contemplating suicide, asking about it will not introduce them to the option or 'put ideas in their head'.
- Offer to communicate your concern to Student Counselling and Development or to their own mental health practitioner (if they already have one).
- Emphasise to the student that the relevant referral support structures have the knowledge, experience and resources to assist in a more appropriate manner. Provide the name, phone number and location of the referral office or accompany the student to the relevant office.
- Arrange a follow-up appointment with the student to discuss the outcome.
- Counselling is a voluntary service and requires informed consent from the student. If a student does not wish to utilise the support services on offer, their wishes should be respected. Unless the student's situation or condition escalates to an emergency status, no further action is necessary at this stage.



EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In a crisis situation, where a student is highly distressed, an emergency appointment can be made at SCD. This appointment consists of a containment session to evaluate the situation and make the necessary recommendations or referrals.

These circumstances could include the following:

- If a student is expressing suicidal thoughts
- If a student is threatening self-harm
- If a student appears to not be in touch with reality
- If a student is expressing bizarre behaviour, ideas and thoughts
- If a student appears overly agitated or aggressive

In responding to a student in distress, staff should only act to the limit of their competencies. The appropriate course of action depends on the urgency of the situation, your relationship with the student and your level of experience.

In situations where a staff member has become concerned about a student and believes them to be at immediate risk of harm to self or others, one or more of the following listed courses of action should be taken.

ACTIONS ADVISED IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

- Try not to act alone. Seek help from another colleague (if possible).
- If the student has harmed themselves, or displays a strong intention to do so, call for an ambulance.

(**ER24** is the ambulance service that is currently being utilised by UFS – the following numbers can be phoned: **084 124** or **0800 051 051**.)

Please ensure that it is a life-threatening emergency before you call the ambulance and remember the following:

- Stay calm.
- Identify yourself.
- Provide your contact number (don't give your office number and then leave the office).
- Clearly state the problem (e.g. the student has taken an overdose).





- Give clear instructions regarding the exact location of the emergency.
- Stay in contact with the emergency staff.
- Don't put the phone down until all relevant information has been given.
- Listen carefully to any instructions and write them down, if possible.
- Stay with the student until the ambulance arrives.
- If the student is very aggressive, seek help from Protection Services.
- Ask the student if they are already receiving counselling at SCD or from any other mental health practitioner. Obtain details and contact the relevant practitioner explaining your concerns and requesting immediate help.
 - Accompany the student to the appointment, if possible.
 - If the incident occurs whilst off-campus, e.g. on a field trip, contact the nearest local health services for assistance.
 - If the incident occurs outside of office hours, call Protection Services.
 - If it is a non-critical emergency within office hours, the student can be taken to the Campus Health Clinic where they will be examined by a physician. Medical aid tariffs / administrative fees are applicable.

CONTACT DETAILS

Student Counselling and Development (<i>Bloemfontein Campus</i>)	051 401 2853
Student Counselling and Development (<i>South Campus</i>)	051 505 1298
Student Counselling and Development (<i>Qwaqwa Campus</i>)	058 718 5029 / 5032 / 5033
Campus Health Clinic (<i>Bloemfontein Campus</i>)	051 401 2603
Campus Health Clinic (<i>South Campus</i>)	051 505 1495
Campus Health Clinic (<i>Qwaqwa Campus</i>)	058 718 5210 / 5228
Protection Services (<i>Bloemfontein Campus</i>)	051 401 2911
Protection Services (<i>South Campus</i>)	051 505 1217
Protection Services (<i>Qwaqwa Campus</i>)	058 718 5043
ER24 Ambulance (<i>Bloemfontein</i>)	082 124 / 0800 051 051
ER24 Ambulance (<i>Qwaqwa</i>)	084 460 7007

SUMMARY OF REACTING TO A STUDENT IN MENTAL DISTRESS

Staff member is concerned about the mental health of a student

NON-EMERGENCY / URGENCY / CONCERN

The student appears to be:

- Low in mood, overly anxious, withdrawn or tearful or has a sudden deterioration in academic performance

AND

- Does not display features considered as an emergency

EMERGENCY

The student appears to be:

- Threatening / aggressive (**call Protection Services**)
- Suicidal
- Threatening self-harm
- Threatening to harm others
- Expressing bizarre ideas and thoughts
- Behaving in a bizarre or very agitated manner

NON-EMERGENCY / URGENCY / CONCERN

- Mention your concerns to the student
- Assure confidentiality
- Encourage the student to contact SCD, Campus Health Clinic or the student's own general practitioner or psychiatrist
- Arrange a follow-up appointment with the student
- If the student does not wish to utilise the support services on offer, their wishes should be respected. No further intervention is appropriate at this point unless their condition deteriorates and becomes an emergency

EMERGENCY

- If possible, consult a colleague – try not to act alone
- Explain concern to student (unless you believe this will worsen the situation)
- Contact SCD, Campus Health Clinic or the student's own general practitioner or psychiatrist
- Book an emergency appointment with one of these professional services
- Accompany the student to the appointment, if possible
- If off campus, contact local health services and request assistance

SOME MORE HELPFUL STRATEGIES

- Always instil hope.
- Listen, communicate support and refer.
- Encourage students to be 'active seekers of health'.
- Encourage students to use a wide variety of techniques to help regulate their moods on a daily basis. Our students can be very creative solution-builders, so assist them in focusing on their strengths and resources. Exercising, listening to cheerful music, going out with a friend, etc. can help lift a person's mood or shake off a negative mood.
- Encourage students to make use of the developmental workshops, programmes, Student Toolkit and other resources offered by SCD.
- Help students remember how they have solved their problems in the past.
- Encourage students to use art or writing as a tool for emotional expression.
- Teach resilience by encouraging students to be creative and to use humour.
- Encourage students to create healthy, supportive relationships and connections.
- Encourage autonomous behaviour.
- Encourage students to become organised, set achievable goals and manage their time efficiently.
- Avoid engaging as a therapist.

- Do not attempt to diagnose (e.g. "I think you're suffering from...").
- Avoid being prescriptive in your communication.
- Avoid forcing the student to seek counselling.
- Because counselling is a voluntary service and requires informed consent from the student, SCD is not able to contact the student for a counselling session at the request of a third party.

“The **i** in illness
is isolation and the
crucial letters in
wellness are **we**.”

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

May we, as a UFS family, have a better awareness of mental health and work together to keep our students happy and healthy!



THE UFS NETWORK OF SUPPORT

■ STUDENT COUNSELLING AND DEVELOPMENT (SCD)

Bloemfontein Campus 051 401 2853

South Campus 051 505 1298

Qwaqwa Campus

058 718 5029/5032/5033

■ CAMPUS HEALTH

Bloemfontein Campus 051 401 2603

South Campus 051 505 1495

Qwaqwa Campus 058 718 5210 / 5228

■ SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

Bloemfontein & South Campus

051 401 9117

Qwaqwa Campus 058 718 5091 / 5090

■ PROTECTION SERVICES

Bloemfontein Campus 051 401 2911

South Campus 051 505 1217

Qwaqwa Campus 058 718 5043

■ AMBULANCE

Bloemfontein & South Campus

0800 051 051 / 084 124

Ambulance Government (Qwaqwa)

10177/112

ER24 (Qwaqwa) 084 460 7007

NETCARE 911 (Qwaqwa)

084 303 7677 / 084 124

■ CENTRE FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS AND DISABILITY SUPPORT (CUADS)

Boemfontein Campus 051 401 3713

South Campus 051 505 1355

Qwaqwa Campus 058 718 5189

OFF-CAMPUS RESOURCES

www.mobieg.co.za

SA DEPRESSION & ANXIETY GROUP FOR A SUICIDE EMERGENCY

011 262 6396

0800 567 567

PUBLIC HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

National Hospital

051 405 2911

Universitas Hospital

051 405 3911

Pelonomi Hospital

051 405 1478

MUCPP Clinic

051 435 6430

Thusong Clinic

051 434 2357/8

Heidedal Clinic

051 409 6786

Batho Clinic

051 409 6776

Mofumahadi Manapo Mopeli Hospital

058 718 3200

Phuthaditjhaba Clinic

058 713 6660

Ma-haig Clinic

058 713 6820

Mphatlalatsane Clinic

058 713 1320

"What mental health needs
is more sunlight,
more candour,
and more unashamed
conversation."

GLENN CLOSE