

Supporting a Friend: UCC Student to Student Mental Health & Wellbeing Guidebook



UCC

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



Students' Union
university college cork

What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide is here to help you to help others if you ever find yourself in a situation where you are concerned about another student's mental health and wellbeing. The chart on page 3 will guide you through linking them to professional services. Page 4 contains all the relevant contact details you might require.

Do students have responsibility for other students if they disclose information to them around mental health difficulties they are facing?

No student is responsible for looking after anyone's mental wellbeing, apart from their own. This guide is **not** a policy and it does not require anyone to do anything that they are not comfortable with.

It exists to acknowledge the reality that students often seek support from their friends and therefore the university wishes to provide some basic guidance on what could be done to support your friend if you feel comfortable doing so.

The university and its staff do have a responsibility to our students in this area as outlined in the Student Mental Health: Policy for Staff {INSERT LINK}, [Fitness to Continue in Study Policy](#) and the [Fitness to Practise Policy](#).

Tips on how to recommend a professional support service to a friend

The two most important things to bear in mind if you want to help a friend reach out for support is to remain **non-judgemental** and be **reassuring** about their decision to speak about their mental health and wellbeing.

When listening to someone here are handy physical tips to ensure you appear attentive:

- Face the person squarely and adopt an open posture
- Respect their personal space
- Considering the location, are there any barriers to communication (e.g. noise, mobile phones, etc.)
- Maintain comfortable eye contact
- Use encouraging facial expressions and gestures (e.g. nodding, smiling, etc.)
- Attempt to contain automatic negative reactions if they make an unexpected disclosure (e.g judgement, shock, anger, etc.)

Here are handy verbal tips to ensure you appear attentive:

- Assure them you are there to listen
- Don't interrupt them
- Allow silence, it is not a bad thing as it allows you both time to gather your thoughts
- If necessary, encourage them to engage with professional supports
- If encouraging them to seek professional support remember you are making a suggestion to them, not giving an order so use appropriate language e.g. "It might benefit you if you spoke with [the name of the service]. They can help students with things like that, would you consider making an appointment with them?"
- Ask for their commitment; this has to be their decision
- If they wish, help them to make an appointment with the professional support service
- Reassure them on their decision

Flow Chart

The flow chart on the next page gives you a step by step process of what you might do and what questions you might ask yourself if you think your friend might need support from a professional support service or just need someone to listen to their concerns.

ARMED & DANGEROUS

- Call Gardaí 112 or 999
- Inform UCC Security (021) 4903111

LIFE THREATENING

- Call Gardaí 112 or 999
- Inform UCC Security (021) 4903111
- If you suspect or are certain they have overdosed immediately call an ambulance 112 or 999, inform UCC Security (021) 4903111 & inform Student Health (021) 4902311, in that order

IF THE ABOVE DOES NOT APPLY:

LISTEN

- Do not undervalue the support you are offering by listening and being available to the person
- For many people being listened to in a non-judgemental manner provides great comfort



MIGHT PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT BE NEEDED?

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Is what they are discussing beyond what you would view as reasonable venting of frustration/anger?
- Is it an ongoing concern to them?
- Has the situation deteriorated or has the issue escalated?

IF NO



IF YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE DOING SO

- Continue to listen to them
- Offer to discuss this with them again should they ever feel the need
- Encourage them to reach out & talk to others (family & friends)



IF YES

ACTION TO TAKE

- Encourage them to contact Student Counselling, Student Health, their own GP/Psychiatrist or any university staff member they feel comfortable with OR if they are not in a fit state to do so themselves, seek consent to make contact on their behalf
- If you feel comfortable doing so you can accompany them to their appointment and remain in the waiting room
- In circumstances where you are particularly concerned, you should consider assisting or accompanying the student to access one of the above support services on that day
- If it is after hours or the weekend consider CUH A+E (021 492 0230), SouthDoc (1850 335 999), An Garda Síochána (112 or 999)

What if I am unsure if I should recommend a support service?

The chart is designed to help students provide information to their friends. Do consider the signs as outlined in that chart but **you are also not expected to be able to make an expert determination**. Air on the side of safety if you are unsure if your friend needs support, they will appreciate your concern regardless. And if they do not wish to seek support at this time, it is their decision and that should be respected (some **exceptional** circumstances exist, see the life threatening category).

Self-care

While it is admirable that you want to help your friend through a difficult time it is important that you do not take their burden on as your own. If they discuss very heavy topics with you it can easily begin to weigh on your mind and cause you to constantly be concerned for them rather than taking care of yourself. All of the support services in the University are available to all UCC students so if the concern you have for your friend is causing you distress you should feel free to reach out yourself, you do not need to disclose anything about your friend so it is not a breach of their trust. It is up to you what you choose to talk about.

Important Contact Information

University Support Services

Student Counselling & Development	(021) 490 3565
Student Health Department	(021) 490 2311

24 Hour Supports

UCC General Services Security	(021) 490 3111
An Garda Siochána, Anglesea Street	(021) 431 3031
A&E Cork University Hospital	(021) 492 0230
South Doc (evening & weekend GP)	1850 335 999
Emergency Services	112 or 999

Always Remember....

GIVE THEM YOUR ATTENTION & SUPPORT

UNDERSTAND THEIR ISSUE IN A NON-JUDGEMENTAL MANNER

IDENTIFY IF THEY MIGHT NEED PROFESSIONAL SUPPORTS

DIRECT THEM AS TO HOW & WHO TO CONTACT FOR SUPPORT

ENCOURAGE THEM TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP