



Support for Students Experiencing
Mental Health Difficulties



FOR STUDENTS

Supporting students studying at Exeter

The Mental Health Team support students who experience a range of mental health difficulties with a specific emphasis on how their health is impacting on their ability to study and cope at university.

The information in this leaflet covers:

- Is this service for me?
- The initial session
- Ongoing support
- What if I'm really struggling?
- What if I interrupt my studies?
- Do I need to declare my health issues or disability?
- Will my personal information be shared with others?
- Staff within the Mental Health Team
- Approaches and interventions
- Is the Disabled Student's Allowance relevant to me?
- How can I contact the Mental Health Team?

Is this service for you?

The Mental Health Team would be happy to meet with you to discuss your situation in more depth and to consider possible options for support if:

(a) you have a previously diagnosed mental health difficulty *or*

(b) you are experiencing a range of signs or symptoms, outlined below, which are impacting on your ability to study and cope at university.

Such signs and symptoms can include:

- **Behaviour** – e.g. poor motivation, increasingly tearful, less active, disorganised, socially withdrawn, self-harm, difficulty sleeping, poor life/work balance, a change in academic achievement, difficulty with planning and organising, agitation, difficulty relaxing.
- **Physical** – e.g. fatigue, lethargy, nausea, tremor, palpitations, difficulty breathing, losing or putting on weight.
- **Thoughts** – e.g. difficulties with concentration, difficulty in making decisions, persistent negative thinking, ruminations, thoughts of self-harm or self-injury, lack of self-belief.
- **Feelings** – e.g. prolonged sadness, rapid mood changes, feeling elated, anxiety, panic, fear, increased irritability, feeling overwhelmed and out of control, feeling hopeless or worthless.

The most common types of mental health difficulties that students experience are anxiety and phobias, eating difficulties, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, bi-polar disorder, psychosis and schizophrenia. However a person's mental health and well-being can also be affected at difficult times of their life, e.g. moving away from home or experiencing a bereavement. At times like these we can experience changes in the way that we think, feel and behave.

For some of us these feelings occur to such an extent or for such a long period of time that they begin to affect our ability to cope with everyday life, and can develop into a more significant mental health difficulty.

You can contact the Mental Health Team directly yourself. See the back page for contact details.

Referrals are also taken from a student's GP or mental health professional.

The initial session

Your initial session will be with a mental health advisor and will last between 1 - 1½ hours.

The session will:

- provide a confidential, supportive place to discuss what is happening for you and how your mental health difficulties are impacting on your course, academic progression and university life.
- consider issues of declaring your mental health difficulty, confidentiality, and giving consent for liaison.
- provide problem-solving approaches in relation to your situation. This may include liaising with your university schools, establishing reasonable adjustments under Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and discussing specific therapeutic interventions.
- consider the relevance and benefits of applying for the Disabled Students' Allowance and obtaining medical evidence.
- consider the most appropriate ongoing support options for you. This may include mental health mentoring and/or signposting to other services e.g. a GP, the Student Counselling Service, international student support and community mental health services.

Ongoing support

Following the initial session ongoing support from the Mental Health Team may have been agreed as a helpful option for you at this time.

Mental health mentoring and ongoing support includes:

- supporting you in managing your mental health and well being.
- supporting you in developing coping strategies and skills to maximize your potential and your experience at university.
- exploring and developing a healthy balance in daily life.
- establishing an individual learning plan (ILP) and negotiating/advising schools on reasonable adjustments, including exam arrangements.
- providing support and practical help in enabling you to access and apply for the Disabled Allowance (DSA).
- ongoing co-ordination and liaison with your university schools and outside agencies. This may include formulating joint plans, advocacy, mediation. (Any liaison would be undertaken with your consent – see Confidentiality section on page 4).
- regular and ongoing monitoring and review of your mental health and well-being and its impact on your academic progress.

What if I'm really struggling?

If you are really struggling with your mental health and feel you need to see someone urgently, please contact your GP or the Student Health Centre.

If you are really struggling with your studies the Mental Health Team support can include:

- exploring options that may be possible for you.
- gaining relevant information to help inform your decision e.g. the School's perspective on your academic situation, the Students' Guild for your financial situation.
- coordinating joint meetings with the other university schools and support services. This may be under the Fitness to Study and/or the Fitness to Practice procedures.
- supporting you in deciding on the best course of action in relation to your studies and health.

Options available may include deferring some or all exams, renegotiating deadlines, health-related breaks such as interruption, repeating a year, part-time study, changing courses, and/or recommendations to access ongoing support from university and/or outside agencies.

What happens if I interrupt my studies?

If you decide to interrupt your studies on health grounds, the Mental Health Team may be able to support you in the following ways:

- planning for your time away from university, and exploring appropriate options of support.
- remaining in contact during your period of interruption, with a focus on supporting your return to university.

- facilitating and supporting your return to study on both a practical and emotional level, e.g. liaison with your academic school, accommodation, implementation of reasonable adjustments, setting up of support structures.

Staff within the Mental Health Team

The Mental Health Team consists of qualified mental health practitioners who have extensive experience in supporting people with mental health difficulties. All team members have a specific professional training such as occupational therapy, social work or nursing and have completed additional training in mental health and well-being approaches.

Staff are employed within the team as either Mental Health Advisors or Mental Health Mentors.

Mental Health Advisors hold a higher level of responsibility within the team and the University. They meet with each new student for the initial session, provide some ongoing mentoring, support students with more complex needs, support the wider University in relation to students' mental health issues, and provide supervision for the Mental Health Mentors.

Mental Health Mentors provide the ongoing mental health mentoring and support for students, (see separate DRC mental health mentoring leaflet). The mentors may also run workshops for students such as managing exam stress.

All staff have a responsibility to maintain their continuing professional development requirements, their professional registration, to receive clinical supervision, and maintain links with appropriate organisations and information, e.g. The Universities Mental Health Advisors Network and The National Mental Health Development Unit.

The team is part of a wider multi-disciplinary team within the Disability Resource Centre, which is part of the University Student Experience.

Approaches and Interventions

The Mental Health Team draws on a variety of mental health approaches and interventions for their work. These include occupational therapy, problem-solving and skills training, life and recovery coaching, solution-focused brief therapy, transactional analysis, cognitive behaviour therapy, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, motivational interviewing and neuro-linguistic programming.

Do I need to declare my health issues or disability?

Many students can be concerned about declaring a mental health difficulty and worry that this may be seen negatively or that they may be labelled in an unhelpful way. However, there is legislation to protect the individual from this sort of discrimination.

When a student declares that they have a mental health difficulty, the University has a responsibility to provide the best support and advice to the student.

Students may also be unsure about declaring as they may not see their mental health difficulty as a 'disability'. However, the Disability Discrimination Act, DDA, 1995/ 2005 recognises mental health difficulties as a 'disability' under the Act and therefore as a legitimate reason for students to require and access additional support and reasonable adjustments while studying. 'Reasonable adjustments' have to be considered to enable a student to access their course with more equality and put the student on a 'level playing field' with their peers.

Declaring your mental health difficulties may entitle you to:

- an assessment with a mental health advisor to look at your individual health and study needs.
- an individual learning plan which outlines guidance and recommendations for your academic school in relation to your individual needs.
- reasonable adjustments, e.g. special exam arrangements, specific accommodation, field trip support.
- the Disabled Students Allowance – see page 5
- additional support whilst at university.

Remember, if you have support needs and you have not informed the relevant people, the University may not be able to meet these needs effectively.

Will my personal information be shared with others?

About Confidentiality

The Mental Health Team offer a confidential service whether a student has chosen to declare their health issue or not. This means that personal information shared with the Mental Health Team will not be passed on to anybody else without the student's permission.

The only exceptions to the rule of confidentiality are:

- if a member of staff believes that the student is a serious risk to themselves or others.
- if a member of staff would be liable to civil or criminal court procedures if information was not disclosed.

At your initial appointment the issues of declaring your mental health difficulty, confidentiality, and giving consent for liaison will be discussed and the relevant paperwork completed.

In order for the most appropriate and effective support to be put in place, the Mental Health Team may need to liaise with relevant university schools and services. As this information is sensitive under the Data Protection Act, the Mental Health Team would gain permission from you to communicate with the appropriate people. Any information shared would always be kept to a minimum and shared on a need-to-know basis.

Some students choose not to give consent for communication to take place with other university schools/services. In these situations you will be informed of how this may affect the type of support the Disability Resource Centre and the University can offer.

If you give consent for liaison to take place with other university support services and/or health agencies, the Mental Health Team will work collaboratively to ensure you receive coordinated support.

Am I eligible for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)?

Students who experience mental health difficulties may be entitled to the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). This allowance is usually funded by Student Finance England. DSA can provide specialist equipment and staff support, depending on individual need, to minimise the adverse impact that a student's health may have on their ability to study at university.

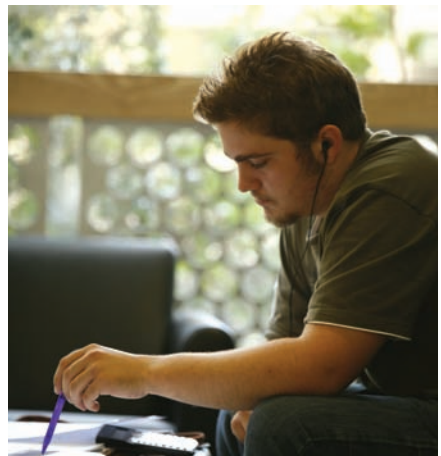
Some students can be ambivalent about applying for Disabled Students Allowance. Common concerns you may have include:

- the stigma attached to the word 'disability' and mental health issues.

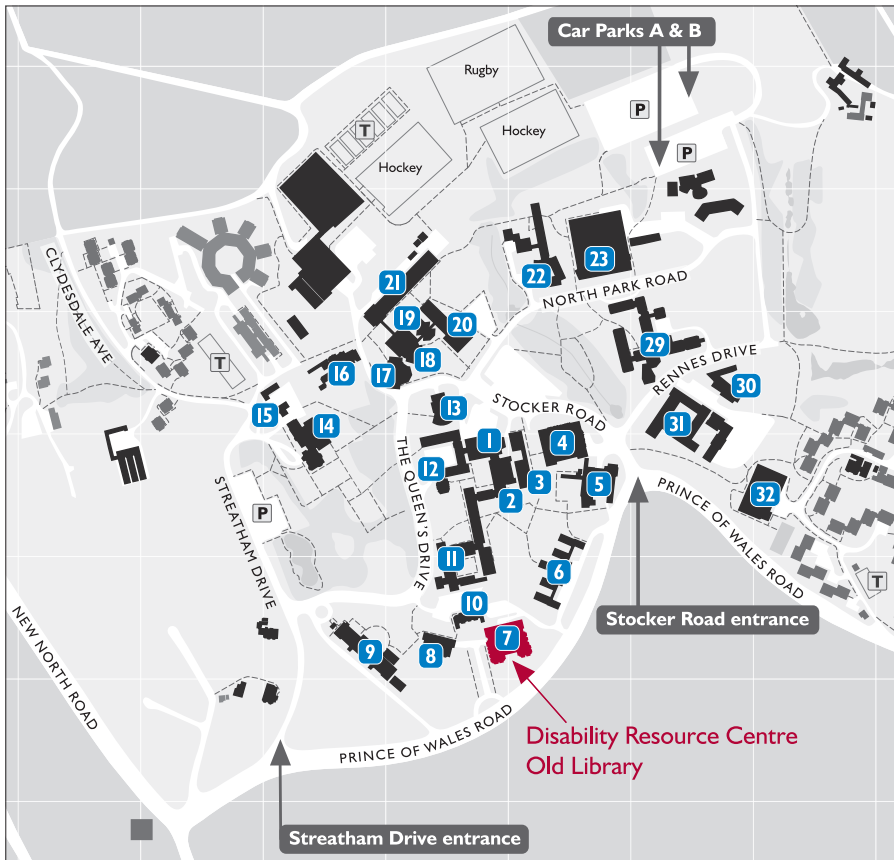
- not classing your mental health difficulty as a 'disability'.
- will it go on your University academic records?
- will your future employers be informed?

The word 'disability' is used as part of the Disability Discrimination Act to help define who is eligible for support, which includes people who experience mental health difficulties. Applying for DSA does not constitute as a formal registration of being disabled. It will not be recorded on your University academic records and you do not need to inform future employers about any DSA applications.

When you meet with a mental health advisor, the DSA will be discussed and any of your concerns can be considered in more depth. If you are eligible you will be encouraged to consider applying in order to take advantage of the benefits that it can provide. These may include receiving regular support from specialist workers and specialist equipment to support your studies.



How to find us



Streamtham Campus

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|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Great Hall | 10 Mary Harris Memorial Chapel | 19 Henry Wellcome |
| 2 Devonshire House | 11 Queen's | 20 Geoffrey Pope |
| 3 Shopping Centre | 12 Northcote House | 21 Physics |
| 4 Library | 13 Northcott Theatre | 22 Laver |
| 5 Streamtham Farm | 14 Reed Hall | 23 Harrison |
| 6 Hatherly | 15 Reed Mews | 29 Amory |
| 7 Disability Resource Centre | 16 IAIS | 30 Xfi |
| 8 Roborough | 17 Peter Chalk Centre | 31 Streamtham Court |
| 9 Washington Singer | 18 Newman | 32 Cornwall House |

How can I contact the Mental Health Team

If you would like more information about how the team may be able to support you or to make an appointment please do not hesitate to contact the Mental Health Advisors at the Disability Resource Centre. Contact details listed below.

Opening hours: Monday – Friday 9 am – 4.30 pm

For more information on the Disabled Students Allowance:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/Disablement/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG_10034898

Acknowledgements

Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion in Higher Education
Prepared by the Universities UK/Guild HE Committee for the
Promotion of Mental Well-being in Higher Education and The
Progression Support Team, Nottingham Trent University, 2007.



If you require this leaflet in another format please contact the
Disability Resource Centre
Old Library
Prince of Wales Road
Exeter Devon
EX4 4SB

Telephone: +44 (0)1392 723880

Email: disability@exeter.ac.uk

www.exeter.ac.uk/disability/mentalhealth