

Supporting Students in Distress

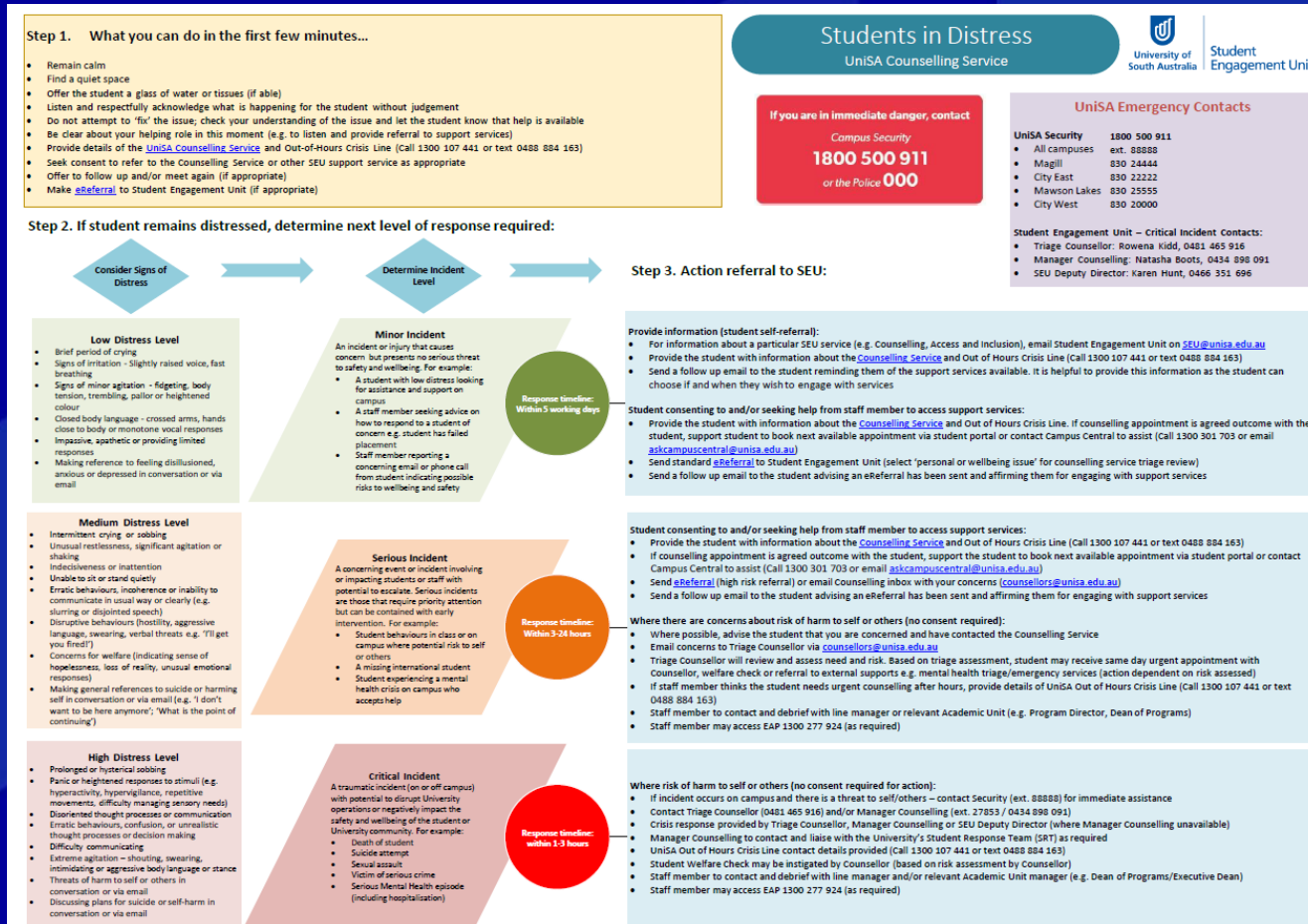
Rowena Kidd – Triage Counsellor

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University of
South Australia

Students in Distress Process Map



Levels of Distress

Common things you might see when someone is distressed

- Emotional outbursts, crying
- Agitation – rapid speaking, fidgeting, shaking
- Withdrawn or providing limited responses to questions
- Confusion, problems concentrating
- Closed body language like crossed arms, closed fists, looking down, hair covering face
- Raised voices, hostility or threats (to self or others)
- Describing feelings of hopelessness or suicidal thoughts

Consider Signs of Distress

Low Distress Level

- Brief period of crying
- Signs of irritation - Slightly raised voice, fast breathing
- Signs of minor agitation - fidgeting, body tension, trembling, pallor or heightened colour
- Closed body language - crossed arms, hands close to body or monotone vocal responses
- Impassive, apathetic or providing limited responses
- Making reference to feeling disillusioned, anxious or depressed in conversation or via email

Medium Distress Level

- Intermittent crying or sobbing
- Unusual restlessness, significant agitation or shaking
- Indecisiveness or inattention
- Unable to sit or stand quietly
- Erratic behaviours, incoherence or inability to communicate in usual way or clearly (e.g. slurring or disjointed speech)
- Disruptive behaviours (hostility, aggressive language, swearing, verbal threats e.g. 'I'll get you fired!')
- Concerns for welfare (indicating sense of hopelessness, loss of reality, unusual emotional responses)
- Making general references to suicide or harming self in conversation or via email (e.g. 'I don't want to be here anymore'; 'What is the point of continuing')

High Distress Level

- Prolonged or hysterical sobbing
- Panic or heightened responses to stimuli (e.g. hyperactivity, hypervigilance, repetitive movements, difficulty managing sensory needs)
- Disoriented thought processes or communication
- Erratic behaviours, confusion, or unrealistic thought processes or decision making
- Difficulty communicating
- Extreme agitation – shouting, swearing, intimidating or aggressive body language or stance
- Threats of harm to self or others in conversation or via email
- Discussing plans for suicide or self-harm in conversation or via email

Step 1 – What you can do in the first few minutes

Step 1. What you can do in the first few minutes...

- Remain calm
- Find a quiet space
- Offer the student a glass of water or tissues (if able)
- Listen and respectfully acknowledge what is happening for the student without judgement
- Do not attempt to 'fix' the issue; check your understanding of the issue and let the student know that help is available
- Be clear about your helping role in this moment (e.g. to listen and provide referral to support services)
- Provide details of the [UniSA Counselling Service](#) and Out-of-Hours Crisis Line (Call 1300 107 441 or text 0488 884 163)
- Seek consent to refer to the Counselling Service or other SEU support service as appropriate
- Offer to follow up and/or meet again (if appropriate)
- Make [eReferral](#) to Student Engagement Unit (if appropriate)

- Remain calm
- Give undivided attention
- Find a quiet space so the student has physical space and privacy (where possible)
- Offer the student a glass of water and tissues (if available)
- If student is hyperventilating, recommend deep slow breathing (e.g. Take a breath with them ... breathe in through nose ... breathe out through the mouth)
- Listen – open minded/non-judgementally
- Acknowledge how the student is feeling
- Where appropriate, assist student to book a counselling appointment [online](#) or connect to Campus Central to book an appointment

Remaining Calm Activity

- Staying calm ... easier said than done right?!
- Mindful breathing can help to remain calm
- Take a deep breath
- Notice how you are feeling
- Debrief
- Practice at home ...

[3-minute Mindful Breathing Meditation \(Relieve Stress\)](#)



Step 1 – Helpful things to say and do ...

- **Acknowledge the feelings**

- That sounds really difficult/upsetting/worrying/stressful
- I can see how that would be distressing/upsetting/hard
- I would think most people would feel this way in this situation
- It's completely reasonable to feel distressed/upset about this

- **Clarify issue (if needed)**

- I hear what you are saying, (reframe what you have heard) is this right?
- What I hear you saying is ...
- Did I understand you when you said...?

- **Suggestions to help reduce distress / calm**

- Let's take a breath together ... count the breath in and out if needed (or imagine you are blowing a big bubble/up a balloon)
- Let's not focus on the (academic issues), your wellbeing is the focus right now
- We can deal with the academic stuff later, let's connect you to some extra help

Step 1 – Helpful things to say and do ...

- **Support student to book a counselling appointment**
 - How about we book a counselling appointment right now?
 - I can send a referral to the counselling service if you prefer?
 - There are ways forward, lets connect you to a counsellor so you can build your plan
- **Set boundaries**
 - Be clear about what you can do right now
 - Don't try to solve the issue in this moment
 - I will refer you to counselling and can follow up later about assessment tasks
- **Confirm the agreed plan**
 - We have a plan, I will ... (send eReferral to counselling), you will ... (contact counselling)
- **Suggest support options for today/tonight**
 - Do you have someone who can support you? Why don't you give them a call?
 - Give student crisis line details (e.g. If you need to talk to someone again tonight, you can call the out of hour crisis line on **Call 1300 107 441** or **SMS 0488 884 163**)



Step 2 – Determine next level of response

• Assess distress level

- is the distress brief, intermittent or prolonged?
- What do you observe / hear from the student?

• Is this situation/incident minor, serious or critical?

- **Minor** – no serious threat to safety or wellbeing
- **Serious** – impact to student and/or staff with potential to escalate (can be contained with early intervention supports)
- **Critical** – traumatic event with potential to disrupt university operations and/or risk of harm to self or others


Step 2. If student remains distressed, determine next level of response required:



Step 3 – Action referral to SEU: Counselling

- **Low distress / minor incident**

- no serious threat to safety or wellbeing
- provide counselling and out of hours crisis line details to student
- with permission of student, send eReferral
 - Select 'Personal & Wellbeing issues' for counselling eReferrals
- response time: within 5 working days



Response timeline:
Within 5 working days

Provide information (student self-referral):

- For information about a particular SEU service (e.g. Counselling, Access and Inclusion), email Student Engagement Unit on SEU@unisa.edu.au
- Provide the student with information about the [Counselling Service](#) and Out of Hours Crisis Line (Call 1300 107 441 or text 0488 884 163)
- Send a follow up email to the student reminding them of the support services available. It is helpful to provide this information as the student can choose if and when they wish to engage with services

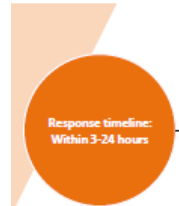
Student consenting to and/or seeking help from staff member to access support services:

- Provide the student with information about the [Counselling Service](#) and Out of Hours Crisis Line. If counselling appointment is agreed outcome with the student, support student to book next available appointment via student portal or contact Campus Central to assist (Call 1300 301 703 or email askcampuscentral@unisa.edu.au)
- Send standard [eReferral](#) to Student Engagement Unit (select 'personal or wellbeing issue' for counselling service triage review)
- Send a follow up email to the student advising an eReferral has been sent and affirming them for engaging with support services

Step 3 – Action referral to SEU: Counselling

- **Medium distress / serious incident**

- impact to student and staff with potential to escalate (can be contained with early intervention supports)
- no concerns about risk of harm to self or others:
 - Provide counselling details to student
 - With permission from student, send eReferral (*Select 'Personal & Wellbeing issues' for counselling eReferrals*)
- concerns about risk of harm to self or others:
 - On Campus – contact Security (x88888) or via SafeZone app 'Emergency' button
 - Off Campus – contact Triage Counsellor via counsellors@unisa.edu.au
- response time: within 3 – 24 hours
- debrief with line manager and/or access EAP (as required)



Response timeline:
Within 3-24 hours

Student consenting to and/or seeking help from staff member to access support services:

- Provide the student with information about the [Counselling Service](#) and Out of Hours Crisis Line (Call 1300 107 441 or text 0488 884 163)
- If counselling appointment is agreed outcome with the student, support the student to book next available appointment via student portal or contact Campus Central to assist (Call 1300 301 703 or email askcampuscentral@unisa.edu.au)
- Send [eReferral](#) (high risk referral) or email Counselling inbox with your concerns (counsellors@unisa.edu.au)
- Send a follow up email to the student advising an eReferral has been sent and affirming them for engaging with support services

Where there are concerns about risk of harm to self or others (no consent required):

- Where possible, advise the student that you are concerned and have contacted the Counselling Service
- Email concerns to Triage Counsellor via counsellors@unisa.edu.au
- Triage Counsellor will review and assess need and risk. Based on triage assessment, student may receive same day urgent appointment with Counsellor, welfare check or referral to external supports e.g. mental health triage/emergency services (action dependent on risk assessed)
- If staff member thinks the student needs urgent counselling after hours, provide details of UniSA Out of Hours Crisis Line (Call 1300 107 441 or text 0488 884 163)
- Staff member to contact and debrief with line manager or relevant Academic Unit (e.g. Program Director, Dean of Programs)
- Staff member may access EAP 1300 277 924 (as required)

Step 3 – Action referral to SEU: Counselling

- **High distress / critical incident**

- traumatic event (on or off campus) with potential to disrupt university operations and/or risk of harm to self or others
- On campus – contact Security (x88888) or via SafeZone app ‘Emergency’ button
- Off campus – contact Triage Counsellor (0481 465 916) and/or Manager Counselling (0434 898 091)
- response time: within 1 – 3 hours
- debrief with line manager and/or access EAP (as required)



Where risk of harm to self or others (no consent required for action):

- If incident occurs on campus and there is a threat to self/others – contact Security (ext. 88888) for immediate assistance
- Contact Triage Counsellor (0481 465 916) and/or Manager Counselling (ext. 27853 / 0434 898 091)
- Crisis response provided by Triage Counsellor, Manager Counselling or SEU Deputy Director (where Manager Counselling unavailable)
- Manager Counselling to contact and liaise with the University’s Student Response Team (SRT) as required
- UniSA Out of Hours Crisis Line contact details provided (Call 1300 107 441 or text 0488 884 163)
- Student Welfare Check may be instigated by Counsellor (based on risk assessment by Counsellor)
- Staff member to contact and debrief with line manager and/or relevant Academic Unit manager (e.g. Dean of Programs/Executive Dean)
- Staff member may access EAP 1300 277 924 (as required)

How Students can connect with Counselling Service

- Book online via: <http://i.unisa.edu.au/students/student-support-services/online-bookings/>
- Book through Campus Central, phone 1300 301 703
- Counselling Workshops – [mindfulness](#), and in-course

After hours support for UniSA Students

Provided by University Crisis Line

Monday – Friday 5pm – 9am and
24 hours weekends and public
holidays.

Call 1300 107 441
SMS 0488 884 163



University of
South Australia

Out-of-Hours Crisis Line

Confidential crisis
support service

Call 1300 107 441
Text 0488 884 163

5.00pm to 9.00am
on weekdays

24hrs on weekends and
public holidays

University Crisis Line



The crisis line will respond to students in distress, de-escalate the crisis, problem solve and find solutions to improve the student's current situation

Referral to **emergency services** where needed in real time

All contacts triaged by counselling service on next available workday

Preventing
Sexual Harassment
STARTS WITH YOU

BE AN ACTIVE BYSTANDER

..... **Direct**

- Tell the harasser their behaviour or jokes are inappropriate
- Refuse to participate in jokes or behaviours which are inappropriate
- If you see a harassing behavior from a friend or colleague, pull them aside and tell them it's not OK
- Talk to the person being targeted to offer support

..... **Distract**

- Use humor (with care)
- Change the topic of conversation
- Use body language to show disapproval
- Make up an excuse to help someone get away from a harasser

..... **Delegate**

- Talk to someone in authority who can challenge the harasser's behaviour
- Talk to the harasser's friends/colleagues

..... **Document**

- Use your mobile phone to record interactions
- Use the UniSA SASH online form to record a disclosure of what occurred (can be anonymous) <http://my.unisa.edu.au/Public/Sash/Form>

UniSA Counselling Service
Counsellors@unisa.edu.au

Respect@UniSA

UniSA is committed to a respectful and inclusive culture in which all students and staff feel safe. A safer community means everyone can reach their full potential. This means we're continually striving to improve our prevention programs and support services.

If you, or someone you know, has been affected by an incident of sexual assault or sexual harassment, support is always available.

For advice or information,
email: respect@unisa.edu.au
or click on the QR code:



University of
South Australia

Counselling Service

counsellors@unisa.edu.au

Triage – 8302 1055

Rowena Kidd, Triage Counsellor

Counselling triage response, access to same day urgent appointments and initial contact for student critical incidents

rowena.kidd@unisa.edu.au

Phone: 830 24704

Mobile: 0481 465 916

Helpful resources for Students in Distress

- UniSA [Counselling Service](#)
- Counselling [self-help resources](#)
- [Sexual Assault & Sexual Harassment](#) information & online training
- [Student Wellbeing](#) resources
- [UniSA Health Medical Clinics](#) (City East & City West)