

What should you do if you are concerned about the mental health of a student?

If you are concerned about a student, don't try to avoid the situation or pretend nothing is wrong. Take it seriously.

However, it is often difficult to know whether they are simply 'going through a phase' or actually experiencing a mental breakdown. There can be a fine line between what is normal and requires no action and something which indicates a serious mental health issue that does require action.

'Normal'	Not 'normal'
Feeling lonely and isolated	Feeling suicidal
Feeling low	Feeling a deep and morbid depression
Feeling high	Euphoric, unrealistic belief in your abilities
Negative self-image	Feeling you are worthless
Cautious, precise	Needing to check things compulsively
Anxious, worried	Panic attacks, anxiety state
Feeling people are looking at you and talking about you behind your back	Knowing people are talking behind your back and are out to harm you
Attention-seeking behaviour	Talking out of turn, self-harming
Talking to yourself	Talking to voices in your head
Not liking to draw attention to yourself	Avoiding talking, answering and doing anything that draws attention

Are you worried about one of your students?

- ? Have you noticed any other students showing concern about this particular student?
- ? Has the student told you that they may have a problem?
- ? Have there been any dramatic changes in their appearance or behaviour?
- ? Have others (friends, parents, other members of staff or students) expressed concern?
- ? Have they threatened to 'end it all'?
- ? Do you smell alcohol or cannabis on their clothes?
- ? Are they self-harming, expressing suicidal thoughts or exhibiting out of character behaviour?
- ? Have they had the chance to identify their mental health needs?

Approaching the student

Do you feel you have established that there is a real cause for concern? Remember it is simply a cause for concern at this point. *There is no place for amateur diagnosis.* Get advice from other relevant staff if necessary. Use the school's or college's procedures.

If you are going to approach the student, take these guidelines into account.

- Make sure you are aware of the school's or college's student support and counselling services.
- Discuss the situation with other staff who might help – you don't have to reveal the student's name.
- Consider carefully where and when you will talk to them.
- Explain your concern to them.
- Give them an opportunity to discuss their problems with you.

- Don't be intrusive if they don't want to discuss anything.
- Listen to the student without being judgmental. Don't 'fill in the gaps' if they go quiet. Give them time.
- Avoid verbal confrontation.
- Don't stand in their way or try to touch them if they walk out.
- Encourage them to seek help – suggest a key person or service that they may go to.
- Be prepared to be told to mind your own business or worse.
- If they will not talk or accept that there is a problem, offer an open invitation to come back another time.
- Do not work outside the limits of your competence.