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Supporting students in distress – a guide for ANU staff

For life threatening emergencies,
call **000** (**0-000** if calling from an
ANU desk phone).

If on campus also call ANU UniSafe on
(02) 6125 2249 (24 hours/7 days a week)



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ANU offers a variety of support options, including the ANU Counselling Service and ANU Student Safety and Wellbeing Team. Both services are free and confidential and provide person-centred and trauma-informed services for currently enrolled students.

This Guide outlines referral pathways to support services at ANU and in the community. It also provides information on when and how to escalate incidents to ensure the appropriate response and support can be put in place.

Please also refer to the Student Critical Incident Policy for guidance on responding to student critical incidents at policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_8632843

Information on community services is available at anu.edu.au/students/health-safety-wellbeing/getting-help-at-anu/urgent-support



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Trauma-Informed Support at ANU

At ANU, our support services are designed to help students participate in university life safely, meaningfully, and with respect. Our trauma-informed approach is guided by five key principles:

- **Safety** –Create environments where students feel physically and emotionally secure. Confidentiality plays a key role in fostering a sense of safety.
- **Trustworthiness** –Communicate clearly and consistently to build trust. Provide clear information about expectations and ensure students understand confidentiality limits before they share personal information.
- **Choice** –Respect students’ right to make their own decisions, even when those choices involve risk.
- **Collaboration** –Work alongside students, valuing their input and autonomy.
- **Empowerment** –Support students to grow, learn, and build confidence through their experiences. Build on their strengths and capacities.



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Trauma-Informed Support at ANU

We recognise dignity of risk –the right of students to make choices that support personal growth, even when those choices involve some risk. Duty of Care refers to a legal concept and the existence and extent of such a duty in our university context will depend on the individual circumstances of the case.

In rare cases where a student's decision-making is impaired and may lead to serious harm, your duty is to [contact emergency services \(000 or Access Mental Health: 1800 629 354\)](#). Outside of these circumstances, the five trauma-informed principles are your guide, and no action should be taken without the student's consent.

Engagement with voluntary services, including ANU Health and Wellbeing, is optional. Our goal is to support student independence while providing access to care when needed.

For guidance, staff can contact: student.wellbeing@anu.edu.au



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Key Community Contacts

ACT Access Mental Health (24/7):
T:1800 629 354

Lifeline (24/7):
T:13 11 24

Beyond Blue:
T1300 22 4636

Suicide Call Back Service:
T:1300 659 467

1800RESPECT -National domestic, family and sexual violence(24/7):
T: 1800 737 732

Canberra Rape Crisis Centre:
T: (02) 6247 2525

Domestic Violence Crisis Service:
T:(02) 6280 0900

Police Assistance Line (no immediate danger):
T:131 444

(Contact details for key ANU services and Student Residences on Acton campus are available on the ANU contact details tab)



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Managing Your Own Wellbeing

It can be difficult hearing and supporting someone who has experienced distress including sexual assault or harassment or is experiencing mental health or wellbeing difficulties.

It is important to remember that as an academic or professional staff member, your role is to respond with compassion, provide students with information, and support students to access the appropriate services to assist with their safety and wellbeing. Unless it is within your position description, you are not expected to provide mental health counselling or undertake responsibility for resolving the student's crisis or distress.

To support your personal health and wellbeing, you must first understand your role and its boundaries. On occasion, students will reach out to staff members as their main source of support for wellbeing and mental health; however, it is important that you are clear with the limits of your role. This may include understanding services that are available to students so that you can facilitate appropriate referrals and being clear with students about what you can and cannot support them with.





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Managing Your Own Wellbeing

It is important to look after yourself, particularly when supporting someone who is in distress. The University offers a number of free and confidential services you can access if you need to debrief or just have a chat about your own wellbeing. You are encouraged to contact the available support services below:

Employee Assistance Programs

ANU offers a choice of counselling and advisory services for our staff members and their immediate families. Our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) providers can help you work through a broad range of personal and work-related issues. You don't need to struggle alone. They're qualified, experienced and independent and the service is free and confidential.

The University's EAP providers are Assure and Converge. Contact details for these providers are as follows:

Assure:

1800 808 374 or [Assure website](#) (24/7 crisis line available)

Converge:

1300 687 327 or [Converge website](#)

ANU Adviser to Staff

The Adviser to Staff provides free, confidential and professional counselling and advice to staff on campus in dealing with work-related or personal issues that may be affecting their work.

Email staff.adviser@anu.edu.au

All services are free and confidential. For further information visit: services.anu.edu.au/human-resources/wellbeing



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Death of a Student

A death of a student, whether it happens on campus or off campus, is managed under the University's Student Critical Incident policy and procedure.

If a student dies on campus

Please contact emergency services on **000** followed by ANU UniSafe on **(02) 6125 2249**. UniSafe needs to know that emergency services have been called to campus so that they can facilitate access.

ANU UniSafe will provide initial support and escalate to the Incident Coordinator under the Student Critical Incident Policy.

If a student dies off campus

If you become aware of a student death off campus, which could be through information shared by another student, please contact ANU UniSafe and provide the student's name, student number and any other information you have about the situation.

ANU UniSafe will escalate the report to the Incident Coordinator under the Student Critical Incident Policy.

Please note: Police are responsible for notifying next of kin of a death.



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Disengaged Student

You may become concerned about a student who has disengaged from their studies or who has failed to communicate with you.

Contact the student through communication channels available to you (such as email or phone) or through a senior College staff member to let them know you are concerned about them and want to check on their wellbeing.

- Call the student using the number listed on the student system.
- Email them at both their ANU and personal email (if available). You can use the email sample from below.
- Check engagement with the LMS, classes, with supervisors or other academic engagement.
- If the student lives on campus, check with their Residential Management if they have seen/had contact from the student
- Check that the student has not applied for leave of absence or cancelled their enrolment.
- For staff and students who are suspected of missing while travelling domestically or internationally on university business, **International SOS** is the University's travel risk management provider and should be contacted.

The College Managers are able to access the Student Administration System and LMS to ascertain the students' status if required.

If the student doesn't reply to your first attempt to communicate, email them to let them know you will be escalating your concern to the Student Safety and Wellbeing team.



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Disengaged Student

Please note that at this stage it is not recommended to contact the students' emergency contact as provided in the student system. This step will take place if the matter is escalated as a missing student and managed in line with the ANU Student Critical Incident Policy.

If you still don't have any communication from the student in 24 hours, escalate to the Student Safety and Wellbeing by emailing student.wellbeing@anu.edu.au and providing the following:

- Name of student
- Last date of contact
- Contact attempts –dates and means
- Any information that concerns you about the student's wellbeing

The Student Safety and Wellbeing team will attempt to make contact and if needed can initiate a request for a welfare check with the Police and/or ANU UniSafe if the student is living in on campus residence.

The Student Safety and Wellbeing team will also assess the situation and liaise with ANU UniSafe if contact is not established for further escalation as a missing student under the Student Critical Incident Policy.



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Disengaged Student

Sample Email

Dear student,

I am reaching out because I have noticed that you have not engaged in your studies recently. I'm concerned about your safety and need you to reply to this email to let me know how you are.

If I do not hear from you in 24 hours, I will reach out to the ANU Student Safety and Wellbeing Team who will attempt to contact you and offer support.

After you have made contact with me, if you need further support, you can make an appointment with ANU Student Counselling and Wellbeing Services using this short and simple [webform](#). A member of the team will then be in touch to gather some basic information and book an appointment. You can also call the 24/7 ANU Wellbeing and Support Line at 1300 050 327 or text 0488 884 170 any time. These services are free and available for all ANU students.

You can also contact these support services from anywhere in Australia:

- Lifeline (24-hour crisis support): Call 13 11 14 or chat online.
- Suicide Call Back Service (phone and online counselling): 1300 659 467
- Kids Helpline (for young people aged 5 to 25): 1800 55 1800 or chat online.
- Beyond Blue (mental health information and support): 1300 22 4636 or chat online
- MensLine Australia: Free 24/7 telephone and online counselling for men: Call 1300 789 978
- 1800RESPECT (24/7 National domestic family and sexual violence counselling, information and support): 1800 737 732 or text 0458737732

If you have immediate safety concerns, contact Emergency Services (000) or ANU UniSafe (6125 2249).



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Missing Student

If you suspect that a student is missing, please see the following tab titled Disengaged Student.

Following the escalation of your concerns to Student Safety and Wellbeing, the team will undertake their own checks and escalate for consideration as a missing student under the Student Critical Incident Policy.

A missing student is managed under the University's Student Critical Incident policy policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_8632843 and procedure policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_002607

Please note: staff must comply with the University's Privacy Policy and are not permitted to provide students' personal information to third parties (including family and friends) without that person's consent. Any communication with third parties, if required, will be managed in accordance with the Student Critical Incident Policy.

Students who are suspected of missing while travelling domestically or internationally:

International SOS is the University's travel risk management provider and should be contacted. For students who are travelling on university business (i.e. research, fieldwork, exchange or study abroad) and can't be contacted, visit [the website](#) for further information.



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Bullying, Discrimination or Harassment Disclosure

Bullying and harassment is repeated, unreasonable and unwelcome behaviour directed towards a person or group that humiliates, offends or intimidates a person or group. Discrimination occurs when a person, or group of people, is treated less favourably than another person or group because of their background or certain personal characteristics including their age, gender identity, disability, race, religion, sex, or sexuality.

If a student discloses that they have been impacted by bullying, discrimination or harassment you should:

- Determine if there are any immediate safety concerns for the person who is making the disclosure. For time critical support, call emergency services on **000**. If the student is on campus, please also contact ANU UniSafe on **(02) 6125 2249**.
- Find a quiet space to talk and give the person your full attention. Let them tell you at their own pace, without interrupting or asking direct or probing questions about the experience.
- Validate their experience by acknowledging their distress. Be up front about your role and limits to your role. It is ok to say you need assistance from someone to ensure you can provide the best support and information.

There are a number of services on campus that can provide support and information to students who have experienced bullying, discrimination or harassment.

A student can seek support or make a disclosure following an incident of harmful behaviour (including sexual assault and sexual harassment) by completing the [disclosure tool on Harmful Behaviours Disclosure Response and Support webpage](#).



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Sexual Assault or Sexual Harassment Disclosure

Receiving a disclosure of sexual assault and/or sexual harassment can be a difficult thing. The following provides you with some steps on how to support someone through a disclosure.

- Determine if there are any immediate safety concerns for the person who is making the disclosure. For time-critical support, call emergency services on 000. If the student is on campus, please also contact ANU UniSafe on (02) 6125 2249.
- It can be very hard for someone to disclose sexual assault and sexual harassment. Find a quiet space to talk and give the person your full attention. Let them tell you at their own pace, without interrupting or asking direct or probing questions about the experience. Silences are okay. Validate their experience by acknowledging their distress. Be upfront about your role and limits to your role. It is ok to say you need assistance from someone to ensure you can provide the best support and information.
- Part of your role as a first responder is to provide the person with information so they can make an informed choice about what to do next. It is essential for the person making the disclosure to maintain control over their decisions. They may or may not want to talk to a support service. You should only share information with a third party, including support services, with the consent of the person making the disclosure.

Students can seek support via the Harmful Behaviours Disclosure Tool or by requesting an appointment with the Student Safety and Wellbeing team. ANU Student Safety and Wellbeing Case Managers provide confidential information and support and can assist the person to work out what support they need.

Alternatively, students can contact [Student Safety and Wellbeing](mailto:student.wellbeing@anu.edu.au) on (02) 6125 2211 or student.wellbeing@anu.edu.au.

Canberra Rape Crisis Centre: 7am-11pm Daily (02) 6247 2525 or 0488 586 518

Police: Triple Zero (000) for emergencies or 131 444 for police assistance (0-000 if calling from an ANU desk phone)



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Sexual Assault or Sexual Harassment Disclosure

Remind the person they have an option to lodge an identified or anonymous disclosure form with the ANU, formally report to the ANU, and/or report to the Police. An ANU Student Safety and Wellbeing Case Manager can assist them to clarify the options and provide information on each of the processes.

Maintain confidentiality:

Treat the disclosure respectfully and do not share details with others without the permission of the person who made the disclosure to you.

Some survivors will not want to pursue resolution pathways at the stage of the disclosure, and you need to respect that decision.

Information that you can provide to the student on making a disclosure and a report with the ANU is available at

<https://www.anu.edu.au/students/health-safety-wellbeing/getting-help-at-anu/harmful-behaviours-disclosure-response-and-support>.

If you are working with a young person under the age of 18, and they have disclosed sexual assault, you can reach out to Student Safety and Wellbeing for advice on your obligations. Student Safety and Wellbeing can be contacted on student.wellbeing@anu.edu.au.

Self-care:

Hearing someone's experience of abuse or assault can be distressing. Give yourself the space and permission to feel whatever it is you feel following any sort of disclosure.

There is no "wrong" response, and many people are able to process this news without it affecting their own health, but let yourself respond as you need to and understand that it can take a few days to have an impact. Reach out for support or assistance as needed.



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Supporting a Student in Distress

Students may become distressed (have a strong emotional response) for many reasons, including mental health concerns like anxiety or depression, family difficulties, relationship problems, pressures of balancing work and study, domestic and family violence, grief, or drug/alcohol use. Not all students experience distress, and not all distressed students are experiencing signs of mental illness.

Determine if there are any immediate safety concerns for the student. For time-critical support, call emergency services on 000. If the student is on campus, please also contact ANU UniSafe on (02) 6125 2249.

When a student is experiencing difficulty, recognising the signs of acute emotional distress can help the student receive the support they need to cope.

Distress may be indicated by:

- Avoidance
- Tearfulness
- Deterioration in appearance
- Disturbing emails or assessment items
- Increased tension
- Reduced motivation
- Self-harm behaviour
- Direct or indirect talk of suicide
- Statements indicating a sense of worthlessness or helplessness



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Supporting a Student in Distress

How can you help

1. Acknowledge their distress in a calm and concerned manner and listen without judgement.
2. Assess level of distress. If the student expresses intentions to harm themselves refer to the information on the suicidal and self-harming risk tab.
3. Normalise access to support services and provide information on services available.
4. Provide the student with the link to Health, Safety and Wellbeing <https://www.anu.edu.au/students/health-safety-wellbeing>.

If the student doesn't want to seek help:

- Frame accessing support in a positive way
- Remind them that you don't have to be at crisis point to make an appointment; addressing problems early often leads to better outcomes.

If you still have safety concerns, you can request a welfare check to be done by the Police if living off campus or ANU UniSafe if the student lives in an on-campus residence.



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Supporting a Student in Distress

Sample Email

Hello [Student Name],

After our recent contact, I wanted to make sure you know how to access support, whenever you need it. You are welcome to make an appointment with ANU Student Counselling and Wellbeing Services using this short and simple [webform](#). After you do, a member of the team will then be in touch to gather some basic information and book an appointment.

You can also call the 24/7 ANU Wellbeing and Support Line at 1300 050 327 or text 0488 884 170 any time. These services are free and available for all ANU students.

You can also contact these support services from anywhere in Australia:

- Lifeline (24-hour crisis support): Call 13 11 14 or chat online
- Suicide Call Back Service (phone and online counselling): 1300 659 467
- Kids Helpline (for young people aged 5 to 25): 1800 55 1800 or chat online
- Beyond Blue (mental health information and support): 1300 22 4636 or chat online.
- MensLine Australia: Free 24/7 telephone and online counselling for men: Call 1300 789 978
- 1800RESPECT (24/7 National domestic family and sexual violence counselling, information and support): 1800 737 732 or text 0458737732
- For immediate safety concerns contact Emergency Services (000) or ANU UniSafe (6125 2249)



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Suicidal or Self-Harming Risk

Talking to someone about suicide can feel scary, but it can really help. If you're worried about someone, the best thing to do is ask them directly if they're thinking about suicide. This shows that you care and gives them a chance to talk. If you are the first person to notice these signs, your job is to help them get professional or emergency support.

Step 1: Start the conversation

A helpful way to start the conversation is to check in on them:

"I'm worried about what you said/wrote in your email.
Do you want to talk about it?"

Listen actively and acknowledge their distress. Check your understanding of the situation and whether they have supports in place or if they need further support.

Sometimes, people say things like "I've had enough" or "I can't take this anymore." This can be an expression of despair without intending self-harm or suicide. It is important to check on the presence of active suicidal thoughts.



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Suicidal or Self-Harming Risk

Step 2: Ask directly about active suicidal thoughts

Asking won't make things worse — it helps the person feel less alone. If you think they might be at risk, ask clearly:

“Are you thinking about taking your own life?” “Have you identified a method?”

If they answer ‘YES’ to any of these questions, take action.

If you're not physically with them, ask where they are. Get their address and phone number. You'll need this info to call emergency services such as ambulance or the police to check on them.

Step 3: Get help

If the person IS suicidal

Let the person know that you are concerned about their immediate safety and need to get help.

- If the person is in danger, don't leave them alone.
- Stay with them (in person or virtually).
- Reassure them they're not alone and that help is available.
- If possible, ask someone else to support you.

Call emergency services. If the person leaves or hangs up, call **000** and request the police do a welfare check. If the student is on campus, please also call ANU UniSafe on **(02) 6125 2249**.



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Suicidal or Self-Harming Risk

Call the following support services as required:

- Emergency Services: **000**
- ACT Access Mental Health: **1800 629 354**

When making a referral, you could use the following:

“Hello, I am from ---, I have a person with me/on the phone who is at high risk of suicide or self harm.”

“Hello, I am from ---, I have serious concerns about the wellbeing of --- who has expressed suicidal ideation and is at high risk, can you please do a welfare check?”

Services will need a name, phone number and if you are requesting a welfare check or an ambulance, you will also need an address.

Self-care: Consider reaching out to EAP or an ANU Staff Adviser for support following supporting a student through a suicidal or self-harming incident.



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Student Suicidal or Self-Harming Risk

If the person is NOT Suicidal

They may still be going through a tough time and need support.

Next Steps:

- Validate Their Feelings:

Let them know it's okay to feel overwhelmed and that you're there to listen. Example: "It sounds like things have been really hard for you lately."

- Encourage Support-Seeking:

Suggest they reach out to ANU support services and the ANU Wellbeing Line. Provide information on how to contact support services (refer to email sample below). Offer to help them complete the Student Counselling and Wellbeing new appointment form if needed.

- Give Resources:

Give them information on how to contact emergency services or Access Mental Health if things get worse for them. You can use the email sample below.



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Student Suicidal or Self-Harming Risk

Sample Email

Hello [Student Name],

After our recent contact, I wanted to make sure you know how to access support, whenever you need to. You are welcome to make an appointment with ANU Student Counselling and Wellbeing Services using this short and simple [webform](#). After you do, a member of the team will then be in touch to gather some basic information and book an appointment. You can also call the 24/7 ANU Wellbeing and Support Line at 1300 050 327 or text 0488 884 170 any time. These services are free and available for all ANU students.

You can also contact these support services from anywhere in Australia:

- Lifeline (24-hour crisis support): Call 13 11 14 or chat online.
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- Beyond Blue (mental health information and support): 1300 22 4636 or chat online
- MensLine Australia: Free 24/7 telephone and online counselling for men: Call 1300 789 978
- 1800RESPECT (24/7 National domestic family and sexual violence counselling, information and support): 1800 737 732 or text 0458737732

For immediate safety concerns contact Emergency Services (000) or ANU UniSafe (6125 2249).



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Key ANU Student Services Contacts

ANU UniSafe (24/7):

T: (02) 6125 2249

Student Wellbeing and Support Line (24/7):

T: 1300 050 327 or text 0488 884 170

Accessibility:

E: accessibility@anu.edu.au

Counselling:

T: (02) 6125 2211

E: counselling centre@anu.edu.au

Dean of Students:

T: (02) 6125 4184

E: dean.students@anu.edu.au

Medical Centre:

T: (02) 6125 2211

E: medical.centre@anu.edu.au

Student Safety and Wellbeing:

T: (02) 6125 2211

E: student.wellbeing@anu.edu.au

Tjabal Centre:

T: (02) 6125 4038

E: tjabal.centre@anu.edu.au



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ANU On-campus residences

Bruce Hall

T: (02) 6125 6444

Burgmann College

T: (02) 6125 6100

Burton & Garran Hall

T: (02) 6184 0000

Davey Lodge

T: (02) 6125 7900

Fenner Hall

T: (02) 6125 9000

Graduate House

T: (02) 6125 1999

John XXIII College

T: (02) 6125 5900

Kinloch Lodge

T: (02) 6125 7900

Lena Karmel Lodge

T: (02) 6125 7900

Toad Hall

T: (02) 6125 6060

University House

T: (02) 6125 5211

Ursula Hall

T: (02) 6125 6200

Wamburun Hall

T: (02) 6125 5233

Warrumbul Lodge

T: (02) 6125 7900

Wright Hall

T: (02) 6125 6888



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Key ANU Student Services Contacts and On Campus

If you are unsure what support a student may need, you can always refer a student to a Student Safety and Wellbeing Case Manager by phone (02) 6125 2211 (Monday to Friday 9am - 4pm) or email student.wellbeing@anu.edu.au who can support them to clarify their needs and organise referrals to support on campus and in the community.

Injury management:

For information on supporting someone through an injury or illness please visit the University's Work, Health and Safety site services.anu.edu.au/human-resources/safety-and-wellbeing

If emergency medical services are required, please call 000.

Produced by the Student Safety and Wellbeing team. Information current at time of publication. Any questions about this Guide can be sent to student.wellbeing@anu.edu.au

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