

Helping Students in Distress

A guide for staff

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Introduction

All University staff have a key role in responding to the needs of students with mental health problems and for promoting the safety and wellbeing of students. The University has a legal duty to respect and support the rights and needs of students experiencing mental health difficulties. This requires that students with mental health difficulties are treated with sensitivity and respect, in confidence and in a non judgemental way, in line with good practice and current legislation. However, the University also has to balance the rights of students with mental health difficulties with the overall duty of care it has for all of its students and staff. Therefore staff should be ready to offer support to students within the professional limitation of their role but are not expected to assume responsibility outside the parameters of their role, for resolving a student's mental health difficulties.

This guide has been produced as part of the **Edinburgh Napier Student Mental Health Policy Statement and Staff Guidance** to:

- Assist staff to recognise when a student may be experiencing mental health problems.
- Provide advice and guidance on how staff might respond to a student experiencing mental health problems.
- Highlight appropriate support services within the University and how best to refer students on to these services.
- Raise awareness of issues relating to student mental health.

As a member of staff, what can we do if we either suspect a student has mental health problems or a student approaches us?

- **Don't Avoid the Situation** – be proactive and don't wait for the situation to get worse. If as a member of staff you have concerns about a student and feel uncomfortable about addressing these with the student, an alternative is to discuss these with a member of the counselling team, the mental health advisor or senior colleague. This can be done anonymously, while still respecting the confidentiality of the student.
- **Be prepared to listen** – it is important to remember that a situation may only require the member of staff to listen, and that sometimes students just wish to share a problem rather than expect us to come up with solutions.
- **Give the student time to talk** – it is important to give the student the space and opportunity to talk. However, it is important to be honest with the student and yourself about how much time you actually have.
- **Be sympathetic and not dismissive** – the student should feel as if they are being listened to and that their problems are being taken seriously.
- **Make an 'action plan'** – if a student approaches you with a concern or problem it may be appropriate, after listening to them, to find some practical solutions to their problem. For instance, this might involve some structured approach around academic worries or a referral to the appropriate student support service or both.

However, it is important that any practical solutions are within the remit of the staff member's role and that staff keep themselves and the student safe.

- **Make appropriate referrals** – it is important that staff are aware of how and when to refer a student to more specialist support services within the University. It is always alright to ask for advice.
- **Be aware of confidentiality** – if possible conduct interviews or discussions in a private space.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

Staff should not normally disclose information to other staff or third parties relating to a student's mental health, without the agreement of the student concerned; third parties include parents, other students and external agencies. If staff need advice or guidance on a student mental health matter then where appropriate this should be sought on an anonymous basis which will ensure that student confidentiality can be maintained. . However, there is an exception to this rule of non-disclosure where it is considered necessary to disclose strictly relevant medical or other information in order to protect the vital interests of the individual or prevent serious harm to another person. This could for example be in the event of serious concerns about illness, injury, mental health issues and/or issues affecting the person's personal safety or the safety of others. There is further guidance on this in sections 8.6 and 8.7 of the University's Data Protection Code of Practice and in sections 14 -17 of Student Mental Health Policy Statement and Staff Guidance document.

Useful links for further guidance

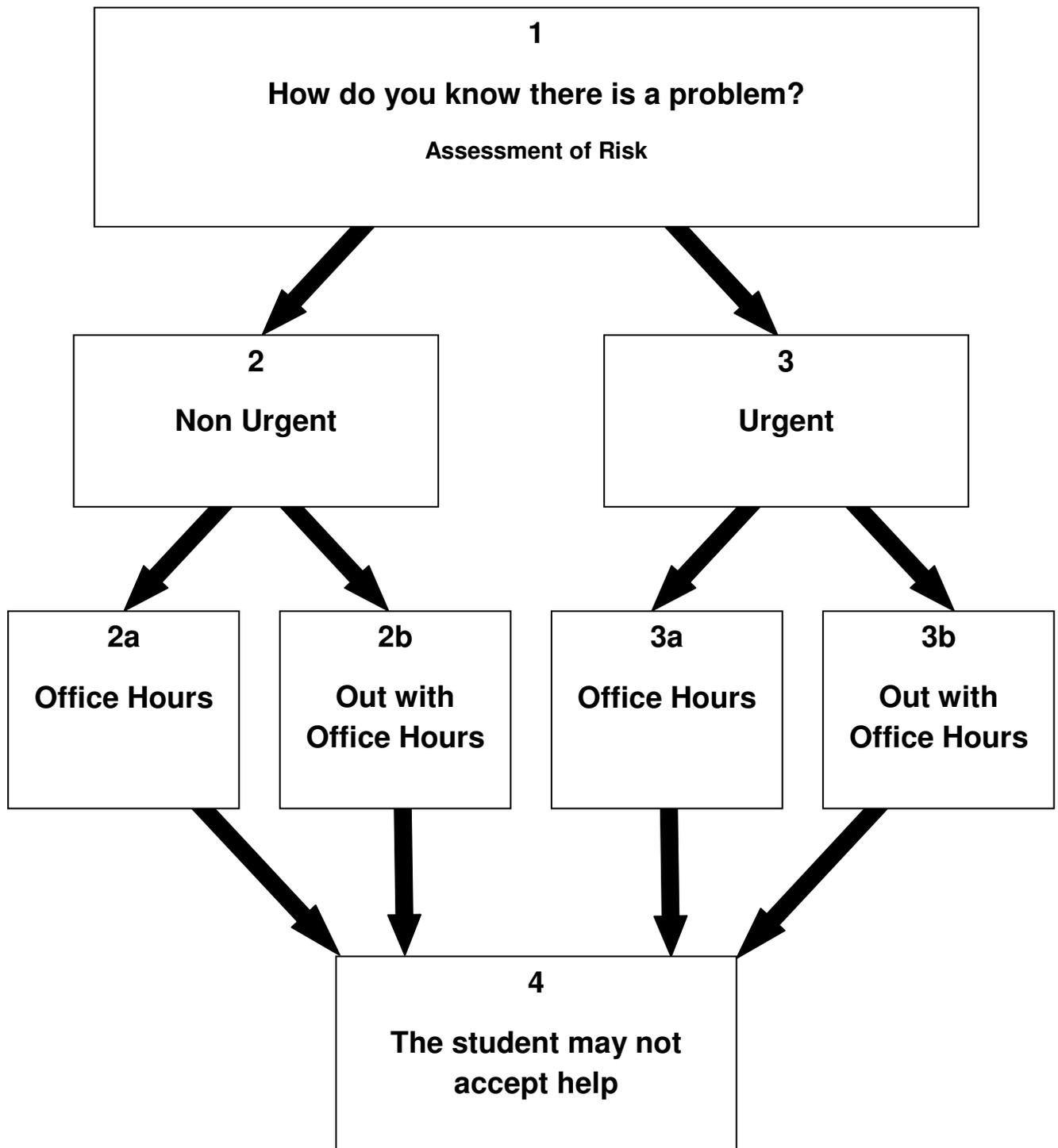
- University Mental Health Policy ([Link](#))
- Emergency Response Procedure ([Link](#))

Useful contacts

- **Counselling Team** –
email – counselling@napier.ac.uk
- **Mental Health Adviser** – 0131 – 455 – 2928
email – a.mackenzie@napier.ac.uk
- **Central Security Control** – 0131 - 455 - 4444.
- **Governance Officer (Data Protection & Legal)** -0131- 455- 6359

Easy Step Guide to responding to students with Mental Health concerns.

NB: the numbers in the boxes refer to the guidance notes on subsequent pages.



Section 1

How do you know there is a problem?

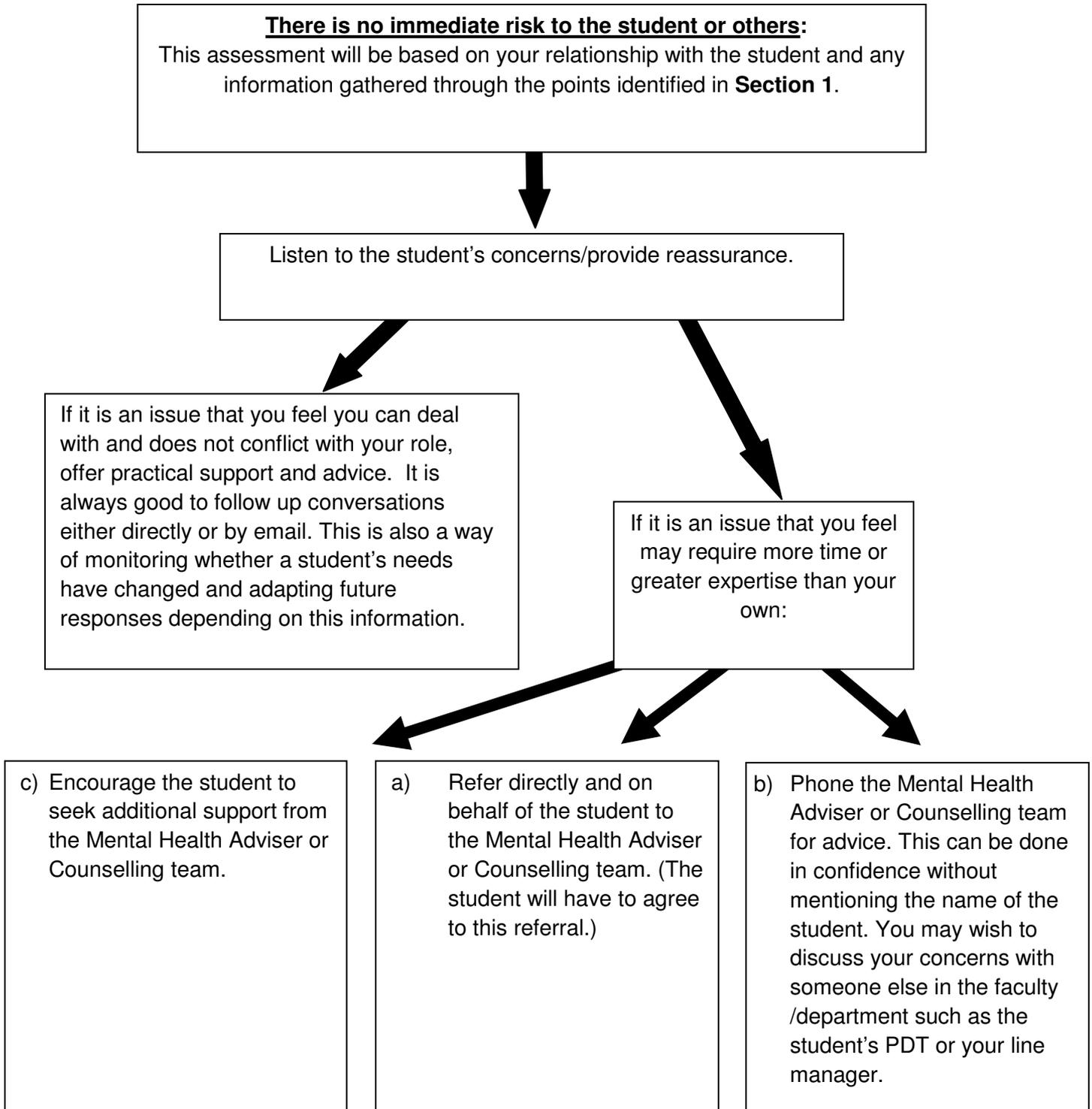
- **Behaviour** - Is there anything unusual or unpredictable about the student's behaviour that is causing concern such as changes in pattern of attendance or their academic performance has changed dramatically?
- **What is the student saying** – are they talking a lot, does the content of their conversation seem erratic or out of character, are they expressing suicidal thoughts/ideas?
- **How does the Student look and seem** – do they seem tense, irritable, sad or withdrawn. Has the student's appearance changed; for instance, are they unkempt?
- **Additional Information** – has the student declared a mental health problem or are other people telling you about a problem?

Don't avoid the situation

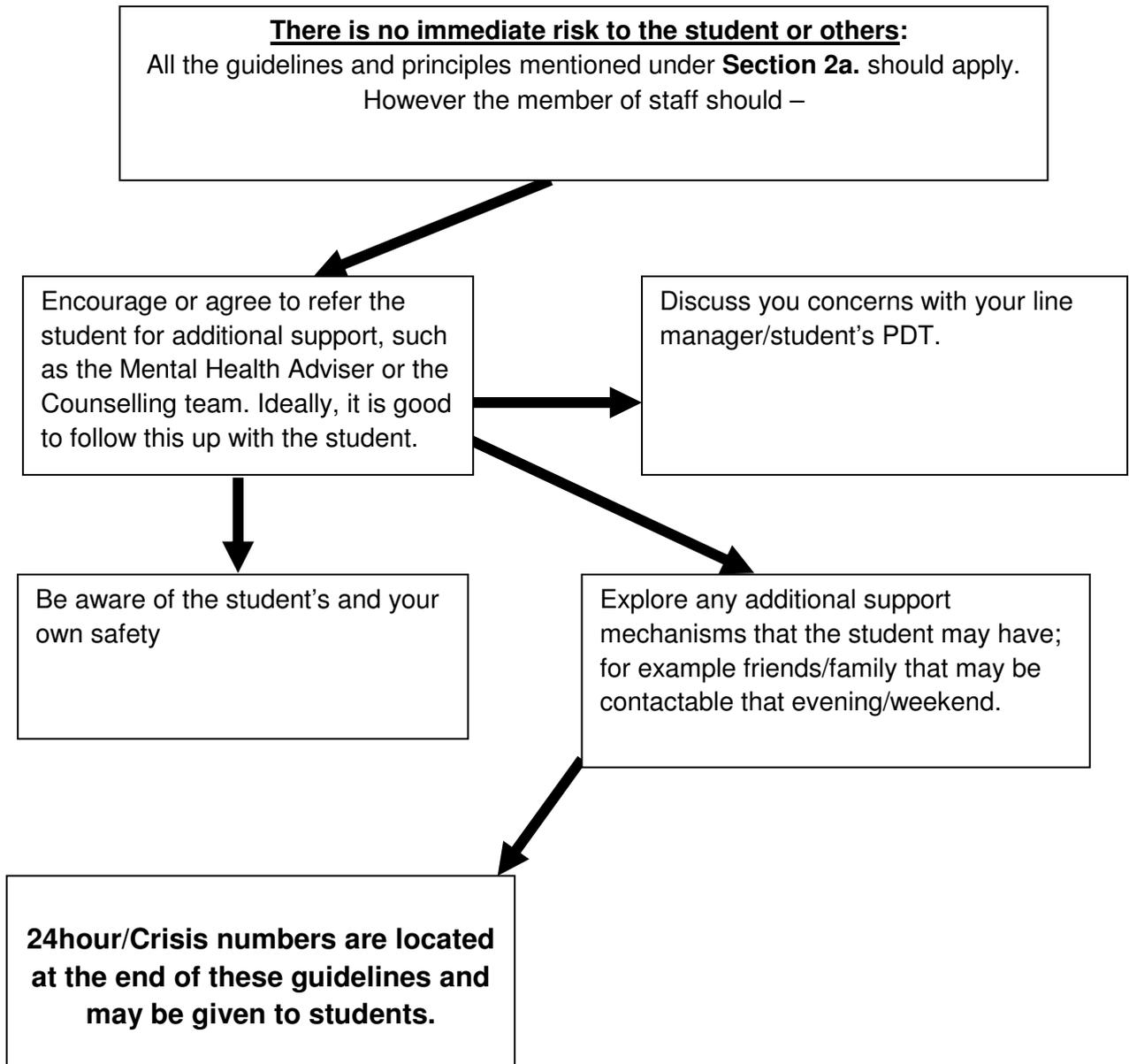
- Hopefully, you will feel that you have a good enough relationship with the student to approach them and talk to them and raise your concerns. This should be done sensitively.
- Discuss concerns with a colleague; maybe they too have noticed some changes in the student. Perhaps this colleague is in a stronger position to approach the student.
- Discuss concerns with the mental health advisor, a member of the counselling team or senior colleague.

Section 2 Non-Urgent

2a. Office hours

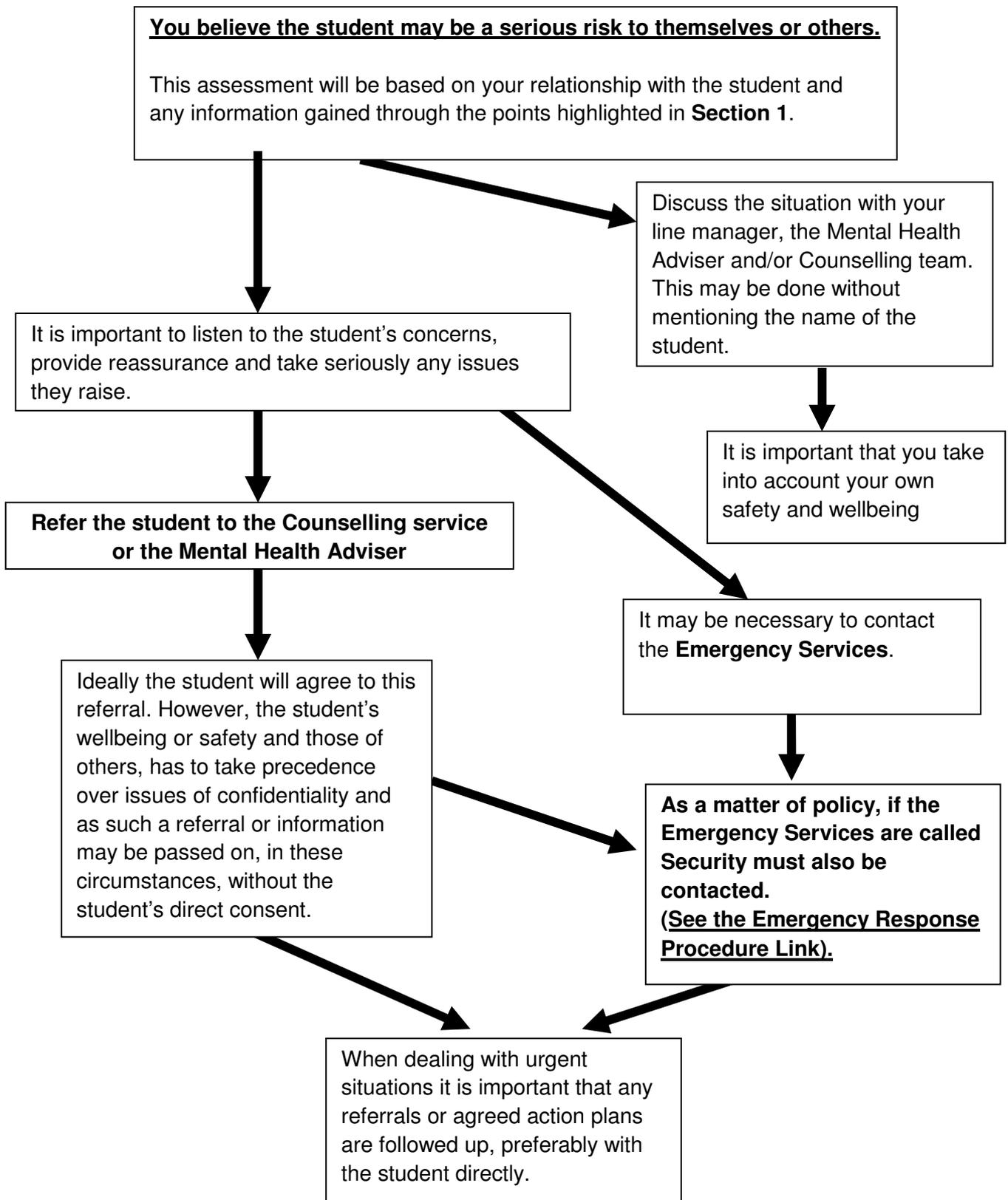


2b. Outwith Office Hours



Section 3 Urgent

3a. Office Hours



3b. Outwith office hours

You believe the student may be a serious risk to themselves or to others

The assessment of urgency will be based on your relationship with the student and information gained through the points highlighted in **Section 1**.

In such an urgent situation if you feel that the student's wellbeing is at risk their safety, or that of others, must take precedence over confidentiality. However, personal information must be treated sensitively and only disclosed on a need-to-know basis.

Contact

Emergency Services

(Security must be informed if the emergency services are contacted).

Security

Tel – 455 - 4444

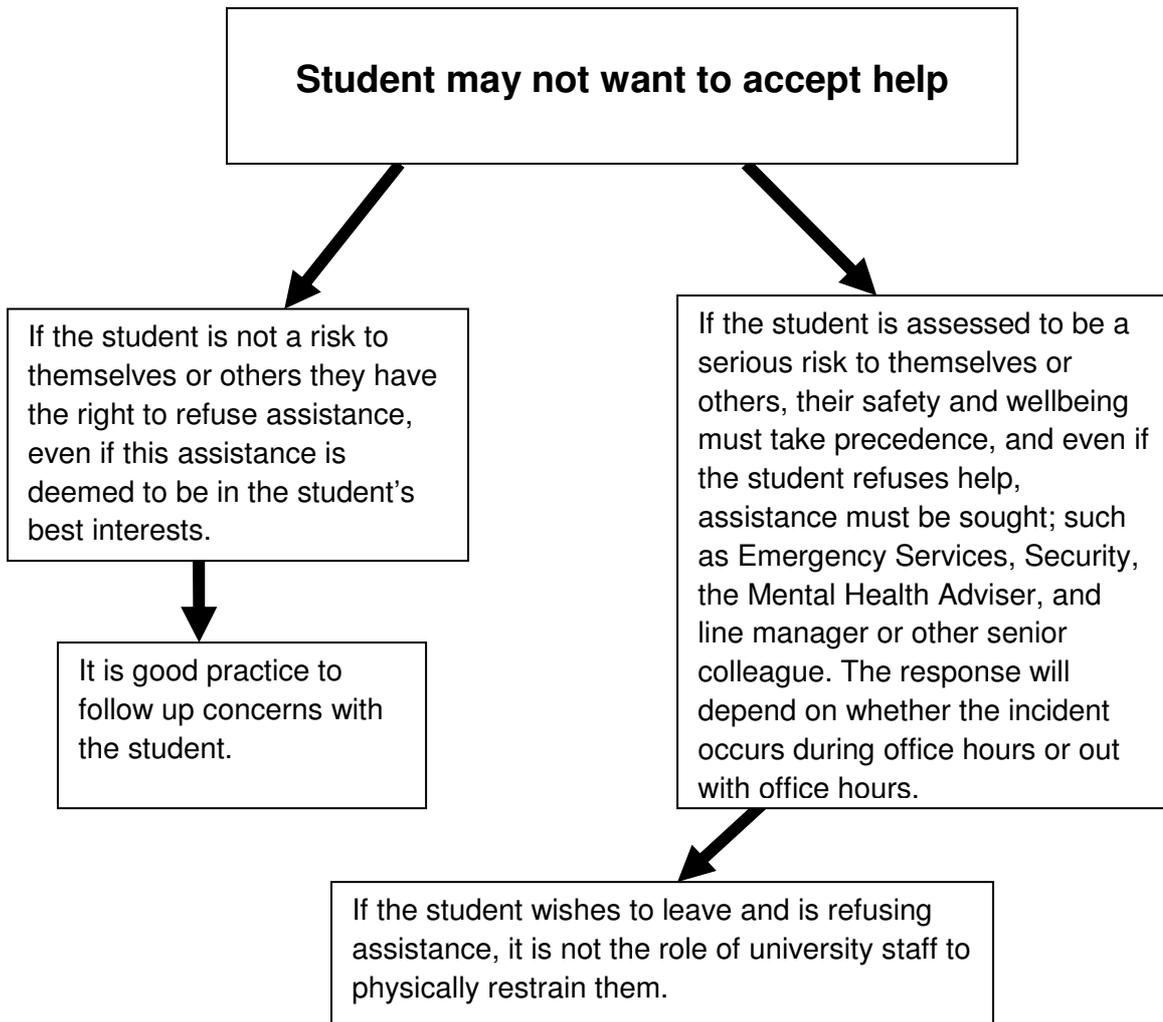
The next day or at the earliest opportunity

A senior member of staff

The Mental Health Adviser

Follow up any agreed actions.

Section 4 Student does not want assistance.



Things to remember:

1. It is important to acknowledge that on occasions a student may be unable or unwilling to accept assistance. This may be due to fear around the stigma of disclosing a mental health issue, cultural differences, fear of some disclosure affecting their academic grading or even that they have support structures out with the University and are dealing with the problem on their own.
2. A student's wish not to want to discuss their problems should be respected.
3. In general, when a student realises that information is being passed on for their own wellbeing and benefit, they are usually happy to give consent. However, any information passed on to others should be communicated sensitively, appropriately and only on a strictly need-to-know basis.

The Counselling team-

counselling@napier.ac.uk

The Mental Health Adviser-

a.mackenzie@napier.ac.uk

Governance Officer – Data Protection and Legal.

h.mizen@napier.ac.uk

Tel Extension - 6359



24/7 Crisis Numbers and contacts

Edinburgh Napier 24 hour services

- **Chaplaincy** - 24hr telephone helpline – 0131-455- 2926
Email – spiritualcare@napier.ac.uk
- **Security** – 0131 -455 -4444

External Crisis Numbers

- **Edinburgh Crisis Centre** - the centre provides a 24 hour helpline, 365 days a year, to those in crisis due to mental health issues. The centre will provide this support to those aged 18 years or over who live in Edinburgh. All support is confidential and is handled by trained staff. Free telephone – 0808 801 0414.
www.edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk
- **Breathing Space** - this is a confidential helpline, which operates Mon – Thurs – 6pm – 2am and Weekends Fri -6pm – Mon 6am. All calls are confidential and are handled by trained staff. The service is free from land lines and most mobile networks. Telephone number – 0800 83 85 87.
(info@breathingspacescotland.co.uk)
- **Night line** – this is a confidential helpline run by students for students. All of the student volunteers are appropriately trained. This service is available between 8pm and 8am during term time. Telephone number – 0131 557 4444.
(nightline@ed.ac.uk)
- **Samaritans** – this is a confidential 24 hour helpline. All the Volunteers are trained. Telephone number – 08457 90 90 90.
www.edinburghsamaritans.org