

A Guide to Supporting Psychosocial Safety

Psychosocial hazards ([Code of Practice](#)) are potential sources of harm at work. They can show up in a number of ways, from how work is organised and supervised to the work environment including social factors at work and workplace relationships, and equipment provided. Psychosocial hazards can co-occur with one another, and they can impact other hazards and risks. Their impact is often cumulative over time and can impact both physiological and psychological functioning via the stress response.

You might be the first to notice when a team member or colleague is struggling, or a staff member discloses to you that they are experiencing some mental ill-health or feeling particularly impacted by something that is happening at work or outside of work. Spotting the signs of stress or poor mental health at an early stage means it can be addressed before it impacts the individual's health and safety.

A colleague or team member might disclose something to you, and you aren't sure what to tell them and how to get them support. The idea of this guide is to give you some suggestions and support on how to deal with these conversations.

Preparing to have a supportive conversation

If possible, it is good to prepare to have a supportive conversation.

Some things to keep in mind are:

- To be supportive and non-judgmental.
- To ensure you are in a private and comfortable place to have the conversation and be prepared to possibly hear something confronting.
- Listen actively.
- Encourage and support the person to seek help.
- Ask open questions.
- Have an idea about what support options are available.
- Follow up in a few days or a week with the individual.

Avoid:

- Providing advice.
- Trying to fix the situation.
- Forcing the person to do or tell you anything (a no response is also ok).
- Filling silences.
- Interrupting.
- comparing situation to one you have experienced/know of, during conversation.

Steps to support:

1. Ask if they are okay. Explain the differences you have noticed and ask them if they're OK. *"You haven't seemed yourself lately – is everything OK?"*
2. Listen to the staff member's concerns and acknowledge their distress/worries. *"Take your time, there is no rush. It can be hard to talk about this stuff"*.
3. Recognise and validate how they are feeling. *"I can hear the last few months have been really hard for you. If you feel comfortable, please tell me more about it."*
4. Find out if the staff member has access to appropriate support. You could offer to call EAP with them. *"Do you have support at home? Or have you talked with a professional about it? We can call EAP together if you like?"*
5. It is okay if they decline support. *"I know it can be hard to talk about this – thanks for trusting me"*.
6. Consider the presenting issues and connect to the appropriate service/support. E.g., if you feel like they are at risk of hurting themselves *"I can hear you are finding things really difficult at the moment and I am concerned about you, I think it would be best for you to talk with/see someone now. We can call the Mental Health line to have a chat with them, otherwise we might need to call an ambulance"*. Note: the MH Line provides 24/7 help and advice, referrals to local MH services and can help with assessing if the person is at risk of self-harm.
7. Follow up, stay in touch with the individual even if they said they didn't want to talk about it that day in a few days touch base with them.

Supporting yourself when supporting others

It is important to recognise that when you support someone else with their mental health it can impact your own mental health. Don't forget to reach out and debrief with someone yourself, this could be your manager/supervisor, your HR representative, UNSW's EAP service or someone else that you trust.

Scenarios

Scenario	What to do
Staff member lets you know they have received a concerning email from a student.	Advise the staff member to call the staff line (9385 5418) for advice and ask that they reach out to the student. Ask the staff member if they are okay and offer EAP for support.
Staff member arrives at work not looking/seeming themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a quiet space or ask the individual to go for a walk with you. • Gently, ask them if everything is okay and that they don't seem like themselves. • If they say they are 'fine', you can remind them that there is support available if they need it. • If they tell you something and indicate they are struggling at the moment, ask 'what support do you currently have?' 'What would be useful?' Offer to call EAP together so they aren't left feeling it is all on them. • Or if they don't want to use EAP, you can support them to call one of the other help services (listed below). • Reassure them that they don't need to manage this all on their own, there is support available.

A staff member tells you they provided MH first aid to a colleague, and they have found the conversation is impacting their mental health

- Talk through with them the timeframe of when the conversation was, and how is it impacting their MH.
- Normalise it for them – sometimes after providing support to others we can be impacted and sometimes don't even realise straight away; it is great that you provided support to someone else.
- Remind them that it is not their job as a MH first aider to diagnose someone or solve the problem (as per regular first aid)
- Is there something that they feel could be helpful for them right now? E.g., flexibility in work hours, a day off.
- What supports do they have in place?
- Have they considered having a discussion with a counsellor through EAP?
- Would they like to make the initial call together?

You receive a disclosure from someone that they feel they are being bullied from their manager or colleague

- Ask if they're okay?
- Would they like to talk about it?
- Validate the feelings they are having about the situation *"it sounds like you are going through a really difficult time"*.
- The process is to connect them with HR to have a discussion about the situation, receive support and get advice about the options available to them.
- Talk them through what other support options are available including talking with EAP – you can support them to make the initial call.
- Check in if they have supports at home.
- Let them know that you will check back in with them in a few days

A colleague tells you they are feeling increasingly stressed due to their work demands and it is impacting their mental health

- Validate the feelings they are having *"It sounds like you have been going through a really difficult time, is there something that would make a difference for you right now?" "Do you feel comfortable to raise this with your manager?"*
- Be understanding and guide to help seeking – *"I know it can be hard talking about these things, but have you thought about accessing some professional support?"* you could offer to be with them when they make the initial call to EAP.
- You could introduce the idea of involving HR to guide them through the next steps. *"HR are here to support and guide us in these types of situations, would you be okay if we find out who our HR person is and make contact for a chat about options?"* or you could offer to find out what HR recommend and then let the individual know, they can stay anonymous.

A colleague appears much more frustrated at simple mistakes that they are making at work than usual

- Check in and let them know that you have noticed they seem more frustrated than usual. *“Are you okay? I have noticed you seem to be getting more frustrated lately”.*
- If they say, *“I’m fine”*, just remind them that you are there to listen if they want to have a chat.
- If they indicate that they are finding things stressful or are under a lot of pressure you can ask if they would like to chat more about it.
- You can ask if they have ever considered contacting our EAP service, they are on campus every couple of weeks or available via phone 24/7 and it can be useful to chat to someone about what’s going on.
- You could ask them what they find usually makes a difference when they are feeling frustrated.

After a casual catch up with a staff member, they have mentioned that they are still fatigued after plenty of sleep and can’t seem to focus on work.

- Validate *“that sounds really hard. How long have you noticed this?” “Did anything particular happen?”*
- *“Have you experienced this type of thing before?”*
- *“Do you have any ideas on what could be causing the ongoing fatigue?”*
- *“What have you tried to assist so far?”*
- *“Is there anything you think could make a difference right now?”*
- *“Have you considered talking with a professional about what you are experiencing?” e.g., EAP, GP (to check for anything underlying).*
- You could link them with EAP, highlighting that sometimes talking with someone external can be useful even if there isn’t a particular thing that happened but rather cumulative.

A student/staff member increasingly mentions self-harm

- To enable you to direct students to appropriate supports it is recommended that you complete Supporting Students in Distress ([SSID0001 \(unsw.edu.au\)](https://ssid0001.unsw.edu.au)), an online e-learning module. If a student increasingly mentions self-harm:
1. Let them know that you are concerned about them given the disclosures of self-harm.
 2. Ask them what supports do they currently have?
 3. If they say none, encourage them to contact Mental Health Connect ([Mental Health Connect | UNSW Current Students](#)) to access professional support or offer to arrange for someone to contact them.
 4. Call the staff line (**93855418**) for support and assistance on what best to do.
 5. If they say they have existing supports, ask them when their next appointment is? Can they possibly do it earlier? Have they thought about

contacting Lifeline or Beyond Blue for support in the meantime.

6. Organise to check back in with them in a few days.

If it is a staff member:

1. Let them know you are concerned about them given the increasing disclosures of self-harm. *Are you okay? Is there anything I can do to support you right now?*
2. *Do you currently have professional support?*
3. If no, encourage them to reach out to EAP or offer for someone from EAP to give them a call for a confidential discussion/check-in.
4. You can call EAP yourself for advice on how best to support the individual.
5. If they say they have professional support, ask them when their next appointment is. If it isn't in the next few days, they can still get support from EAP. Or perhaps they can see if they can get an earlier appointment.
6. Let them know that you are here for them and organise to check back in in a few days.

A report is made in Salus referencing MH or a psychosocial issue.

Reach out to the reporter and check in if they are okay and have support themselves. If it is a **student** provide them with the details of Mental Health Connect ([Mental Health Connect | UNSW Current Students](#)) or call the staff line (**93855418**) and someone can reach out to the student. If it is a **staff member**, ensure they have the EAP details or offer to have someone from EAP call the staff member. If you are unsure about responding to these reports, please feel free to chat with the Safer Communities team.

Internal supports

Human Resources

You can always reach out to your HR BP to discuss any concerns you have about a staff member; they can provide advice and next steps.

<https://unsw.sharepoint.com/sites/human-resources/SitePages/Business-Partner.aspx>

EAP information

Benestar offers short-term solution focussed counselling that is confidential for staff and family members to access for support around work and personal challenges. Individuals can call Benestar 24/7 and book an appointment or request to speak with someone immediately.

With the consent of the individual, you can call Benestar and request a check-in call. This takes the onus off the individual to make the initial call.

Benestar offers manager support, **My Coach**. This can support managers and supervisors when they need to talk through options on how to support a staff member or difficult situation [EAP \(Benestar\) | Wellbeing \(unsw.edu.au\)](#).

There is onsite counselling sessions every other Wednesday, these sessions can be booked by calling 1300 360 364, sometimes there are in-person appointments available on the day.

Benestar can also provide on-campus critical incident support.

Make a report

You can make a confidential report into Salus, and someone will reach out to you to discuss next steps

Security

The UNSW security team can be called to support the de-escalation of staff or student matters, if you need to contact an ambulance or you just need support to manage a situation. [Security | Estate Management | UNSW Sydney](#)

Uprise

Uprise is a personal trainer for your mood, resilience and emotional intelligence. <https://www.wellbeing.unsw.edu.au/uprise>

Staff wellbeing

[Healthy Mind | Wellbeing \(unsw.edu.au\)](#)

Student support options

[Mental Health Connect | UNSW Current Students](#)

Staff line – 9385 5418. Staff can call this line if they have a concern about a student and the duty person can reach out to the student and offer support.

External supports

GP	UNSW health service is available on campus if required
Lifeline	13 11 14 crisis support line 24/7
NSW Mental Health Line	1800 011 511 24/7 help and advice, referrals to local MH services
Beyond Blue	1300 224 636 24/7 mental health support service
Head to health	Connects people to mental health support
MyCompass	Black Dog Institute – a customisable self-help tool for your mental health
This Way Up	Online evidence-based programs to help improve the way you feel

Further training

Recognise and Respond	free 1-hour online suicide prevention training
Mental Health First Aid	subsidised for UNSW staff and students

Benestar	Workshops and webinars available for teams and individuals
Black Dog Institute	Workplace mental health and wellbeing - Black Dog Institute Better Mental Health offer a range of workshops.
Comcare	How managers can support worker mental health Comcare
Supporting students in distress	Supporting Students in Distress UNSW Current Students