

MENTAL HEALTH FRAMEWORK

Policy Code	OPS20
Policy Lead	Chief Executive Officer / Principal
Approving Authority	Board of Directors
Approval date	28 June 2024
Commencement date	01 July 2024
Next Review Date	March 2025
Version	2024.2
Relevant legislation or external requirements	<p>National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (NC: 6)</p> <p>Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (HESFs: 2.3)</p> <p>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)</p> <p>Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Cth)</p> <p>Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS Act 2000)</p> <p>Education Services for Overseas Students Regulations 2001</p> <p>Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (TEQSA Act)</p>
Related ASA Documents	<p>Critical Incident Management Plan</p> <p>Critical Incident Policy</p> <p>Critical Incident Procedure</p> <p>Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedure</p> <p>Diversity and Equity Policy and Procedure</p> <p>Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedure</p> <p>Student Support, Wellbeing and Health Policy and Procedure</p> <p>Work, Health, and Safety Policy</p> <p>Work, Health, and Safety Procedure</p>

1. Purpose

This Framework outlines the ASA Institute of Higher Education's (**ASA's**) organisational commitment to promoting and supporting staff and student mental health and wellbeing.

2. Scope

This Framework applies to all ASA students and staff.

This Framework complies with the regulatory requirements from the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (TEQSA Act), National Code of Practice for Providers for Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (National Code), Higher Education Standards Framework (2021), the Privacy Act (1988) and the Real Talk: A Conversational Approach to Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing in Australian Universities (2021). Real Talk was developed by Headspace in partnership with Universities Australia which provides a foundation for recognising mental health difficulties, suicide prevention and how to provide support to those who require it.

Mental health and wellbeing is an integral and essential component of health which enables individuals to realise their own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work and studies productively, and contribute to their community. It is fundamental to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact, earn a living, and enjoy life. On this basis the promotion, protection, and restoration of mental health can be regarded as a vital concern of

individuals, communities and societies¹. It follows that mental health and wellbeing is crucial to students' academic performance, capacity to learn, and ability to engage fully with the wider experience of higher education. It is therefore a vital concern of the ASA community.

ASA promotes an environment which encourages mental health and wellbeing for all staff and students and provides additional support where it is appropriate and reasonable to do so. For example, support is targeted at individuals who have mental health difficulties and who might face cultural and language barriers while being isolated from family and home for the first time.

ASA is committed to achieving a healthy community by placing value on both physical and mental health. ASA also recognises that mental health issues can be triggered by excessive levels of work or study related stress, and it is ASA's duty of care to take measures as reasonably practicable to preserve the mental health and wellbeing of its staff and students.

ASA recognises the importance of ensuring that all staff and students can work and study in a supportive and caring environment, where they are valued and respected. By applying these values to our work and study practices we aim to promote mental wellbeing and prevent stress by promoting a supportive culture.

ASA recognises that it is required to provide staff and students with a safe and healthy environment, so far as is reasonably practicable, under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth)*, the *Work Health and Safety Regulations 2017 (NSW)*, *Work-related Psychological Health and Safety National Guidance Material 2019 (Cth)*, *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*, and *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 (Cth)*.

The concept of positive mental health and wellbeing implies a state of health characterised by emotional and spiritual resilience that allows individuals to enjoy life and to survive pain, disappointment and sadness. Mental health problems can be triggered by stress arising from the workplace/ study environment or outside world; mental wellbeing at work or study is determined by the interaction between working/studying environment, the nature of the work/study and the individual.

ASA promotes a comprehensive approach to tackling mental health issues arising from the workplace/study environment or personal circumstances by addressing prevention, management and support. This framework requires a shared understanding between ASA management and employees/students that mental ill health can be a legitimate health issue.

Staff and students experiencing difficulties that could lead to them experiencing mental ill health should be encouraged to seek help and support. Staff and students have a duty to themselves and others to help minimise mental ill health in the ASA environment and should take an active part in mental wellbeing management initiatives. This framework should be read with conjunction with the *Student Support, Wellbeing and Health Policy and Procedure*, and the *Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedure*.

ASA will identify and detail factors which may cause increased stress in the environment by Risk Assessment.

3. Principles

ASA encourages the promotion, protection, and restoration of mental health and wellbeing amongst all staff and students. This framework aims to promote staff and student mental health and wellbeing by aligning ASA policies, procedures and processes to support that goal.

Towards achieving this aim, the following are the objectives of this framework:

¹ WHO Factsheet No. 220: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

- To promote an ASA environment which is supportive of mental health and wellbeing and in which mental health difficulties are openly acknowledged and not stigmatised.
- To direct staff and students with diagnosed mental difficulties or concerns about their mental health, to advice and information on support which are available and how to access this support.
- To direct staff to procedures that should be followed if they encounter an emergency arising from a staff member or student's mental health difficulties, or they suspect a staff member or student might be suffering from a mental health difficulty but where there is no apparent emergency.
- All cases will be dealt with in accordance with ASA's policies and procedures on diversity and equity, discrimination, bullying and harassment, and student support, wellbeing and health.
- Cases will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and related documentation will be subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act.
- ASA will not disadvantage unfairly any staff member or student who admits to suffering from work or study related stress and/ or mental health issues.

4. Definitions

Term	Definition
ASA community	ASA community refers to all students and staff members of ASA.
consultation	Consultation is a time for students to seek face-to-face contact with Academic or Administrative staff to raise any issues that they may have.
mental health	Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well, and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in.
mental health awareness programs	Mental health awareness programs are educational initiatives and activities aimed at promoting awareness, understanding, and de-stigmatisation of mental health issues within the student community.
mental wellbeing	Mental wellbeing is how we respond to life's ups and downs. In this simple mental wellbeing definition lies deeper meaning and implication for our lives. It includes how a person thinks, handles emotion (emotional wellness), and acts.
student wellbeing	Student Wellbeing is the holistic state of health, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects, contributing to a student's overall quality of life.
support services	Support Services are comprehensive resources and assistance provided by ASA to address the academic, personal, and emotional needs of students.
support staff	Support staff is a member of staff of a higher education provider without an academic staff classification and who provide support functions for teaching and/ or research activities. Examples of 'support functions' include management; academic learning support; English language support; student counselling; librarian; IT support; laboratory assistance; technical assistance; general administrative functions; and student administration functions such as provision of student advice, student admissions, student enrolments and student graduations.

5. Health Promoting Actions

As identified in the Framework for Promoting Student Mental Wellbeing in Universities paper research has highlighted “there is strong and expanding evidence base indicating that higher education students are a ‘very high risk population’ for psychological distress and mental disorders”².

To help with promoting support actions, ASA will ensure the following is actioned:

- foster engaging curricula and learning experiences;
- cultivate supportive social, physical and digital environments;
- strengthen community awareness and actions;
- develop students’ mental health knowledge and self-regulatory skills; and
- ensure access to effective services.

5.1 Action 1: Foster engaging curricula and learning experiences

Student mental health and wellbeing is supported when curriculum and teaching practices foster students’ intrinsic interests and communicate the importance and value of the knowledge and skills being developed. Student mental wellbeing is also supported when curriculum design and learning experiences build students’ self-efficacy and create social connections.

Action 1 includes:

- auditing curriculum and course structure to ensure progression;
- reviewing assessment practices to ensure that students receive regular, informative feedback on their learning and progress; and
- designing learning experiences that enable students to work together to achieve common goals.

5.2 Action 2: Cultivate Supportive Social, Physical and Digital Environments

The social, physical and virtual environments for student life and academic engagement play a significant part in promoting or undermining student mental health and wellbeing. It is essential that students are made to feel a sense of belonging through social, physical and digital environments that are strongly inclusive, promote respectful interactions and relationships, and meet people’s daily needs.

Action 2 includes:

- providing cohesive, engaging extra-curricular activities that foster a sense of belonging for students from diverse backgrounds;
- auditing and enhancing physical spaces to ensure access to appropriate spaces for private study, social interaction, and relaxation activities; and
- ensuring all students are aware of policies and procedures that address discrimination, bullying, harassment, sexual assault and sexual harassment, and of complaint processes for redressing offensive, intimidating or discriminatory behaviour.

5.3 Action 3: Strengthen community awareness and actions

Mental health and wellbeing is supported when individuals within a community have the information and abilities to identify options and make decisions and choices conducive to good

² A Framework for Promoting Student Mental Wellbeing in Universities: unistudentwellbeing.edu.au

health. To better support students mental health, actively build the capacity of and create opportunities for students and the student association to effectively initiate, develop, contribute to and sustain activity and decision-making related to student life in general and student mental health and wellbeing.

Action 3 includes:

- running regular campaigns to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing and redress stigma associated with mental health difficulties;
- developing or reviewing online and print resources that promote mental health literacy among students and staff;
- facilitating student involvement in activities and programs to raise students' awareness of mental health issues and the academic benefits of mental wellbeing;
- involving students in developing and delivering wellbeing activities at key points during the academic calendar such as orientation; and
- organising, funding and promoting mental health training for student representatives involved in peer support programs.

5.4 Action 4: Develop Students' Mental Health Knowledge and Self-regulatory Skills

All students should have opportunities to develop mental health knowledge and skills within their academic course of study. It is known that a significant number of students experience mental health difficulties and struggle to manage the demands and pressures of their academic studies. These students need timely, personalised opportunities to develop relevant skills, such as time management, reflection and self-understanding, self-regulation, goal setting and help-seeking skills.

Action 4 includes:

- providing opportunities within the formal curriculum for students to learn health promoting knowledge and skills such as resilience, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and time and task management;
- developing curriculum and co-curricular offerings that build students' self-knowledge (e.g. values and character strengths) so they are better able to make decisions and identify career pathways consistent with their values, interests and strengths;
- developing print and online information and resources that build students' knowledge and skills for mental wellbeing (e.g. mental health essentials, stress-management, mindfulness, self-compassion, autonomous motivation, managing emotions); and
- collaborative development with students of programs, information and activities that build resilience and students' capacities to hear and act on constructive feedback.

5.5 Action 5: Ensure Access to Effective Services

Ensuring that students who may be experiencing mental health difficulties have access to appropriate services and academic adjustments. Mental health difficulties and mental health illness are surrounded by misunderstanding and stigma. This impacts the treatment of and responses to individuals who experience such difficulties. It also affects individuals' acknowledgement of mental health difficulties when they arise and decisions to seek help or access support.

Action 5 includes:

- ensuring diverse, visible and discreet student services to support wellbeing and learning

- (e.g. counselling and academic skills);
- collecting data for evidence-based evaluation of the accessibility and quality of services;
- fostering active student involvement in the development, review and evaluation of services;
- developing or reviewing strategies to ensure that students take up the available services; and
- developing or reviewing guides for ASA staff on referring a student who may be experiencing mental health difficulties to relevant services.

6. Overview of Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Procedure

ASA employs an integrated approach to student mental health and wellbeing with four levels of intervention.

6.1 For All Students

ASA policies and procedures are aligned to support mental health and wellbeing and to create a community and campus environment that is supportive and inclusive, encouraging student engagement and connection.

6.2 For Students Who Want or Require Skills Development

Resources are available to inform them about the importance of mental health for academic success, how to help maintain mental health and wellbeing, early signs of poor coping and strategies, and services to help regain mental wellbeing. Staff are trained to identify students who may need further support and to refer students who require additional support to the relevant staff, resources and services.

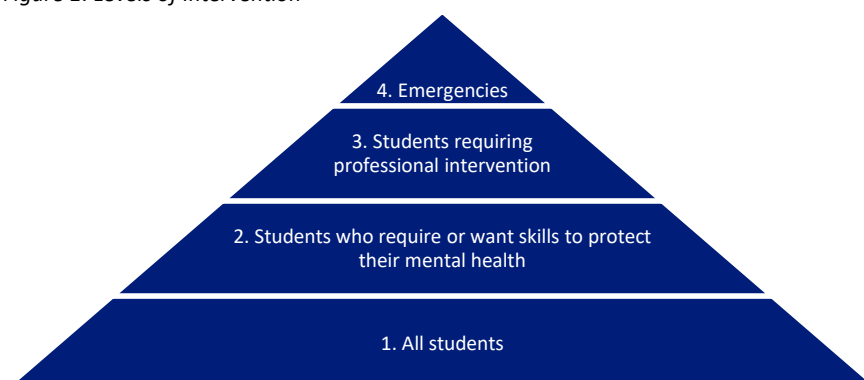
6.3 For Students Seeking or Requiring Professional Intervention

Clear guidelines are in place for how to apply for academic support and policies exist to ensure that students with a disability arising from a mental illness are not subject to discrimination.

6.4 For Students Who Require Professional Intervention Urgently

Procedures are in place to mitigate risk and coordinate a response which escalates or refers decision-making to those appropriately qualified in mental healthcare.

Figure 1: Levels of Intervention



7. Roles and Responsibilities

Central to ASA's principles is the building-up of commitment to student experience and wellbeing, and an inclusive community, as outlined in the *ASA Strategic Plan 2024-2028*. Safeguarding mental health and wellbeing is important for all members of the ASA community,

and all members share in the responsibility of promoting an inclusive environment which supports the promotion, protection, and restoration of mental health and wellbeing.

7.1 Role of Staff

Often the first person a student discloses a mental health difficulty to, or to notice that a student may have a mental health difficulty, will be a member of staff, for example a Lecturer or Student Services Officer. Therefore, staff should familiarise themselves with the *Student Support, Wellbeing and Health Policy and Procedure*, and this Framework. Additional information and training on mental health is available, and staff are strongly encouraged to avail themselves of these resources.

7.2 Role of Students

Students are encouraged to take care of their own mental health. For example, students should ensure that they get adequate rest and exercise, take medication, if prescribed, and access appropriate support whether inside or outside ASA.

Students are responsible for communicating their needs and seeking support within ASA. ASA cannot offer appropriate and reasonable support without this information.

Students with diagnosed mental health conditions are encouraged to seek support from the Student Learning Hub. The Student Learning Hub invites students to participate in a needs assessment, where they will agree on a support plan and reasonable adjustments can be put in place to reduce the impact of the mental health condition on the student's academic studies. Reasonable adjustments may include alternative assessment arrangements, classroom support, and academic skills support.

The *Student Code of Conduct* applies to every student. Students should be aware that any behaviour which impacts negatively on fellow students or staff, or which is in any way disruptive or which breaches ASA's policies and procedures for the maintenance of good academic and behavioural discipline, is not acceptable and will be subject to ASA's *Student Code of Conduct*, the *Diversity and Equity Policy* and associated procedure, and the *Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedure*.

Students concerned about a fellow student's mental wellbeing should refer their fellow student to the available resources and encourage them to seek support at the earliest opportunity. Students may wish to direct their fellow student to ASA's Wellbeing Officer. Students should be aware of their personal limitations. If someone is in immediate danger or is a danger to others, students should call emergency services (phone 000), and if on campus should contact Student Services.

8. Benefits of Disclosure

Students are strongly encouraged to disclose if they have mental health difficulties. Without such disclosure, ASA cannot provide appropriate support or make appropriate referrals.

9. Environment

Central to ASA's Principles is the building-up of commitment to student experience and wellbeing, and an inclusive community of students and staff. In sessions and through the Student Representative Council (SRC) and peer mentors are encouraged to form small communities and friendships. Such connections reduce students' isolation and enhance their sense of belonging.

ASA is committed to running a series of events throughout the year to promote mental health awareness and build students' capacity to understand the signs and symptoms of poor coping. These events encourage students to intervene on their own behalf in a timely way to prevent the onset of more serious mental health difficulties.

ASA provides campus-based support services to assist students who require additional advice or who might require further intervention. The Wellbeing Officer can help direct students to these services.

10. Confidentiality

Students can expect that ASA will treat information about their mental health confidentially. Information is only shared with a student's consent and the student will be told who the information is being shared with and the reasons for sharing this information. There are limited exceptions to this rule, for example where a student is considered a danger to themselves or others, where a crime is being investigated, where disclosure is required by law, or where procedures of the *Mental Health Act 2014 (Cth)* and *Mental Health Act 2007 No 8 (NSW)* are invoked, for example for the purpose of an involuntary admission to an approved centre such as a hospital.

11. Relevant HESFs

This Framework and the associated Procedure comply with the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021. The following are relevant excerpts and specify that:

Standard 2.3 Wellbeing and Safety

1. All students are advised of the actions they can take, the staff they may contact and the support services that are accessible if their personal circumstances are having an adverse effect on their education.
2. Timely, accurate advice on access to personal support services is available, including for access to emergency services, health services, counselling, legal advice, advocacy, and accommodation and welfare services.
3. The nature and extent of support services that are available for students are informed by the needs of student cohorts, including mental health, disability and wellbeing needs.
4. A safe environment is promoted and fostered, including by advising students and staff on actions they can take to enhance safety and security on campus and online.
5. There is a critical-incident policy together with readily accessible procedures that cover the immediate actions to be taken in the event of a critical incident and any follow-up required.

12. Version Control

This Framework has been reviewed and approved by the ASA's Board of Directors as at March 2024 and is reviewed every year.

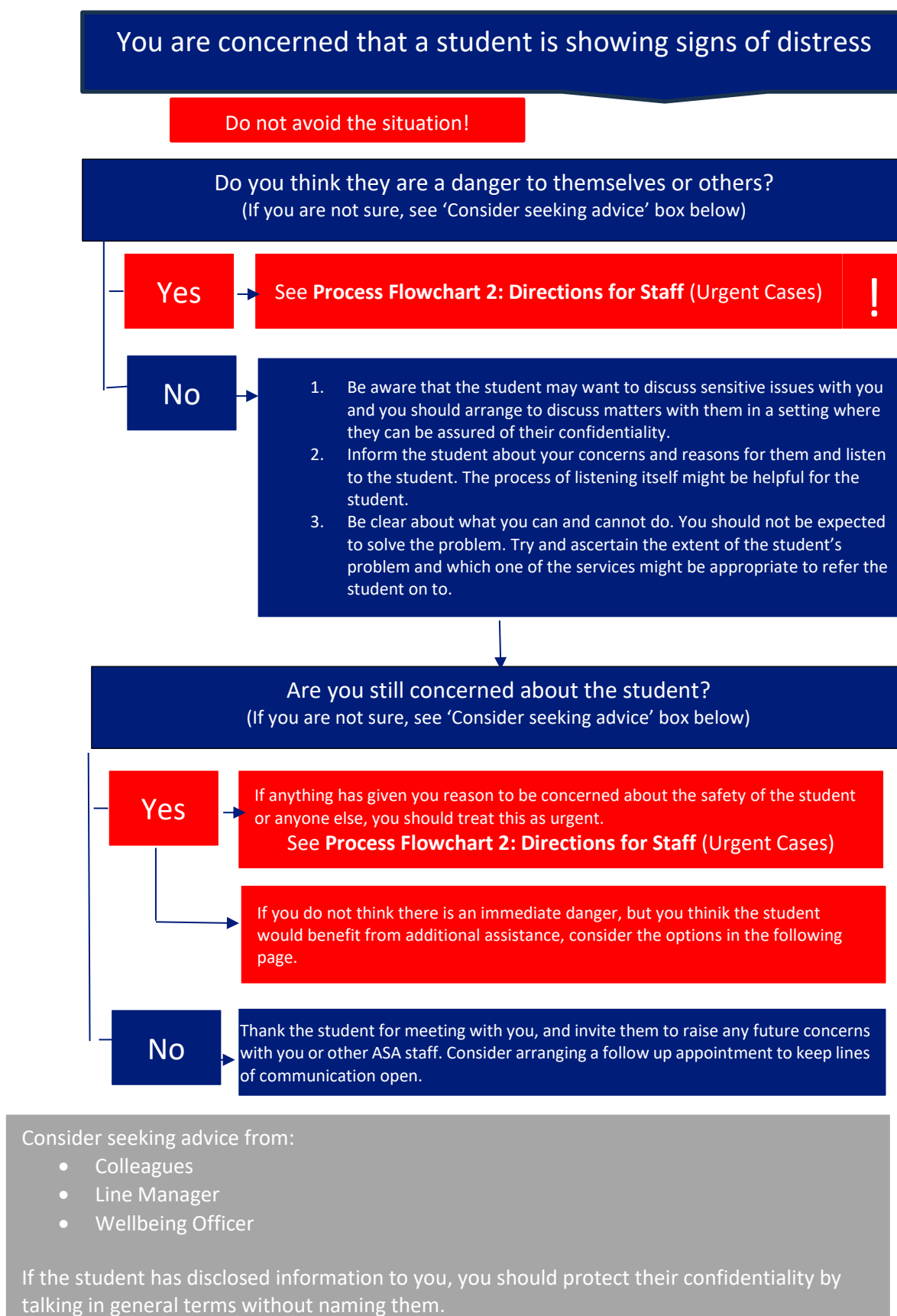
This Framework is published and available on the ASA website

<https://www.asahe.edu.au/policies-and-forms/>

Change and Version Control				
Version	Authored by	Brief Description of the changes	Date Approved:	Effective Date:
2024.2	Project Officer	Document formatting updated to reflect change of Trading Name to ASA Institute of Higher Education	28/06/2024 by CEO	01/07/2024
2024.1	Director Learning and Innovation	Newly created document	01/03/2024	08/03/2024

Appendix 1 - Process Flowchart 1:

Directions for Staff (Non-Urgent Cases)



If you do not think there is an immediate danger, but you think the student would benefit from additional assistance, consider the following options:

You can refer the student to:

- Wellbeing Officer
- Learning Support Hub
- Mental Health Resources

If the student is reluctant to accept a referral you could try one of the following:

- Suggest that a second opinion would be helpful for them and you – Explain to the student that their difficulties are outside your area of expertise.
- Dispel myth about seeking help from a professional – Encourage the student to schedule ‘just one’ appointment and suggest that seeking professional support is a sign of strength and maturity.
- Request that they consider other options – Some students might not wish to see the Wellbeing Officer or a counsellor but will agree to visit a GP doctor. Others might prefer to talk to a religious leader or a local support group. You can outline a range of options.
- Explore the student’s reluctance – A reluctance to seek help might relate to previous negative experiences or a misconception that information about help-seeking will be passed on to lecturers or family. If you explore the reluctance, it might be possible to resolve the concern.

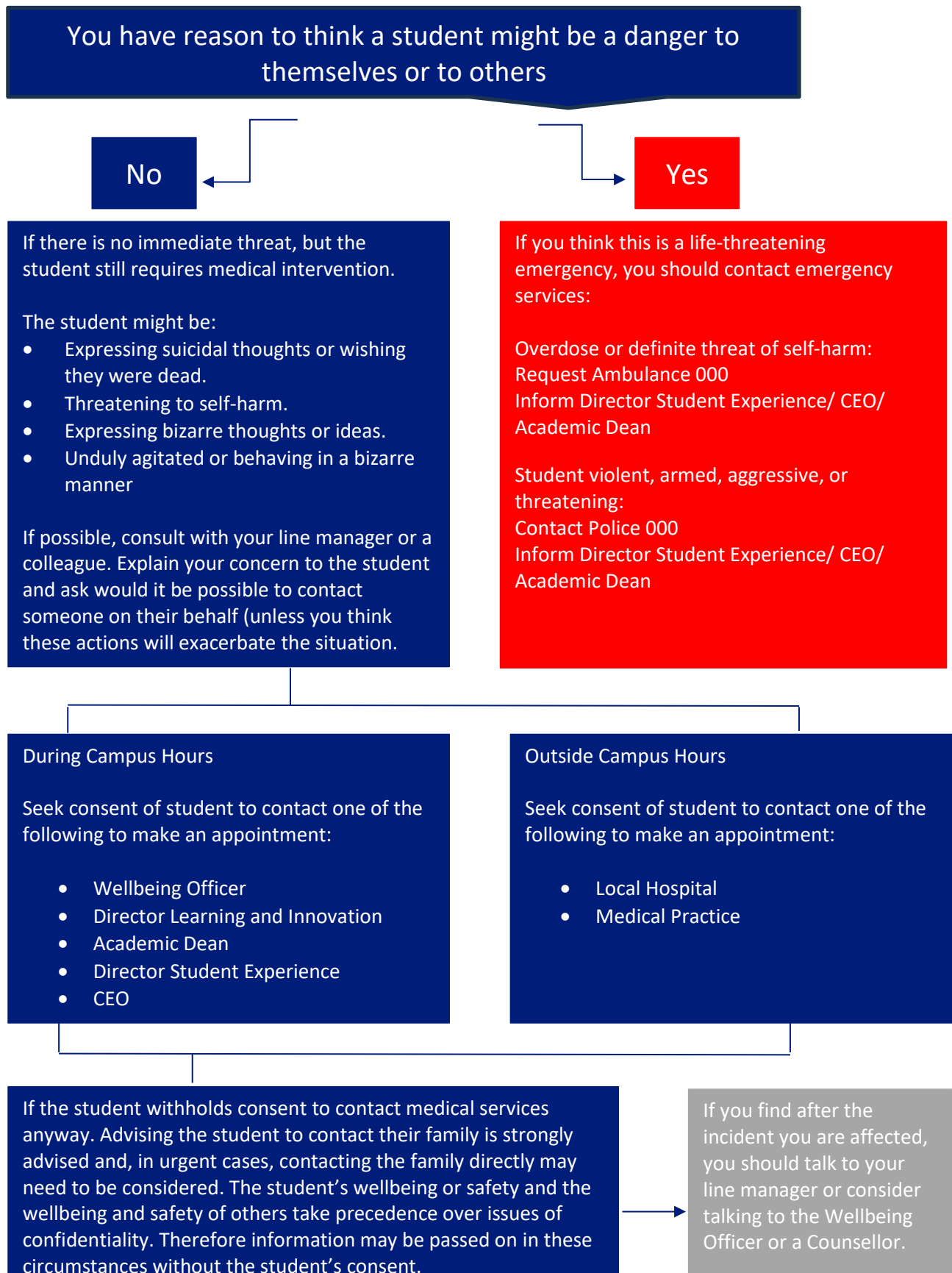
If the student remains reluctant to accept a referral, unless you have fears in relation to safety, this should be respected, and no further action is appropriate at this point.

A student with mental health difficulties is more likely to benefit from professional help without coercion. The student might seek professional help later.

Arrange a follow-up appointment to keep lines of communication open and revisit the situation.

Appendix 2 - Process Flowchart 2:

Directions for Staff (Urgent Cases)



Appendix 3:

Advice for students who are concerned about their own mental health or the mental health of a fellow student.

You are feeling distressed, or you are concerned that a fellow student might be distressed.

It is an emergency if:

You think you might hurt yourself or others, or you think your fellow student might hurt themselves or others;

You or your fellow student are seriously ill.

You or your fellow student are at risk of suicide;

Is this an emergency?

Yes

No

Ensure your safety and the safety of others.

If you are on Campus:

Contact Campus Services:

Wellbeing Officer
Director Learning and Innovation
Academic Dean
Director Student Experience
CEO

Contact Emergency Services:

Overdose or definite threat of self-harm:
Request Ambulance 000

Student violent, armed, aggressive, or threatening:
Contact Police 000

If assisting a fellow student:

Once help is on its way, if it safe to do so, reassure your fellow student and wait with them until help arrives.

If you are concerned about own mental health:

- Resources are available in ASA to inform you about mental health issues and to help you regain mental wellbeing. See the Learning Support Hub.
- Communicate your needs and seek support (remember, seeking help is a sign of strength not weakness)
- Consider seeking professional support. The Wellbeing Officer can support you or you can talk to a GP.
- If you have a diagnosed mental condition and require assessment adjustments or academic support, you should contact the Learning Support Hub. Remember ASA needs this information to offer you support.

If you are concerned about a fellow student:

- Be aware of your personal limitations.
- Express your concern to your fellow student and encourage them to seek support.
- You can direct them to ASA support services which are available.
- You can talk to the Wellbeing Officer or other staff member about your concerns on a no names basis.

After the incident

- Talk about it with friends and family while respecting the confidentiality of the affected student
- Consider talking to the ASA Wellbeing Officer or external counselling service
- Talk to the Director Student Experience about what has happened – you might need to take a few days away from your studies or arrange an extension, for example.