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Student Wellbeing Handbook

Canberra

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What is Mental Health

Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and homesickness can be common among students, particularly international students who have the added pressure of being away from home, studying in a second language and social barriers. As a result, it is important to be aware of and understand your mental health.

This handbook is designed to provide some guidance on how to recognise symptoms, where to seek help and how to look after your mental health and wellbeing.

1. Identifying the need for additional support

The quality of your experience depends on many factors, including:

- being mentally and physically healthy
- feeling safe
- being able to learn and practise English
- finding a secure and affordable place to live
- securing paid part-time work
- knowing where to go for help and support
- understanding Australia's multicultural way of life.

But how do you know you need additional support? Here is some information on depression, anxiety and homesickness.

Depression

Feeling sad, down and blue and if these feelings persist for a prolonged time then you might be experiencing depression.

Depression can affect anyone, anytime and should not be seen as a sign of weakness or personal failure.

Some symptoms of depression may include:

- low mood for most of the day
- lack of interest in things you used to enjoy
- changes in diet and/or weight
- a change in sleeping pattern
- feeling physically restless or slow
- feeling worthless or guilty
- poor concentration
- thoughts of harming yourself.

It can be hard to find the motivation to study when you are depressed. Your ability to think clearly and critically and learning can become more difficult.

If you think you may be experiencing depression it is important to seek help from a professional. Please see a GP to discuss these symptoms or contact one of the external help providers listed in this handbook.

Anxiety

The symptoms of anxiety are sometimes not obvious as they may develop slowly over time. Given we all experience anxiety at various points in our lives, it can be hard to know how much is too much.

Normal anxiety tends to be limited in time and connected with a stressful situation or event.

The type of anxiety experienced by people with an anxiety condition is more frequent or persistent, not always connected to an obvious challenge, and it impacts on quality of life and day-to-day functioning. While each anxiety condition has its own unique features, there are some common symptoms including:

- Physical: panic attacks, hot and cold flushes, racing heart, tightening of the chest, quick breathing, restlessness, or feeling tense, wound up and edgy
- Psychological: excessive fear, worry, catastrophizing, or obsessive thinking
- Behavioural: avoidance of situations that make you feel anxious which can impact on study, work or social life

If you think you may be experiencing anxiety it is important to seek help from a professional. Please see your GP to discuss these symptoms or contact one of the external help providers listed in this handbook.

Homesickness

International students are constantly exposed to new things – new friends, living environments, new studies in a new country. It is only natural that you will miss your friends, family and things that are familiar at home.

If you can adapt to the challenges of living and studying in a new place it will help you develop valuable life skills. These skills can contribute to your personal growth, and increase your resilience, even making you a great candidate for future jobs.

2. Seeking help

If you think that you may be experiencing mental health issues, [completing this checklist](#) (from Beyondblue) is a quick way to give you more insight. The checklist won't provide a diagnosis – for that you'll need to see a health professional – but it can help to provide a better understanding of how you're feeling.

Students who are experiencing mental health and wellbeing issues that are affecting their attendance and/ or course progress can contact the Student support officer at any time during their course. The Student support officer will attempt to assist the student where feasible by:

1. Providing information on what types of supports are available and how to access them
2. Providing students an opportunity to access the right staff to outline their issue
3. Providing advice to students on how to address the issue
4. Supporting the student in dealing with the issue

2.0 Any student who requires counselling should access external support. Capital College students may make an appointment with Life Supports (phone 1300 735 030 / www.lifesupportscounselling.com.au), or choose their own counselling service.

2.1 The College will liaise with the student and the external support to facilitate the provision of counselling services if required.

2.2 The types of issues that an external counselling service may be able to support students for includes:

1. encountering anxiety / depression or displaying symptoms of mental health issues
2. experiencing significant difficulties adjusting to Australia and / or life without their family support network
3. personal issues around relationships, issues with members of their family that are subsequently negatively impacting the student.
4. issues with drugs or alcohol or some other form of dependency.
5. other types of personal welfare issues that require access to a counsellor

3. If you are experiencing an emergency, please call 000 immediately.

There are many services available in Canberra as a first step to getting help. After having a read through the options choose which service you think is right for you.

Many of the below resources are free, and you do not need to contact your Overseas Student Health Cover (OSCH) to access them. To visit a GP for treatment, please refer to your OSCH.

Service	Description	Contact
Emergency	24-hour emergency assistance (Police, Fire, Ambulance)	000
ACT Access Mental Health	24-hour mental health emergency access & support	1800 629 354 or 6205 1065
Beyond Blue	Phone or chat online for 24-hour support	1300 22 4636
Lifeline	24-hour telephone counselling	13 11 14
Black Dog Institute	Online self-help tools and apps that can be accessed via desktop, mobile or tablet 24-hours a day	
Suicide Callback Service	24-hour crisis counselling and call back	1300 659 467
Domestic Violence Crisis Service	24-hour domestic violence crisis assistance	6280 0900
QPlus	Counselling and referral service specifically for people who are LGBTQIA+	1800 184 527
Health Direct	24-hour medical & health advice line staffed by registered nurses	1800 022 222
Canberra Rape Crisis Centre	A crisis and counselling telephone support service: 7am-11pm	62475

4. Practical tips to help you adjust

If you don't think you need external professional help, here are some simple ways to help you make a start yourself:

- Be prepared to feel homesick at times.
- Talk to people and try to make new connections. A great place to start is other students also studying with Capital College
- Join social clubs outside of the college.
- Take up hobbies that are enjoyable to you, this is great way to meet new people and start to feel more at home in Australia.
- Connect with people from your own culture and speak in your home language.
- Share your experiences with others that are in a similar situation.

5. Recreational activities

5.1 The College may arrange recreational activities for students throughout the year.

5.2 Examples of recreational activities may include:

1. Festivals – local street music, arts and food festivals
 2. Trips to local attractions
 3. Tour of Canberra and surrounds
 4. Cultural / food nights at the College
- 5.3 Students are made aware of the availability of activities during orientation and throughout the year

6. Staying Well

It is most important to seek professional help for any kind of mental illness, just as you would with your physical health. There are some additional things you can do in your day to day life to help treat, or even prevent a decline in your mental health.

- Keeping active - Regular physical activity is a good way to help prevent or manage mild anxiety and depression. Keeping active can help you stay physically fit and mentally healthy.
- Sleeping well – Getting a good night's sleep is crucial for your mental health and psychical wellbeing.
- Eating well – Food plays a vital role in maintaining physical and mental health. Eating a nourishing, balanced diet helps to give people an overall sense of wellbeing
- Reducing stress – Stress is a common response to tough events or situations. Some stress is normal, however serve and ongoing stress may be a risk factor.
- Relaxation exercises - Finding a sense of peace and calm in our day-to-day lives can be difficult. Relaxation techniques can help to relax the mind and body and manage some of the symptoms of anxiety/depression.
- Mindfulness exercises using mindfulness apps such as Aura, Breethe, Buddhify, Calm, Headspace and IMindfulness by Mindfulness-MBSR.com
- Getting organised - Sometimes the best antidote to worry and stress is planning. Write a to-do list, set up a study timetable and look at ways in which you can reduce some of the pressure on your schedule.
- Remember to have fun - Whilst it may seem like the last thing to do when you're stressed, taking time off to unwind is essential to your mental wellbeing and is a very effective way to avoid burn out. Reserve at least one night each week to socialise, see a movie or anything else that is fun.

7. Social contacts

Canberra is a very diverse city with opportunities for people from all over the world to connect with other cultures, and people from their own culture.

- Language and Cultural Groups in Canberra – There are many language and culture groups via this link including, language exchange meetups only walking distant from CAPITAL COLLEGE. Japanese, Spanish, French, German and Italian language groups are also found via this link.
- InterNations – This website can help connect you with people and events from your culture in Canberra
- My Community Directory – This link contains more than 80 social groups and communities from different cultures, countries and religions that exist here in Canberra.
- Capital College – Follow us on Instagram [@auscapcollege](https://www.instagram.com/auscapcollege) to stay up to date with our student social events

References

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

<http://unistudentwellbeing.edu.au/teaching-practice/effective-teaching/>