

# Early support model

## Instructions for teachers and other staff

Faculty of Medicine 2020.

Prepared by University of Helsinki counselling psychologists.

### QUICK INSTRUCTIONS

Guidelines for early support situations.

General principles of applying the guidelines:

- Providing early support
- Discretion and respect
- Keeping observations and interpretations separate
- Respecting diversity and autonomy

Guidelines

1. Observe.
2. Address with a low threshold.
3. Discussion templates in this booklet can be used as a basis for discussions.
4. Refer on when necessary.
5. Addressing an issue is enough.

Example:

1. Observe.
2. Address the issue and listen.
  - a. Communicate your observations as directly as possible, without interpretations. E.g., "I have noticed that you have been absent a lot/have not progressed with your studies/have seemed absent-minded, etc. What could this be about?"
  - b. Listen calmly to the student and, if needed, help the student to better verbalise their situation. (You should avoid making interpretations: "You are depressed" or "You are not motivated enough" or "You have become lazy", instead: "Did I understand correctly that you are struggling with a low mood?")
  - c. Refer the student on based on the graph on the page:  
[https://teaching.helsinki.fi/sites/default/files/inline-files/Kun%20huoli%20her%C3%A4%C3%A4\\_versio2%20%281%29.pdf](https://teaching.helsinki.fi/sites/default/files/inline-files/Kun%20huoli%20her%C3%A4%C3%A4_versio2%20%281%29.pdf). Students may decide for themselves whether they want to receive help.
3. In case of acute concern, you may contact 112 emergency number directly and inform them of the situation.
4. If necessary, after the situation has been resolved, you may talk about your experience and your feelings with a colleague/supervisor/occupational healthcare services; making sure, however, that the identity of the student in question is protected.

## DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS

### General instructions related to challenging situations

<https://teaching.helsinki.fi/instructions/article/challenging-supervision-situations>

#### Behaviour that raises concern

Worrying behaviour can be manifested, for example, in a student being absent from teaching without notification, not answering messages sent by the teacher, not progressing in their studies or appearing absent-minded or unwell. A student may be quiet in teaching situations or exceptionally anxious when they need to give a presentation. A student may appear to be intoxicated in the teaching situation or may smell of alcohol or cannabis.

Assess whether there is a need for a face-to-face discussion or for giving more general guidelines during the lecture.

A subtle way to guide students during a lecture may take place in the following way:

1. “I would like to remind you all of the guidance and support services provided on the Instructions for Students website”: <https://studies.helsinki.fi/instructions/where-can-i-get-guidance> and <https://studies.helsinki.fi/instructions/article/contact-persons-your-degree-programme>

Guidance in a face-to-face discussion may take place as follows:

1. Think about your goals for the discussion in advance (e.g., clarifying the situation, referring on, etc.) and what your own role and responsibilities are in the situation. (Remember: <https://teaching.helsinki.fi/instructions/article/challenging-supervision-situations>)
2. Use observant language, such as the following, when speaking with the student (avoid interpretations and judgements):
  - a. “I have become a bit concerned ...”, “I’ve been wondering how you are.”
3. The student will disclose as much of their personal issues as they feel is necessary.
4. The student may be silent in the situation, or start crying. In the latter situation, you can allow the student to ‘let it out’, offer a handkerchief and verbally alleviate the shame possibly experienced by the student for crying.
5. If the student says that they are coping less well than before, you may refer them on to guidance services or student healthcare. Students with learning difficulties can be helped by counselling psychologists and the expert team for special arrangements.
  - a. “In similar situations, students have benefited from counselling psychologist/FSHS/study advice services.”
6. The main thing is to convey the message of caring and noticing. However, remember your core duty. It is good to keep roles clear and students may find it confusing if a teacher takes on the role of a therapist, parent, source of support, etc.
7. Students are personally responsible for seeking and receiving help as well as for their own learning, development and decisions.
8. Consider whether there is a need for a follow-up meeting. You may, for example, agree on meeting with the student or on the student updating you on the situation by email in a few weeks’ time. However, with regard to your job description, this is not necessary and you are free to use your own judgement on the matter. Remember that a possible follow-up is not intended to be a care contact.
9. If you so wish, you can make notes related to the meeting and issues discussed for your personal use. However, this is not compulsory.

## Disruptive behaviour

Disruptive behaviour may be manifested, for example, in a student disturbing others, interrupting, talking over others or making inappropriate comments in a lecture or a seminar group. A student may raise their voice when talking to teachers, other students or staff. A student may appear to be bullying another student. A student may stay too long after the lecture talking with the teacher or continually send disturbing messages to the teacher by email.

Teachers and students have the right to work in peace in a safe learning environment. Teachers have a responsibility to address any disruptions to teaching and learning situations. (According to section 45 of the Universities Act, “a student who disrupts teaching, behaves threateningly or violently or endangers the life or health of another person may be ordered to leave the premises where teaching takes place or an event organised by the university”.)

The University does not condone any type of inappropriate treatment, bullying or harassment. In any matters related to harassment, please contact the University’s harassment contact persons (Timo Valtonen: [timo.valtonen@helsinki.fi](mailto:timo.valtonen@helsinki.fi) or Terhi Somerkallio: [terhi.somerkallio@helsinki.fi](mailto:terhi.somerkallio@helsinki.fi)). The Student Union can also provide assistance ([hairintayhdyskilo@hyy.fi](mailto:hairintayhdyskilo@hyy.fi)). Further information about addressing inappropriate behaviour: <https://flamma.helsinki.fi/en/group/henkilostoasiat/epaasiallinen-kohtelu-ja-hairinta>

Addressing a situation with a student may take place, for example, as follows:

Example: A student disrupts a lecture, for example, by shouting or causing confusion.

1. Address the situation face to face with the student. If you feel uncomfortable in the situation, you can ask a third person to attend.
2. Talk about your observations to the student, for example, in the following manner:  
“My teaching/concentration is disturbed by ....”  
“Please stop so that we can concentrate on teaching.”
3. If this prompt does not have the desired effect, you may ask the student to leave the teaching situation, for example, in the following manner:  
“I have discussed this with you. Your behaviour disrupts teaching. Please leave.”
4. If the student refuses to leave, you may call a porter.
5. After the incident, inform your supervisor and, when needed, the head of academic affairs or course coordinator of the incident.
6. Make brief notes for yourself on the incident.
7. In order to support your personal coping, talk about the incident with your colleagues and/or supervisor.
8. Occupational health services support coping at work.

Example: A student sends you an inappropriate email message.

It is not necessary to respond to inappropriate messages. However, if you wish to respond, you may do so, for example, in the following manner:

1. Describe your observations and feelings to the student in an email or face to face.
  - a. “I found your message confusing.”
  - b. If the message is very inappropriate: “I feel that your message is inappropriate in this context”, or “I felt that your message was inappropriate”.
2. Remind the student of the rules and the roles of teacher and student.
  - a. “I am in the role of a teacher and I want us to only talk about issues related to studies in future.”
  - b. “We will do so (explain the way forward clearly using a calm tone of voice) ...”

3. If the situation causes you concern, you may bring up your concerns and offer support measures to the student.
  - a. "If you have something on your mind, please book an appointment and we can talk about it."
  - b. "If you have a lot on your mind, maybe you could discuss it with a counselling psychologist/FSHS/an education planning officer."
4. Inform your supervisor about the situation.

If you think that the student's behaviour may be cause for grave concern, please see the guidelines below for situations of grave concern.