

“Mental health is the emotional resilience which enables us to enjoy life and survive pain, disappointment and sadness. It is a positive sense of well-being and an underlying belief in our own and others’ dignity and worth”

How do you react when a learner presents ‘in crisis’?

There may be times when learners present extremes of emotions and feel unwell. Please remember this is rare and even more rare are occasions when a staff member should be concerned about their personal safety.

Don’t panic

When dealing with someone who is very anxious or upset– don’t join the learner in their emotional situation. By presenting in a calm, confident manner (even if you don’t feel it) this will help to diffuse some of the emotional energy, and possibly help ease the distress a little. It will also give you time to think before you act. When the learner is calm it is good to ask who we can contact on their behalf.

Ensure some privacy for the individual

When someone is experiencing ‘high expressed emotions’ privacy may not be the foremost thing on their mind, but the issue affecting them might be of a very personal nature. Think of how you would like to be treated in such a situation. This helps with confidentiality too.

Be aware of your personal/professional limitations

If you feel you have too little knowledge of the issue make the individual aware. Being honest about what you can and cannot do is important.

If you feel unable to support the learner – seek out appropriate help

Let the learner know that you empathise with their situation, and that you will find alternative, more appropriate support to meet their immediate needs. Seek out the most appropriate member of staff to deal with the immediate situation and hand over to them.

Don’t forget to ‘debrief’

If you feel you have been affected by the presenting issue seek support as soon as possible afterwards. Talk to someone in confidence, this could be your line manager or any member of staff you feel comfortable with.

Learning support can help you to develop your skills so that your work reflects your true abilities

For further information please contact:

Head of Learning Support	020 8355 3926
Dyslexia Co-ordinator	020 8488 4871
ESOL Support	020 8488 4871
Literacy Co-ordinator	020 8488 4871
Specialist ICT Support	020 8488 4871
Maths Co-ordinator	020 8488 4871
Mental Health Co-ordinator	020 8301 8070
College Counselling	020 8312 5072
Learning Support at Eltham Centre	020 8921 3435

For more information contact
Head of Learning Support
Room A106
95 Plumstead Road
London SE18 7DQ
Email: learningsupport@gcc.ac.uk

LEARNING SUPPORT

Disability Statement

“1 in 6 of us are experiencing mental health difficulties at any one time”

People with mental health difficulties are among the most discriminated against in society. Fear of stigma and discrimination can lead to low confidence and people may withdraw from society.

This can impact on education and an individual's motivation and ability to participate in learning. When rejection and prejudice are commonplace why should a learner feel a college will be any different?

We all have a responsibility to challenge the stigma and offer welcoming environments that allow for a learner to progress. Education is a key part of an individual's recovery and can give someone confidence and experiences they can use to help them have the life they want.

Disclosure and support

With disclosure appropriate support can be offered and the College has a responsibility to encourage disclosure. Due to previous experiences individuals may be reluctant to disclose a mental health difficulty. Treating someone with respect, listening and explaining all the options with them in a safe setting will help with this.

Some questions to ask

Do you think that you might want some additional support to do your course? This is entirely optional.

Do you have a health problem that you think we should know about? If so, could you give me some brief details?

Have you received any support with your learning in the past?

What support did you get?

Was it helpful?

Would you like to meet an adviser to talk about your situation in relation to learning?

Is there any information that you think might be useful for us to know to support you with your course?

When an individual discloses explain what support is available, such as the mental health co-ordinator, and ask for permission to inform relevant staff members. This can happen at any time during a course whether before or at enrolment or when a learner feels comfortable with their tutor and discloses at this point. Of course, many learners with mental health difficulties will thrive without support but being aware of what is available will be helpful for all learners.

What can be offered?

Support to learners while they are at the College. This may include working on coping strategies that help a learner to get the most from their course and College life.

Liaising with a learner's support network, such as the services they are linked with, to ensure continuity of care for an individual.

Working with staff at the College to support their work to improve the whole College's responses to learners with mental health difficulties.

Some ways of working with people who have mental health difficulties

For tutors and all staff having a flexible approach will benefit learners, these suggestions will make learners with mental health difficulties feel more comfortable and can lead to learners seeking further support to assist them while at College.

Recognise that some learners may need considerable time to settle into a class and feel comfortable enough to begin to address their learning.

Recognise too that 'ice-breakers' may be threatening for some learners.

Learners may wish to start with only a small number of hours each week and then build this up gradually (e.g. term by term) so opportunities need to be in place to allow this to happen.

Recognise that some people with mental health difficulties might have days when they are just not able to come to class and try to find ways to compensate for these absences.

Remember that anxiety can mask true ability therefore a learner's potential may not be apparent until several weeks into a course when they have relaxed.

Plan flexible learning situations which include a variety of activities. Understand that some individuals might have real anxiety about trying new activities and include activities in which people can experience immediate success.

Encourage a supportive environment which is not too judgemental. Give reassurance and honest feedback. Sometimes not saying anything about a perfectly acceptable piece of work can be construed as disapproval.

Picking up signals

Is the learner's behaviour causing concern?

Have they told you that they have a problem?

Have you noticed any change in behaviour recently? This may be doing more or less work than before, missing lectures, missing deadlines for handing work in?

Have you noticed any change in mood recently?

Have other people raised their concerns with you?

Have there been changes in the person's appearance? (deterioration in personal hygiene).

Does the learner seem....

Emotional? Tense? Agitated? Withdrawn? Loud? Incoherent?

Don't ignore the situation, what action will you take?

Formally talk to the learner and note responses- you can broach the subject 'I have noticed that you...' this shows that you are aware and concerned. Check that you have the time and are prepared to act on information given.

Don't pretend you can make the problem go away.

Don't join the learner in their distress.

Check that you are aware of referral services and information sources in or outside of College. After discussing support you can come to the mental health co-ordinator with the learner or make an appointment when you are with them for them to come alone.

Check that you have explained to the learner that you are not a specialist and discuss the limits of the help you can give.

Check that you understand issues of confidentiality and data protection and that the learner is also aware.

Act on the things you agreed you would do.

Don't underestimate the massive impact a few actions can make.

If the learner does not want to talk....

Is the problem urgent?

Do you think the learner is at risk of harming himself/others?

Is he/she not coping? If 'yes' seek advice from your manager or the mental health co-ordinator...don't ignore the situation.

Go through the support options with the learner so they can have information about what the College can do, this may help them to trust and discuss how they feel.