TIPS FOR STAFF ON MAINTAINING PERSONAL WELLBEING

The Bond University staff community all face varied job demands and competing priorities. Due to small class sizes, regular contact with students (some of whom are in distress at times) and a personalised point of difference approach at Bond, some academic and professional staff might experience stress or anxiety.

As we spend so much of our time at work, it is an ideal place to ensure we are intentional and proactive about preventing and managing mental health issues and fostering wellbeing.

The Wheel of Wellbeing suggests that taking daily action in six key areas can strengthen personal and professional wellbeing (https://www.wheelofwellbeing.org/):

- **Body** – Enjoy 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week
- **Mind** – Studies show that life-long learners are some of the happiest and healthiest people so try a new hobby or learn something new
- **Spirit** – Practising acts of kindness, volunteering time, or simply saying ‘thank you’ all work wonders for your wellbeing
- **People** – Connect with people around you and build close relationships with friends and family
- **Place** – Savouring natural surroundings helps create breathing space and a pause in busy life routines
- **Planet** – Make small positive changes like getting on your bike or switching off electricity

Here are some other useful strategies to consider:

- Take care of yourself – eat healthy, drink water, exercise regularly and get enough sleep.
- Find out what makes you stressed and intentionally manage and address the stressors that are in your control.
  - For instance: use calming and relaxation techniques, exercise, spend time with friends. Seek help before you feel overwhelmed.
- Manage your time and workload effectively – limit the number of times per day that you check email and the time that you spend responding; plan your day, with time each day to think, reflect and regroup; allocate adequate time for non-work-related things like socialising, hobbies / interests, exercise and sleep.
- Maintain work boundaries (e.g. avoid reading for or thinking about work in bed).
- Recognise when one of your roles (e.g. teaching, research or service) becomes extra-demanding and scale back on the other areas.
  - Recognise when your goals need to be modified so that they are achievable.
  - Speak with your supervisor if you are struggling with your workload and work out a plan together.
- Take action rather than hoping problems will go away - break the problem down into small, achievable goals to help you move forward, step by step.
- Keep life balanced and things in perspective - try not do to too much at particularly stressful times.
- Talk problems over with a friend/professional before they reach crisis stage.
- Cut out any negative self-talk and engage in positive self-talk - switch negative thoughts such as ‘I can't manage’ to more positive ones such as ‘I'm managing well considering everything I have to do’.
- Incorporate daily micro-restorative habits into your workday (e.g. take short walks throughout the day; get fresh air and see daylight; eat healthily).
LEARNING & TEACHING STRATEGIES

STAFF WELLBEING

FIXING OUR OWN OXYGEN MASK FIRST: CARING FOR OURSELVES SO WE HAVE CAPACITY TO CARE FOR OUR STUDENTS

HOW TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WITH STUDENTS

Responding to and supporting students in distress can be challenging for academics and professional staff alike. Here are some practical strategies about how to have difficult conversations and communications with students experiencing distress or disclosing sensitive personal information.

Engaging with students in distress: what is our role? At Bond we all care very much about our students, but it is generally not our role to counsel distressed students or support them to manage emotional or psychological difficulties. It’s better for us to refer students to either their own GP or our colleagues within Medical Services.

Maintaining confidentiality: If a student discloses sensitive information to us we should maintain confidentiality. This means we shouldn’t discuss a student’s personal information or circumstances with a relative, work colleague or a relevant support service, without that student’s permission.

However, we also have a duty of care to prevent harm or injury (to the student or others). Always make meeting notes and indicate to the student that you are going to email the support advice you have given them and will copy in the faculty SASQ without disclosing the details of your discussions.

Dear Student in distress, we have discussed support strategies and you have agreed to make an appointment with the counselling services. The SASQ team (copied in) are a source of support independent to your degree and you can reach out to them if you need to. If you would like me to contact the support services on your behalf, please let me know.

Regards, Bond staff

How should staff respond to a student in distress? There is no single best approach for responding to distressed students. Remember the boundaries of your role and be clear about what support you can and cannot offer. Do try to suggest options and encourage students to seek appropriate support e.g. Bond support services or a visit to their GP.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

**DO**

- If possible, choose a time and place that affords privacy and limited interruptions for your conversation.
- You could advise them to bring a support person with them.
- Try to listen attentively and patiently – it may be difficult for the student to find the right words to explain their situation; sit with the silence.
- Try to speak respectfully and take the student’s feelings seriously (‘I can see that it is very upsetting for you’, ‘It’s very understandable that you would feel that way’).
- Ask what help they would prefer and support the student’s agency (‘Would you like me to call someone for you?’ rather than ‘I’ll call the Counselling Service now and book you in’).
- Suggest options, encourage them to seek appropriate support – gently (‘It sounds like it might be helpful for you to talk with someone about this; what do you think?’, rather than ‘You need to see a psychiatrist or counsellor’).

**DON’T**

- Promise in advance to keep the information secret as you may need to breach confidentiality if you believe the student or someone else is at risk of harm.
- Analyse the student’s motives (you only feel that way because…’; ‘Why are you coming to me with this just as the assignment is due?’).
- Argue, lecture, ridicule or minimise their experiences (you wouldn’t be in this position if you had…’; ‘I think you’re over-reacting’).
- Ask questions that might imply judgement or blame – (‘Have you done anything about this yet?’, ‘Why didn’t you tell someone before now?’).
- Share your own experiences of being highly anxious or overwhelmed, or your own experiences of assault/abuse/trauma/grief/loss.
- Attempt to physically console or comfort a student by hugging them or holding their hand.