University of Sussex Student Mental Health and Wellbeing policy statement

Introduction

The experience of coming to university can be very exciting and challenging, but adapting to significant change can also be stressful and anxiety provoking. Moving to a new area or country/culture; managing a tight budget; dealing with academic pressure and exams; responding to social media; establishing new friendship groups; finding paid work; planning a career and finding accommodation can all exert considerable pressure on your mental health.

Anxiety and stress can be alleviated in most situations through the emotional support of friends and family or the practical support of university staff and it is important not to pathologise and label what are in reality normal emotional reactions to new experiences. However, you may experience more persistent problems which may prevent you from full participation in your studies without appropriate professional support. These mental health conditions may be either temporary or long-term and may vary considerably in terms of severity and effect.

Definitions

To establish clarity and consistency two terms are used which are not inter-changeable:

Mental health or mental wellbeing refers to general psychological wellbeing. Wellbeing could be understood to be “a state of equilibrium or balance that can be affected by life events or challenges” (Dodge et al 2012).

Mental health condition refers to mental illness or clinically diagnosable conditions as defined in the 2011 report by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. However, we are aware that many conditions exist on spectrums and accordingly the severity of each condition can vary considerably.

Aims

The University is committed to creating a supportive environment in which the positive mental health and wellbeing of its students and staff is promoted and facilitated. The University will provide you with the opportunity to pursue not only academic excellence, but social, cultural and sporting fulfilment.

It is the policy of the university to:

2. RCP 2011
Promote mental health and wellbeing through its policies and procedures.
Prevent, wherever is practicable, circumstances at university which are detrimental to your mental health.
Provide an environment in which you will be made aware of and offered suitable support and adjustments to allow you to achieve your fullest potential.
Ensure the effectiveness of this policy statement through regular monitoring and evaluation.

To implement these aims, the University will:

- Work to create an environment that is inclusive, positive and open in its approach to mental health in order to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health conditions.
- Promote a culture which encourages you to disclose any concerns so that you can be supported appropriately.
- Provide a clear framework for responding appropriately to disclosures of mental health conditions, and create clear guidance for students and the staff supporting them.
- Fulfil its legal duty to provide reasonable adjustments for mental health conditions, when they fit the legal definition of disability in line with the 2010 Equalities act.
- Take a zero tolerance stance on discrimination based on any protected characteristic including mental health conditions.
- Ensure that all staff with teaching, support and welfare responsibilities and who work directly with students, have appropriate training and awareness around mental health to recognise the signs of poor mental health and distress and in order to direct you to appropriate support.
- Continue to provide a range of services to support mental wellbeing with a network of pastoral care.
- Develop a good working partnership between University services; the NHS and other appropriate community based services.
- Ensure that the provision of support services for students increase in line with student numbers, and that student mental health is included under safeguarding in the overall university strategy.
- Promote awareness of internal and external services providing support for students.
- Regularly review student feedback about these services, and take into account the needs and requests of the university population when evaluating resources.
- Ensure that the regulations of the university are implemented in a fair manner which considers your individual circumstances, and works to achieve the best outcome, one which is not detrimental to your mental health and wellbeing.