

# Student Guide to Mental Health and Wellbeing

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# 1. Introduction

Mental health and wellbeing provide us with the emotional strength that enables us to enjoy life and to survive pain, disappointment and sadness. It also helps develop an underlying belief in our own, and others' dignity and worth.

This Student Guide to Mental Health and Wellbeing will give you information and advice on not only mental health and wellbeing, but also the sources and possible types of support available to you at Bloomsbury Institute and beyond.

This Student Guide accompanies our [Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy](#).<sup>1</sup>

## 2. How is my mental health and wellbeing?

It can be difficult to decide how we feel because if we don't feel our "normal selves", we tend to think we are just "a bit down" or "a bit stressed". If you are not sure how you feel, you can take a self-assessment produced by the NHS. See link below.

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mood-self-assessment/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mood-self-assessment/)

However, if you have any concerns about your mental health, you should make an appointment to see your doctor.

## 3. Mental health conditions

We've included some of the most common mental health conditions on the next page. For further information on these conditions and other mental health conditions, you can head to Mind, a UK mental health charity: [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems)

- **Anxiety and panic attacks** – Anxiety is an emotion that everyone experiences, but if it occurs too often or prevents someone from functioning healthily, it becomes an issue. It can show itself in extreme stress or worry and could also develop into panic attacks with symptoms including shortness of breath, increased heart rate, sweating and blurry vision.
- **Bipolar disorder** – This is a condition that affects your mood and can cause it to swing from one extreme to another, from feeling very low and lethargic to feeling elated and overactive.
- **Clinical depression** – Symptoms of clinical depression include having lasting feelings of unhappiness or despair for long periods of time, rather than just a few days, as well as often feeling on the brink of tears and having difficulty sleeping and completing basic daily tasks.
- **Eating disorders** – These are experienced by people who have unhealthy thoughts, habits or behaviours surrounding their diet and body.
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)** – This is a condition that leads someone to have obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours. An obsession is an unwelcome thought, image, urge, worry or doubt that repeatedly appears in your mind. It can make you feel very anxious. A compulsion is a repetitive activity that you do to reduce the anxiety caused by the obsession. It could be something like repeatedly checking a door is locked, repeating a specific phrase in your head or checking how your body feels.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** – This is an anxiety disorder caused by very stressful or frightening events (e.g. abuse, physical or sexual assault, natural

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of our Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy can be found at <https://www.bil.ac.uk/qem/policies/>

disasters, acts of terrorism) which the person often relives through nightmares and/or flashbacks and severely impacts daily life.

- **Psychosis and schizophrenia** – This is a diagnosis that is given to someone who suffers hallucinations, delusions and paranoia, which can lead to further negative symptoms such as withdrawal.
- **Self-harm** – This is when you hurt yourself as a way of dealing with very difficult feelings, painful memories or overwhelming situations and experiences.

## 4. How can I stay healthy?

Looking after your **physical** health can also help your mental health and wellbeing. You should therefore try to sleep well and maintain a balanced lifestyle by keeping active and eating well. This will help to improve your mood, give you more energy and help you think more clearly.

When it comes to food, it is important to eat regularly and well. Avoid foods which make your blood sugar rise and fall rapidly, such as sweets, biscuits, sugary drinks, and alcohol. Instead, turn to slow-release energy foods such as pasta, rice, oats, wholegrain bread and cereals, nuts and seeds. Also, try to drink plenty of fluids (5-6 glasses a day). Water is a cheap and healthy option. For more information and advice about food and mood, visit [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/about-food-and-mood](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/about-food-and-mood)<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the above, “Five Ways to Wellbeing” have been identified which focus on connecting, being active, taking notice, learning and giving.

### 4.1 Connect

Social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing and for acting as a buffer against mental ill health. You could do this by

- Joining one of the Student Guild Societies.
- Having lunch with a fellow student.
- Sharing mealtimes with your family.
- Talking to someone instead of sending an email.
- Speaking to someone new.
- Asking how someone’s weekend was and really listen when they tell you.
- Putting five minutes aside to find out how someone really is.

### 4.2 Be active

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety. Why not try taking a break from social media, for example, and try and be more active? If you have a disability or long-term health condition, the NHS provides advice on physical activity that is suitable for you:

[www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/get-active-with-a-disability/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/get-active-with-a-disability/)

Even if it is hard for you to find time to be active, you could try doing one or more of the following (where possible):

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/about-food-and-mood>

- Taking the stairs not the lift.
- Walking wherever you can - preferably with a family member or friend so that you can 'connect' at the same time as well.
- Going for a walk in between classes – Gordon Square, Russell Square and Regent's Park are not far from us.
- Getting off the bus or tube one stop earlier than usual and walking the final part of your journey.
- Doing some stretching each day.

### **4.3 Take notice**

Take some time to enjoy the moment and the environment around you. This will not only enhance your wellbeing, but also help to reaffirm your life priorities to enable you to make positive choices in life. You can do this in small ways.

- Get a plant for your home.
- Have a 'clear the clutter' day.
- Take notice of how your family and friends are feeling or acting.
- Take a different route on your journey to or from college.
- Visit a new place for lunch.

### **4.4 Learn**

By being at Bloomsbury Institute, you already have this one nailed, which is great because learning enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life. The practice of setting yourself goals and working to deadlines is also strongly associated with higher levels of wellbeing.

If you have time, you can supplement your own personal growth and learning by also taking up a hobby, learning a new skill or developing an existing skill e.g. learning a new language or experimenting in the kitchen with new recipes.

### **4.5 Give**

There is a proven link between committing acts of kindness and an increase in wellbeing. How about considering one or more of the following?

- Volunteer to be a Peer Advisor in the Student Guild, a Peer Assisted Learning Leader or Peer Mentor.
- Undertake voluntary work beyond your studies.
- Take an interest in the people around you especially those that may appear in need of some support.
- Check in on an elderly neighbour.
- Phone the family member or friend you never get around to calling.

## 5. Who can I talk to?

If you are experiencing any difficulties, please come and talk to any member of staff here at Bloomsbury Institute. We are here to support you.

If you are unsure of who to turn to, a good place to start would be our Centre for Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success.

SEWS: [sews@bil.ac.uk](mailto:sews@bil.ac.uk)

Key sources of support within SEWS are staff within our Disability Office. In addition, our Disability and Wellbeing Manager is also our First Aid Mental Health Champion.

Disability Office: [disability@bil.ac.uk](mailto:disability@bil.ac.uk)

Alternatively, you could contact one of our Mental Health First Aiders for initial advice on support options. Information on our Mental Health First Aiders can be found on our [Disability and Wellbeing Support](#)<sup>3</sup> page.

### 5.1 Where can I find self-help and online resources?

You can find resources on a number of areas including mental health and wellbeing, eating disorders, substance abuse, domestic violence, self-harm etc on [Canvas](#)<sup>4</sup>.

In addition, leaflets are available from the Disability Office on a number of topics relating to mental health and wellbeing.

However, in cases of immediate danger, call 999 or go to the Accident & Emergency Department at your nearest hospital. If there is no immediate danger, contact your GP for an appointment as soon as possible.

## 6. What we can and can't do

### 6.1 We can

- Provide confidential support and advice from our Disability and Wellbeing team especially in terms of referrals to external specialist support.
- Help you to develop appropriate study support arrangements.
- Provide advice on our policies and procedures and those of our awarding bodies which may be relevant for your particular circumstances.
- Offer a [Wellbeing Programme](#)<sup>5</sup> through our Centre for Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success.

### 6.2 We can't

- Provide in-house specialist advice and counselling.
- Compromise our academic standards when trying to meet your needs.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bil.ac.uk/disability-and-wellbeing-support/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://canvas.bil.ac.uk/courses/777>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bil.ac.uk/disability-and-wellbeing-support/wellbeing-programme/>

- Adjust the requirements and competency standards in respect of any of our degrees that are regulated by a professional body e.g. ACCA, CIMA, CILEx

## 7. Support mechanisms

### 7.1 Reasonable adjustments

If you have a disability, long-term health condition or specific learning difficulty, we will ensure that wherever possible reasonable adjustments are put in place to support you to ensure you are not being disadvantaged. These adjustments might be in relation to activities such as teaching (including lectures, seminars, and workshops) and examinations and assessments. You will find full details of these in our [Disability Policy](#) and within Appendix A in particular.

To discuss and agree or review any appropriate reasonable adjustments, please speak to a member of staff within our Disability Office. They can be contacted at [disability@bil.ac.uk](mailto:disability@bil.ac.uk)

### 7.2 Extension Requests

If you are unable to submit your work on time due to circumstances beyond your control, it may be possible for you to request an extension. Whether or not you will be granted the extension will depend upon the nature of the difficulty you are experiencing, whether you could and should have anticipated it, and the extent to which the circumstances were outside of your control. For example, we would look favourably on an extension request from you if you were to be prevented, due to serious health difficulties, from studying during a period when you would be expected to be working on an assignment. We would not look favourably on a request prompted by a computer crashing!

If you want further information or advice on Extension Requests, please refer to your [Student Handbook](#)<sup>6</sup> and get in contact with our Academic Administration team [academic.admin@bil.ac.uk](mailto:academic.admin@bil.ac.uk)

### 7.3 Mitigating/Extenuating Circumstances

If you experience a serious or acute problem, or an event beyond your control or ability to foresee (e.g. serious illness or severe disruption of your personal life) which are likely to prevent completion of an assignment or attendance at an examination, you may be able to claim mitigating/extenuating circumstances. If you are granted mitigating/extenuating circumstances, you would be allowed to complete your assessment at a later date (which ordinarily would be the next opportunity to submit).

If you want further information or advice on mitigating/extenuating circumstances, please contact our Academic Administration team at [academic.admin@bil.ac.uk](mailto:academic.admin@bil.ac.uk)

### 7.4 Withdrawal, Study Break/Suspension of Studies and Deferral

If you feel unable to continue with your studies as a result of your disability or long-term health condition, there are a number of options that may be available to you. These options include the following:

- Withdrawal – this is where you decide to **stop** your studies **completely**.
- Study break / Suspension of Studies – this is where you decide to **stop** your studies **temporarily**. A study break normally must be either for one semester (minimum) or one academic year (maximum).
- Deferral – this is where you decide to **postpone** your studies, but **temporarily** only. A deferral is when your start date is postponed (up to a maximum of 12 months).

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bil.ac.uk/student-services/handbooks/>

You can find information on the above (including processes and deadlines) in our [Withdrawal, Study Break/Suspension of Studies and Deferral Policy](#)<sup>7</sup>.

Please note that if you are considering either a withdrawal, study break/suspension of studies or deferral, there may be broader implications of which you may not be aware. We strongly advise you to contact a Success Champion in our Centre for Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success and our Finance team to be sure that you are making as informed a decision as possible. If you are an International student sponsored by us, then we would strongly recommend that you discuss any plans you might have to withdraw from your course with a member of staff within our [Compliance team](#)<sup>8</sup> as withdrawal from a course automatically results in withdrawal of your visa sponsorship.

## 7.5 Fitness to Study

In some cases, it may be necessary for us to consider whether you are well or fit enough to study. In such cases, we would be guided by the policies of our awarding bodies. Examples of where we might need to apply the above policy include where:

- a student's behaviour, resulting from an illness or disability, is negatively affecting the experience of other students and/or staff and/or presents a risk to self and/or others and this is not being addressed through academic assessment;
- an existing declared condition may substantially change;
- a student may develop a condition during the period of their registration;
- a student may declare a previously undeclared condition, or an undeclared condition may manifest itself.

## 7.6 Wellbeing Programme

Our Centre for Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success runs a [Wellbeing Programme](#)<sup>9</sup> for all students. The programme offers you the opportunity to take time out and reflect on how your life could be enhanced by finding that sense of calm and centredness which lies at the heart of a balanced, fulfilling life.

## 7.7 Togetherall

We provide all students with free access to a digital mental health support service called [Togetherall](#)<sup>10</sup>. This service is available online, 24/7, and is completely anonymous to enable everyone to express themselves openly in a safe environment. Professionally trained Wall Guides monitor the community to ensure the safety and anonymity of all members. In addition to Togetherall's online community, students have access to a wealth of useful resources and can work through tailored self-help courses covering topics such as anxiety, sleep, weight management, depression and many more.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bil.ac.uk/qem/policies/>

<sup>8</sup> Our Compliance team can be contacted at [visa.compliance@bil.ac.uk](mailto:visa.compliance@bil.ac.uk)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bil.ac.uk/disability-and-wellbeing-support/wellbeing-programme/>

<sup>10</sup> Available at: <https://account.v2.togetherall.com/log-in>