Suicidal Thinking

You may be consulting this page because you are considering suicide or because you are worrying about a friend who seems to be considering suicide.

The Counselling Service advises most strongly that anyone contemplating suicide seek assistance at the earliest possible time. We would never want to minimise the problems that lead individuals to contemplate ending their lives - often they are problems of great severity which carry with them deep feelings of shame, loneliness and hopelessness. However, most research and anecdotal experience of carers suggest that the despairing thought which make a person feel that the only way to resolve the problem is by suicide is normally a misguided one. This Service has worked with many students while they are actively contemplating suicide or who have done so in the past - almost invariably when the crisis is past they express relief that they have not acted on their suicidal intentions.

The problems that lead to suicidal thinking are too complex and varied to address here - although some pointers may be found on our other pages. However what we can do is give clear guidance to immediate sources of help.

Immediate Help

During working hours

- The Student Counselling Service. The service reserves one session each day for students in immediate distress. The service is highly confidential (although we reserve the right to mobilise other help if someone's life or health is at immediate risk). Follow this link for contact details.

- The College Health Centre. You can usually get an appointment at extremely short notice in an emergency - the Health Centre will treat you in an emergency even if you are not registered there. Again the service is highly confidential.

Out of working hours

- For those in College during term time a Residential Support Assistant can be contacted by Security 01784 443063.

- The Health Centre number will put you in contact with the local out-of-hours medical service.

- College work with London Nightline who offer help and advice at night on 0207 631 0101 (6pm-8am every night of term).

- Hospitals with 24 hr. casualty services - Ashford (01784 884488); St. Peter's, Chertsey (01932 872000). St. Peter's has a specialist Psychiatric Liaison Officer on call in the A&E Department.

- The Samaritans can be contacted on 08457 909090 at any time. Their service is entirely confidential. This may be preferred by some students; however it does mean they will not mobilise help within College.

In addition to these services that maintain specific emergency cover, Chaplains, Residential and Community Support, Student Services Staff, Student Union Welfare Officers and Departmental Advisors will all be willing to support a student in times of difficulty or distress.
Helping a Friend

If a friend of yours is in distress and maybe even talking about harming themselves, we would suggest the following steps, sometimes summed up in the acronym COPE.

Be Caring - never ignore or take lightly a suggestion of suicide - research shows most people who attempt suicide normally tell someone else of their intentions first. Ask more and do not be afraid that talking about the threat will put ideas into the person's mind - it is more likely that they will appreciate being taken seriously.

Be Optimistic - as explained above, most human problems can be solved with time, care and expert help no matter how hopeless they seem. You do not have to give up hope just because your friend has temporarily lost theirs. However, do not let your optimism lead you to dismiss or make light of the person's concerns.

Be Practical - Do not leave a person expressing serious self-harming intent alone, especially if the means of self-harm are at hand. Involve others - using the emergency services if necessary. Be particularly vigilant if someone is drunk or under the influence of drugs, if they have made a suicide attempt in the past or if they have a clearly formulated plan. Do not however get drawn into making unrealistic long-term promises of ongoing support that you are unlikely to be able to keep.

Seek an Expert - If the person threatening suicide refuses to involve any of the sources of help listed above once the immediate crisis is passed, consider contacting them yourself in order to plan what steps can be taken to get support for your friend.