

ASH, DIPLOMA OF NURSING DIVISION 2

FOR ALL VET
SECTOR STAFF

Case study 2

CASE DESCRIPTION

Ash (they/them) is a 35-year-old nursing student at your TAFE.

Ash has requested multiple extensions to assignments which were denied by staff. Ash has now submitted a formal complaint with your organisation about teaching staff. It is part of your role in the TAFE to respond to this complaint.

When you call Ash, they readily disclose they've had a difficult year. Their sister died of cancer two months ago. They are feeling easily upset, having trouble concentrating in class. They are also a carer for their father, who has early onset dementia.

Ash is willing to see a GP and wants to get some extra support, but also feels staff should be reprimanded for their lack of support.



BEST PRACTICE: EARLY INTERVENTION

1. Ensure Ash knows the course requirements, including time commitments and level of difficulty.

Being clear about course requirements prior to enrolment can help students to decide whether the course is a good fit for them at a particular time in their life.

2. Advise Ash at enrolment about the support services available.

This could include:

- information in enrolment packs about where to reach out for support, both regarding general wellbeing and course requirements
- an activity in orientation to prompt students to think about who supports them. For example, family, friends, professional services, TAFE services, and how to access these supports. The orientation should reiterate that help is available and encourage help-seeking behaviour.

3. Continue to remind Ash about supports throughout their enrolment with you.

This information should be sent at regular intervals to all students. It can even be included in a signature on staff emails, so students are reminded regularly that support is available and are likely to see it at the time that they need it.

4. Invite Ash to inform your organisation about changes in their circumstances e.g. death of a loved one or becoming a carer.

Issue this invitation to students at regular times throughout the year. This enables staff to offer appropriate support in a timely way and provide any special consideration guidelines that are appropriate (e.g. guidelines for carers).

5. Contact Ash when they start falling behind/requesting multiple extensions.

Contacting or meeting with Ash in person after the second extension request would have alerted you to their difficulties earlier and prevented the student-staff conflict and deteriorating trust.

6. Develop policies where RTO staff are required to identify and respond to potential problems.

If a student falls behind in their coursework, stops attending, or the quality of their work starts to decline, have a response embedded in policy. For example, after two missed classes or two extension requests, educators contact the student to discuss what is happening and if there is anything your organisation can do to help. Note: educators need to be prepared to discuss broader issues which may be impacting the student, such as for Ash – caring responsibilities and grief.

7. Notice how Ash is in class.

Ensure educators have sufficient training to recognise if a student is struggling with their mental health. For example withdrawing from peers, appearing angry or sad a lot of the time, expressing hopeless thoughts, ceasing participation.

8. When you notice changes in baseline behaviours, have a supportive conversation.

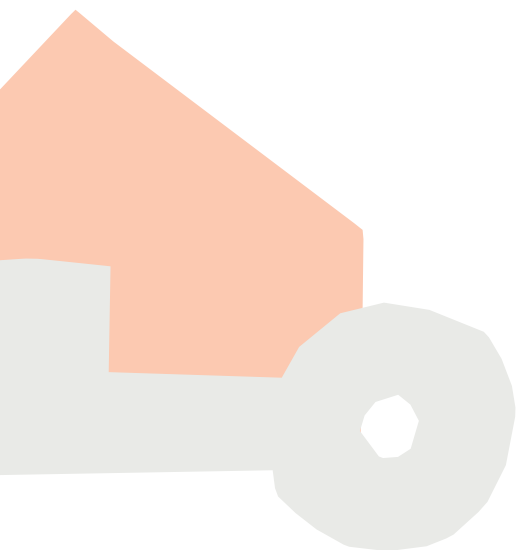
In a place where they feel comfortable or safe, tell the student what you've noticed and why you're worried. Then you can help the student to find appropriate support.

9. Develop a whole-of-organisation approach. Embed these steps in policy and practice.

Also focus on building a supportive culture, raising awareness about mental health, and involving students in ways to address issues such as student-staff trust, or response to wellbeing.

Actions include:

- schedule annual training days for staff, conducted by an external agency who specialise in early detection and management of mental health issues
- have support information available such as posters or pamphlets placed on walls or in areas where students can discreetly access.



INTERVENTION AT THE CURRENT POINT: CRISIS RESPONSE

1. Empathise.

Convey that you understand how difficult Ash's circumstances are and how they may impact on their study. Acknowledge how unsupported they feel.

2. Convey hope and understanding.

For example, you could say: "It sounds like a really difficult time, but I'm glad you told me, and we're going to work out a plan together to help you manage this."

3. Explore supports.

Ash has indicated they will see a GP. Ensure they know the GP can do a mental health treatment plan with them, with which they can access subsidised psychological services. Discuss other support options so Ash is aware of their choices. For example, any onsite wellbeing support at your RTO, and online options such as [headspace](#), [Beyond Blue](#) and [Lifeline](#).

Explore support for carers, including scholarships or bursaries in your state (such as through Carers Victoria) or [Carers Australia](#).

4. Explore reasonable adjustments.

Consider options to assist Ash to complete the work required, take some leave from study, or other approaches they identify as helpful at this time.

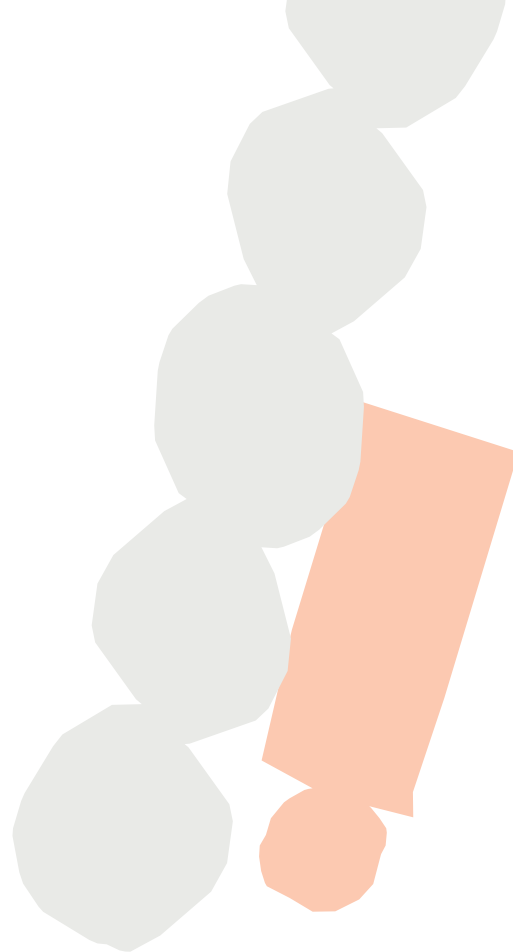
5. Instigate a conversation with Ash to review organisational policies.

On top of your usual organisational complaints policy, listening and acting on Ash's complaint can help to establish trust that you are taking their experience seriously. You could also consult with students more widely about what they would find helpful. For example, through an anonymous survey. From the information collected, develop policies and protocols about how to respond to early indicators of difficulties. Consider the student's right to privacy but also the need for timely support.

6. If you have a peer program, offer to link Ash with peer support.

7. Continue to check in with Ash.

Has the support provided and outcome(s) met their needs? If not, what else would support them at this time?



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Disclaimer The 'supporting VET student mental health and wellbeing' resources (the Resources) are designed to assist registered training organisations (RTOs) to understand relevant legislation and policy, as well as the application of that legislation/policy to the provision of vocational education and training to support student mental health and wellbeing.

The information contained in the Resources is intended only as a guide to relevant legislation and policy and does not constitute legal advice, impose additional legal obligations on RTOs or purport to provide binding interpretations of legislative obligations (for example, those under the *2025 Standards for Registered Training Organisation (RTOs) (Commonwealth)*, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth)*, and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Commonwealth)*).

The information contained in the Resources is accurate as at the date of publication. RTOs should seek legal advice specific to their individual circumstances to understand their legal obligations. For any questions about the Resources, please contact the [Department of Employment and Workplace Relations](#).

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