TEACHING IN TIMES OF CRISIS: A GUIDE TO WELLBEING, RESILIENCE AND STUDENT SUPPORT

A Self-Guided Toolkit for Higher Education Educators

Crisis-Affected Cloud, Hybrid and Disrupted Learning

CLOUD HED

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Toolkit at a glance

TEACHING IN TIMES OF CRISIS: A GUIDE TO WELLBEING, RESILIENCE AND STUDENT SUPPORT

INTENDED AUDIENCE	Lecturers, tutors, teaching assistants, academic mentors, programme staff, and other higher education educators with direct student contact.
PURPOSE	To support humane and sustainable teaching in crisis-affected contexts by helping educators attend to their own wellbeing, capacity, and professional boundaries, and by providing a practical response pathway — Prepare–Look–Listen–Link — for supporting students.
LEARNING GOALS	• Recognise how crisis conditions may affect educators' wellbeing, capacity, decision-making, and professional functioning. • Identify early signs of overload and burnout risk, and use realistic self-care, collegial, and institutional support strategies. • Clarify professional boundaries, personal limits, and available support routes before responding to student concerns. • Understand how crises may affect student participation and academic functioning. • Prepare relevant contacts, procedures, boundaries, and course options. • Notice changes without diagnosing or making deficit assumptions. • Listen briefly, communicate clearly, and avoid forced disclosure. • Offer realistic flexibility and connect students to appropriate academic, practical, wellbeing, or emergency support.
USE AND CONNECTIONS	The toolkit functions independently and contains the response, referral, boundaries, safety, and wellbeing guidance required by educators. Cross-references connect educator action to the **Student Toolkit**, institutional responsibilities and optional tools in the **Psychological Skills Library**.

About this toolkit

This toolkit is a practical reference for higher education educators working in crisis-affected, disrupted, displaced, war-related, or otherwise unstable cloud-based learning environments. It brings together concise guidance, checklists, templates, and fillable tools that educators can consult independently whenever a relevant situation arises.

The toolkit is self-guided. Readers may use it from beginning to end, open the section they need, complete an optional worksheet, or return to a template when a relevant situation arises. The toolkit begins by addressing educator wellbeing, professional limits, and support needs. In Part II, Prepare–Look–Listen–Link serves as the single response pathway for supporting students.

The material is psychologically informed but non-clinical. It does not train educators to diagnose mental health conditions, assess suicide risk, provide counselling, process trauma, conduct psychological debriefing, or replace institutional safeguarding and emergency procedures. Its purpose is narrower and more practical: to help educators respond in ways that are humane, clear, educationally appropriate, and sustainable, without feeling overwhelmed.

How the toolkit is organised

Part I (Sections 1–2) focuses on educator wellbeing, professional sustainability, and the individual, collegial, and institutional support needed in times of crisis.

- **Section 1** addresses educator wellbeing, stress, burnout prevention, recovery, and institutional responsibility for sustainable working conditions, clear roles, manageable workloads, and access to appropriate support.
- **Section 2** provides guidance on peer consultation, collegial support, professional limits, and moral distress.

Part II (Sections 3–10) focuses on understanding and supporting students through Prepare – Look – Listen – Link.

- **Section 3** explains how crisis conditions may affect learning, participation, and communication.
- **Sections 4–7** present one central response model: Prepare – Look – Listen – Link.
- **Section 8** provides a concise Look – Listen – Link decision pathway.
- **Section 9** provides trauma-informed communication and academic flexibility guidance.
- **Section 10** clarifies professional boundaries, confidentiality, and escalation.

Quick tools and printable worksheets are embedded in the relevant sections so that guidance and action tools appear together without duplication. Related CLOUD-HED resource boxes indicate where readers can continue in the **Student Toolkit**, **Institutional Toolkit**, **Psychological Skills Library**, or **Repository of Case Studies**.

How this toolkit supports educators

This toolkit helps educators to:

- identify personal overload and burnout warning signs early;
- use brief peer consultation after difficult student-support situations without turning consultation into therapy or case discussion;
- record local institutional contacts and procedures in one accessible place.
- notice changes in student participation, communication, functioning, access, or safety without diagnosing;
- apply the Prepare – Look – Listen – Link model as a calm, practical, and boundaried first response;
- distinguish academic continuity issues, practical barriers, wellbeing concerns, and urgent safety concerns;
- respond with care, clarity, and professional boundaries;
- use trauma-informed communication that avoids pressure, shame, and unnecessary disclosure;
- connect students with appropriate academic, wellbeing, practical, safeguarding, or emergency support;
- clarify what is within and outside the educator role;

THIS TOOLKIT SUPPORTS	THIS TOOLKIT DOES NOT PROVIDE
preparedness, observation, first-line communication, academic flexibility, boundaries, referral, and educator self-awareness	diagnosis, therapy, trauma processing, suicide-risk assessment, clinical treatment, legal advice, or emergency management
use of local institutional and emergency procedures	a replacement for safeguarding, mental health, occupational health, medical, legal, or data-protection procedures
brief, respectful, role-appropriate support	an expectation that educators become continuously available or carry complex concerns alone

Toolkit map

SECTION	TITLE
PART I	Sustaining Yourself and Accessing Support
1	Educator Wellbeing, Stress and Burnout Prevention
2	Peer Consultation and Collegial Support
PART II	Supporting Students with Care, Clarity and Limits
3	Understanding Learning in Crisis-Affected Contexts
4	Prepare: Know the System Before a Difficult Situation
5	Look: Notice Changes Without Diagnosing
6	Listen: Respond with Care, Clarity and Limits
7	Link: Connect Students to Academic and Wider Support
8	Decision-Making with Look – Listen – Link
9	Trauma-Informed Communication and Flexible Teaching
10	Professional Boundaries, Confidentiality, and Escalation
REFERENCES	References and Further Resources

PART I

Sustaining yourself and accessing support

1. Educator Wellbeing, Stress and Burnout Prevention

Educator wellbeing is not an optional extra. Crisis-affected teaching may involve rapid course redesign, repeated student disclosures, unstable participation, moral distress, uncertainty, expanded communication, and pressure to remain compassionate without adequate support. These demands can accumulate even when individual educators are highly committed and skilled.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCES

For additional short self-regulation and stabilisation tools, see the **Psychological Skills Library**, especially the **Personal Stabilisation Plan**. For organisational duties concerning workload, staff support, supervision, and safe working conditions, see the **Institutional Toolkit** section **Staff Wellbeing, Burnout Prevention, and Organisational Response**.

In prolonged crisis contexts, educators may be teaching and supporting students while living through many of the same disruptions themselves. They may be working with unstable infrastructure, displacement, safety concerns, family responsibilities, repeated schedule changes, staff shortages, uncertainty and reduced opportunities for recovery. In these circumstances, a crisis is not always a temporary interruption to normal work; it may become the environment in which teaching must continue.

This can require constant prioritisation, contingency planning, and adaptation. Educators may need to reorganise lessons at short notice, prepare alternative communication or delivery routes, respond to distressed students, and repeatedly reconstruct routines after disruption. At the same time, prolonged stress may affect concentration, memory, patience, decision-making, and the ability to recover between demands.

Prolonged stress, overload, and feelings of being overwhelmed or helpless should not be framed as personal weakness or a failure of resilience. These experiences may arise when high or unpredictable demands continue while resources such as time, autonomy, staffing, recovery opportunities, clear procedures, collegial support, and institutional protection are insufficient. Burnout may be one possible outcome of these sustained conditions, but it is not the only one. Individual coping strategies can help, but they cannot compensate indefinitely for unsafe or unsustainable working conditions.

1.1 Educator Wellbeing Check-In

Educator wellbeing is not a luxury, but an institutional responsibility. Notably, it is part of sustainable teaching quality, ethical decision-making, student support, and institutional resilience. Use this check-in to pause, notice patterns and choose a realistic boundary, support action or recovery step. It is voluntary, non-clinical and must never be used for staff performance evaluation. This check-in is developed for this toolkit.

WHEN THIS CHECK-IN MAY BE USEFUL:

- at the end of a difficult teaching week;
- after supporting a distressed student;
- before or after particularly demanding activities, and during prolonged periods of teaching under crisis conditions;
- when work or student concerns continue to occupy personal time;
- during voluntary peer support, supervision, or professional development;
- when irritability, numbness, guilt, detachment, reduced motivation, or exhaustion are increasing.

IMPORTANT

Educators should not be required to disclose personal wellbeing information publicly.

My check-in

CHECK-IN ITEM	RESPONSE
Energy	Low / Medium / High
Emotional load	Low / Medium / High
Boundaries	Clear / Blurred / Overwhelmed
Support	Available / Limited / Absent
Recovery	Enough / Not enough / Missing
Today I need	Rest / clarity / peer support / institutional support / fewer demands / a clearer boundary / referral support / professional help / other
One next step	Today or this week, I will:

1.2 Burnout Early-Warning Checklist

This is not a tool for self-diagnosis. It was developed based on the crisis context for this toolkit, with the purpose of helping educators to identify patterns and raise concerns about their wellbeing.

Mark how often each statement has been present during the past two weeks:

0 = not at all;

1 = sometimes;

2 = often;

3 = almost always.

This is an educational reflection tool for noticing patterns. It is not a validated diagnostic scale and should not be used to calculate a diagnosis.

AREA	STATEMENT	RESPONSE 0	1	2	3
Emotional exhaustion	I feel emotionally drained by teaching or student support.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Physical fatigue	I feel physically tired even after resting.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recovery	I find it difficult to recover after work or difficult student interactions.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Boundaries	I feel pressure to be constantly available.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Guilt	I feel guilty when I cannot respond immediately or help more.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Over-responsibility	I feel responsible for solving problems beyond my role.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Irritability	I notice more impatience, anger, or resentment than usual.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Detachment	I feel emotionally numb or distant from students or colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Effectiveness	I feel that whatever I do is not enough.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Concentration	I struggle to focus on teaching, planning, or communication.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sleep/rest	Work-related stress affects sleep or the ability to disconnect.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Support	I do not have a safe professional space to debrief difficult situations.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Meaning	It is becoming harder to feel purpose or meaning in teaching.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Do not treat the total as a diagnostic score. Instead, look for patterns. Several responses in the "often" or "almost always" range, particularly when they relate to exhaustion, inability to disconnect, sleep, concentration or reduced capacity to work, suggest that it may be useful to reduce non-essential demands where possible and seek additional support.

If these difficulties are persistent, worsening or affecting your health or ability to function safely at work, consider contacting appropriate institutional, occupational-health or professional support. Where excessive workload or unsafe working conditions are contributing to the problem, these should also be addressed institutionally rather than treated solely as an individual self-care issue.

1.3 Early Warning Signs and Level-of-Concern Guide

Possible signs that your current level of demand may be becoming difficult to sustain include:

- feeling emotionally exhausted by teaching or student support;
- working in permanent emergency mode;
- feeling guilty when messages are not answered immediately;
- becoming irritable, detached, numb, or cynical;
- losing sleep because of work or student-related concerns;
- feeling that no amount of support is enough;
- checking platforms repeatedly during personal time;
- resenting students, colleagues, or leadership more than usual;
- avoiding interactions because they feel emotionally overwhelming;
- neglecting health, relationships, rest, or other responsibilities.

These signs are not a diagnostic checklist. They are prompts for early action. If they are persistent, worsening or affecting health and functioning, seek appropriate professional support.

INTERPRETING PATTERNS WITHOUT DIAGNOSING

ZONE	POSSIBLE PATTERN	SUGGESTED ACTION
GREEN – manageable strain	Temporary tiredness; some recovery; access to support; continued sense of meaning and effectiveness.	Maintain boundaries and recovery routines; continue monitoring; keep peer connections active.
YELLOW – rising risk	Several warning signs occur often; recovery is difficult; boundaries are blurred; guilt, irritability, numbness, or reduced effectiveness are increasing.	Reduce, postpone, delegate, or simplify non-essential work; clarify boundaries; seek consultation or supervision; request leadership or procedural support; choose one recovery action.

ZONE	POSSIBLE PATTERN	SUGGESTED ACTION
RED – urgent support needed	Severe or persistent distress; inability to function or teach safely; inability to sleep or recover; unsafe coping; hopelessness; immediate safety concern.	Seek occupational, medical, psychological, or urgent support. Inform appropriate leadership if teaching capacity is affected. Do not manage severe distress alone.

SAFETY NOTE FOR EDUCATORS

If you feel at immediate risk, unable to keep yourself safe or unable to function safely, use local emergency or professional support immediately. This toolkit is not sufficient for an urgent situation.

1.4 Validated Burnout Questionnaire

IMPORTANT SAFETY AND RESPONSIBLE-USE NOTE

The **Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI)** is a self-report questionnaire for reflection, occupational-health work or research. It does not diagnose burnout, depression, anxiety, or any other health condition; it does not replace therapy, medical care, psychological assessment, or an institution's duty of care. Only appropriately qualified health professionals can assess and diagnose health conditions in accordance with the rules of the relevant country.

Other validated tools and professional assessment methods also exist. Anyone experiencing persistent or worsening exhaustion, marked impairment, inability to function safely, or concern about personal safety should contact an appropriate medical, psychological, occupational-health, or emergency service. Institutions remain responsible for providing reasonable workload management, clear procedures, referral routes, supervision, staff support, and safe working conditions.

1.4.1 OLDENBURG BURNOUT INVENTORY (OLBI)

The OLBI is intended to identify patterns of **exhaustion and disengagement**, not to provide a clinical diagnosis. Rather than using a single score as a pass/fail threshold, pay attention to whether you are consistently endorsing statements indicating high exhaustion or increasing detachment from your work.

Persistent patterns across several items are a reason to pause and consider what needs to change: workload, recovery time, boundaries, collegial support, supervision, organisational arrangements or access to professional support. When difficulties are substantial or continue despite reasonable adjustments, contact the relevant institutional, occupational-health or professional service.

Rate each statement from 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree. The OLBI contains eight exhaustion and eight disengagement items, with both positively and negatively phrased statements. Items marked [R] require reverse scoring when calculating dimension averages.

DIMENSION	ITEM	RESPONSE 1	2	3	4
Disengagement	I always find new and interesting aspects in my work. [R]	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exhaustion	There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Disengagement	It happens more and more often that I talk about my work in a negative way.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exhaustion	After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exhaustion	I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well. [R]	☐	☐	☐	☐
Disengagement	Lately, I tend to think less at work and do my job almost mechanically.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Disengagement	I find my work to be a positive challenge. [R]	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exhaustion	During my work, I often feel emotionally drained.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Disengagement	Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exhaustion	After working, I have enough energy for my leisure activities. [R]	☐	☐	☐	☐
Disengagement	Sometimes I feel sickened by my work tasks.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exhaustion	After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Disengagement	This is the only type of work that I can imagine myself doing. [R]	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exhaustion	Usually, I can manage the amount of my work well. [R]	☐	☐	☐	☐
Disengagement	I feel more and more engaged in my work. [R]	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exhaustion	When I work, I usually feel energised. [R]	☐	☐	☐	☐

OLBI scoring note: reverse the positively phrased items, then calculate separate averages for exhaustion and disengagement. Higher averages indicate stronger self-reported exhaustion or disengagement. The OLBI is a dimensional measure, not a stand-alone diagnostic test. Do not infer a health diagnosis or employment fitness decision from a score.

1.5 Stress, Overload, and Burnout Risk

STATE	TYPICAL PATTERN	WHAT MAY HELP
Acute stress	Short-term pressure linked to a specific event; recovery is possible when the event passes.	Rest, clear priorities, temporary adjustment, and practical support.
Prolonged overload	Demands remain high; recovery is incomplete; irritability, sleep difficulty, or reduced concentration may appear.	Reduce or redistribute demands, strengthen boundaries, seek peer and leadership support.
Possible burnout risk	Persistent exhaustion, detachment or cynicism, reduced sense of effectiveness, and inability to recover.	Professional support, workload action, and institutional response—not only personal coping.

1.6 Review Demands and Resources

A useful wellbeing response does not begin with "How can I cope better?" alone. It also asks "Which demands can be changed?" and "Which resources are missing?"

CURRENT DEMANDS	AVAILABLE RESOURCES	GAP OR ACTION (fill in yourself)
Workload and deadlines: too many tasks or students, repeated schedule changes, grading load.	Clear priorities, reduced or postponed tasks, shared workload, realistic timelines.	
Student-support demands: repeated disclosures, fear for student safety, guilt, or conflict.	Referral pathways, supervision, peer consultation, role clarity, and shared responsibility.	
Communication channels and availability: multiple platforms, pressure to reply immediately.	One official channel, published response times, notification boundaries, and backup procedures.	
Digital or infrastructure problems: unstable internet, electricity, or platform access.	Offline/asynchronous options, technical support, low-bandwidth materials, and realistic contingency plans.	
Role ambiguity and unclear procedures.	Written protocols, named consultation contacts, decision authority, and documentation guidance.	

CURRENT DEMANDS	AVAILABLE RESOURCES	GAP OR ACTION (fill in yourself)
Crisis exposure and difficult news.	Recovery time, leadership communication, reduced exposure before teaching, and professional support.	
Personal health, caregiving, financial stress, or isolation.	Health care, leave, or workload adjustment, family/community support, rest, and social connection.	
Meaning and professional efficacy.	Feedback, achievable priorities, collegial connection, and recognition of useful small actions.	

1.7 A Sustainable Response Has Three Levels

LEVEL	EXAMPLES
Personal	Protect response times, take recovery breaks, simplify non-essential tasks, notice early warning signs, seek health or psychological support when needed.
Peer or team	Consult a colleague, use structured peer reflection, share information about procedures, and agree on consistent boundaries.
Institutional	Adjust workload, clarify policy, create referral pathways, protect time off, provide supervision or staff support, improve leadership communication.

Individual actions matter, but they cannot compensate for an impossible workload, permanent availability, unclear procedures, or absent support systems. The institution is responsible for creating conditions that protect educator wellbeing, including manageable workload expectations, role clarity, safe staffing, access to occupational-health and psychosocial support, confidential routes for seeking help, supervision or consultation after difficult situations, and procedures that do not leave individual educators carrying complex risks alone. **The Institutional Toolkit** in this series addresses these organisational responsibilities in more detail.

KEY MESSAGE

Burnout prevention is not asking educators to become more resilient while leaving unsustainable conditions unchanged. Notice what is happening, share responsibility, and address the system as well as the individual.

1.8 Recovery Planning

Choose one action at each level. Keep the plan realistic and specific.

AREA	MY ACTION
One demand I can reduce, postpone, delegate, or simplify	
One boundary I need to protect this week	
One recovery action that is genuinely restorative for me	
One colleague or supervisor I can consult	
One institutional support or change I need	
One sign that would tell me to seek professional help	

Brief recovery and reset options

- Use a short pause before responding to an intense message: stop, step back, observe, and proceed deliberately.
- Create a transition ritual after teaching: close platforms, note tomorrow's priority, move physically, and signal that the workday is ending.
- Use one official communication channel and switch off non-essential notifications outside stated hours.
- Schedule a screen-free break and protect at least one period without course messages.
- Reduce exposure to distressing news immediately before teaching where possible.
- Use structured reflection and consultation rather than carrying complex student concerns alone.
- Replace "I must solve everything" with "I can do what is within my role and refer the rest."
- Seek occupational, medical, psychological, or other professional support when warning signs persist, worsen, or affect functioning.

2. Peer Consultation and Collegial Support

Difficult student-support situations should not always be carried or interpreted by one educator alone. Brief, structured peer consultation can help educators clarify their role, check professional judgement, identify the appropriate referral or escalation route, and recognise when a concern requires programme-level or institutional action.

Peer consultation must remain purposeful, boundaried, and privacy-conscious. It is not therapy, psychological debriefing, informal case discussion, or a substitute for safeguarding, supervision, occupational health, mental health care, or emergency procedures.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCES

For institutional guidance on consultation, decision authority, documentation, referral, and escalation, see the Institutional Toolkit sections **Governance, Roles, and Decision Authority** and **Referral, Escalation, and Service Continuity**. For optional personal stabilisation after a difficult interaction, see the Psychological Skills Library.

2.1 Peer Consultation After a Difficult Situation

Peer consultation can reduce isolation and support professional judgement. It should not become therapy, gossip, or detailed retelling of a student's private experience. Use only the information necessary to understand the professional issue and decide the next step.

PEER CONSULTATION IS	PEER CONSULTATION IS NOT
A structured professional conversation about role, decisions, procedures, and next steps.	Therapy, trauma processing, or psychological debriefing.
A way to share responsibility and seek professional judgement.	Gossip, informal case discussion, or unnecessary sharing of student details.
A route for identifying referral, documentation, escalation, and institutional follow-up.	A substitute for emergency, safeguarding, occupational-health, or mental-health support.
A check on what support and boundaries the educator needs.	A reason to delay urgent action while waiting to consult a colleague.

Brief peer consultation can be particularly useful when:

- a student discloses serious distress or a complex personal situation;
- the educator feels responsible for something beyond the course or continues carrying the concern after work;
- a student has disappeared and the educator is unsure what follow-up is appropriate;
- the level of concern, referral route, confidentiality limit, or escalation requirement is unclear;
- repeated flexibility requests require programme-level rather than individual decisions;
- several students are affected by the same crisis, loss, displacement, or infrastructure disruption;
- a difficult interaction reveals unclear procedures, workload pressure, or a gap in institutional support.

While doing peer consultation, make sure to respect privacy and some ground rules:

- Share only information needed for professional decision-making.
- Avoid unnecessary identifying, personal, diagnostic, or traumatic details.
- Focus on observed facts, the educator role, procedure, responsibility, and next steps.
- Follow institutional confidentiality, documentation, safeguarding, and data-protection rules.
- Do not promise secrecy where safety or safeguarding procedures apply.
- Act immediately when there is an urgent concern; consultation must not delay emergency action.
- Use occupational, medical, psychological, or other professional support when peer consultation is not enough.

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARY

Peer consultation supports shared professional judgement. It does not transfer clinical responsibility to colleagues or make teaching staff responsible for monitoring student safety.

2.2 Quick Tool: Brief Peer Consultation Form

PROMPT	NOTES
What happened? Use a brief factual description.	
What was difficult?	
What is within the educator role?	
What is outside the educator role?	
What is the next step for the student?	
What is the next step for the educator?	
Does the institution need to act?	
What support does the educator need now?	

PRIVACY RULE

Do not include unnecessary identifying or traumatic details. Use the institution's authorised consultation and documentation routes.

2.3 When Peer Support Is Not Enough

Seek professional or institutional support when distress is persistent, sleep or health is significantly affected, the educator cannot disconnect from a student situation, work functioning deteriorates, there is fear about making a serious mistake, or the organisational conditions are unsafe or unsustainable. Peer consultation is useful, but it should not replace occupational health, mental health care, formal supervision, safeguarding advice or management action.

2.4 Moral Distress and the Feeling of Never Doing Enough

Educators may know what students need but lack the authority, time, or resources to provide it. They may be asked to preserve standards, support distressed students and implement rapid changes that conflict with one another. This can create moral distress: the experience of being unable to act in the way one believes is right because of organisational constraints.

Moral distress is not solved by telling the educator to be more resilient. Useful responses include naming the conflict, documenting recurring barriers, consulting colleagues, clarifying decision authority and escalating systemic problems to leadership. The educator can identify what is genuinely within their control while refusing the idea that institutional gaps are a personal failure.

REFLECTION

Which difficulty am I treating as a personal inadequacy even though it is produced or intensified by an institutional constraint?

PART II

Supporting Students with Care, Clarity and Limits

3. Understanding Learning in Crisis-Affected Contexts

3.1 Crisis changes the conditions of learning

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCES

For student-facing preparation, see the Student Toolkit sections **Learn with Disrupted Access**, **When Things Feel Unsafe or Too Heavy** and **Know When Study Strategies Are Not Enough**. For short non-clinical grounding and self-regulation tools, see the Psychological Skills Library.

Crisis-affected learning is not ordinary learning with a few added inconveniences. A student may be trying to study while displaced, caring for relatives, living with unstable electricity, using one device for an entire household, navigating legal or financial uncertainty, grieving a loss, or monitoring threats to personal and family safety. You may also be experiencing the same. These conditions compete directly with the cognitive, emotional, and practical resources required for higher education.

Concentration, memory, planning, motivation, and communication may become inconsistent under prolonged stress. Students may need more time to read instructions, may forget information they previously understood, or may find it difficult to begin tasks, even when they care about the course. Some students become quiet and withdraw. Others communicate with urgency, anger, guilt, or repeated apologies. These changes may be temporary, intermittent, and shaped by practical barriers rather than by a mental health condition.

Student engagement is often described as behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. In crisis contexts, each dimension may be affected differently: attendance may decline, belonging may weaken, and the capacity to persist with complex tasks may fluctuate. Educators, therefore, need to look at patterns rather than a single missed deadline or one difficult message.

KEY MESSAGE

A change in academic behaviour is information, not proof. Notice the change, consider the context, and respond without jumping to conclusions.

3.2 Avoid deficit assumptions

When a student disappears from a course, submits incomplete work or requests repeated flexibility, it can be tempting to interpret the behaviour as a lack of effort. In disrupted environments, however, the same behaviour may reflect loss of connectivity, fear, exhaustion, caregiving, relocation, administrative barriers, or reduced capacity to organise learning. A trauma-informed educational approach asks educators to replace the question "What is wrong with this student?" with more careful questions such as "What may be making participation difficult?" and "What is still possible within the course?"

Avoiding deficit assumptions does not mean removing all expectations. It means creating a fair process for understanding barriers, clarifying essential requirements and identifying realistic next steps. Students benefit from compassion, but they also benefit from structure. Vague statements such as "do whatever you can" may increase uncertainty. A clear statement such as "the essential task is X; the format or deadline may be adjusted" is more supportive because it preserves direction.

3.3 Four types of concern

A useful first distinction is to consider whether the main concern appears academic, practical, wellbeing-related, or urgent. These categories overlap, but they help the educator decide what kind of response is appropriate.

PROMPT	EXAMPLES	PRIMARY EDUCATOR RESPONSE
Academic continuity	Missed deadline, confusion about instructions, temporary absence, difficulty catching up.	Clarify priorities, identify one manageable task, offer permitted flexibility.
Practical access	No device, unstable internet, power cuts, displacement, transport, childcare, documents.	Identify learning impact, offer realistic alternatives, link to practical or institutional support.
Wellbeing	Grief, anxiety, exhaustion, emotional overload, withdrawal, difficulty functioning.	Acknowledge, listen briefly, avoid forced disclosure, connect to appropriate support.
Urgent safety	Immediate danger, self-harm or suicide concern, threat to others, severe disorientation, inability to stay safe.	Do not manage alone; follow local emergency or safeguarding procedures immediately.

3.4 Trauma-informed educational principles

Trauma-informed practice does not require an educator to determine whether a student has experienced trauma. It is a way of organising communication, teaching and support so that the learning environment does not unnecessarily increase fear, shame, powerlessness or loss of control. Common principles include safety, trust, transparency, choice, collaboration, dignity, and attention to strengths.

Safety: Use predictable structures, explain changes, and avoid public pressure to disclose personal information.

Trust and transparency: Say what is possible, what is not possible, what will happen next, and when the student can expect a response.

Choice: Offer realistic options where possible, while avoiding unlimited or unstructured flexibility.

Collaboration: Work with the student to identify one academic next step rather than deciding everything for them.

Dignity: Avoid blame, humiliation, disbelief, minimisation, and intrusive questioning.

Strengths and agency: Recognise what the student has already managed and support them to take the next feasible action.

3.5 What psychologically safer teaching is – and is not

PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFER TEACHING CAN INCLUDE	IT DOES NOT REQUIRE
clear expectations and advance notice of changes	diagnosing trauma, depression, anxiety, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
options that preserve the main learning outcome	providing therapy or counselling
private, respectful outreach after a pattern of disengagement	asking students to recount traumatic experiences
brief validation and a practical next step	promising that everything will be fine
connection to institutional or professional support	taking sole responsibility for a student's safety
reasonable communication boundaries	being available at all hours

3.6 Inclusion, culture and unequal exposure to crisis

Students do not experience the same crisis in the same way. Exposure, safety, legal status, disability, language, financial resources, family responsibilities, discrimination, and access to technology shape what participation is possible. Educators should avoid assuming that a single national, cultural, or political identity predicts a student's experience. Students from the same region may have very different relationships to the crisis and different preferences about whether it is acknowledged in class.

Inclusive practice means making support available without requiring students to publicly identify themselves as affected. It also means checking whether communication, examples and course requirements create additional barriers for displaced students, international students, students with disabilities, carers, or students working across unstable time zones. When discussing crisis-related topics, provide advance notice, explain the academic purpose, and offer alternatives to personal disclosure. Do not ask students to represent a country, community, or traumatic experience for the benefit of the class.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICE QUESTION

Can a student access the support or academic option without publicly disclosing identity, trauma or political position?

OPTIONAL PAUSE AND CHECK

Think about one course you currently teach. Write brief answers to the following questions:

- Which student behaviours do I tend to interpret quickly as a lack of motivation?
- Which practical or crisis-related barriers may be invisible to me?
- Which parts of my course are already predictable and transparent?
- Where could one small increase in clarity, choice, or flexibility reduce unnecessary stress?
- What responsibilities are clearly mine, and what require institutional support?

REMEMBER

You are part of an institution that is supposed to provide support. In most situations, you will need to have institutional support to deal with crisis situations. You are not alone!

3.7 Psychological First Aid: Prepare – Look – Listen – Link

Prepare – Look – Listen – Link is the organising structure for the educator toolkit. It combines preparation, careful observation, a supportive first response, and connection to appropriate academic or specialist support in one practical pathway.

STEP	KEY QUESTION	EDUCATOR ACTION
Prepare	What should I know before a difficult situation occurs?	Know procedures, contacts, limits, flexibility options, documentation expectations, and educator support resources.
Look	What has changed, and are there any learning, wellbeing, practical, or safety concerns?	Notice patterns without diagnosing; distinguish green, yellow, and red concerns.
Listen	How can I respond with care without forcing disclosure or overstepping my role?	Acknowledge, invite limited sharing, clarify learning impact, offer one realistic next step, and state boundaries.
Link	What is the right academic, institutional, professional, or emergency connection?	Connect, refer, consult, document, follow up appropriately, or escalate when required.

REMEMBER

You do not need perfect words. The goal is a calm, humane, practical, and professionally appropriate first response.

4. Prepare: Know the System Before a Difficult Situation

Preparation is the first step because difficult student situations are harder to handle when the educator is simultaneously trying to locate contacts, interpret policy, and decide what they are allowed to do. Preparation reduces panic, prevents overpromising, and makes it easier to respond consistently. It also reveals institutional gaps: if educators cannot find a referral route or do not know what to do after hours, that is not only an individual knowledge problem. It is information about the support system.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCES

Preparation depends on clear institutional ownership. See the Institutional Toolkit sections **Governance, Roles, and Decision Authority**, and **Referral, Escalation, and Service Continuity**. For your own readiness under pressure, see the Personal Stabilisation Plan in the **Psychological Skills Library**.

PREPARE ASKS

What do I need to know before a student is distressed, disappears from the course, discloses serious difficulty or asks for support beyond my role?

4.1 Know the available support routes

Educators should know where students can obtain academic advice, counselling, or wellbeing support, accessibility support, practical assistance, health care, safeguarding assistance, and emergency help. In many institutions, these services are spread across different webpages and may use unfamiliar names. A list of services is useful only if the educator also understands when each service should be used and whether the student can self-refer. This can also be provided by the institution in times of crisis, but you can create your own.

Mental health and psychosocial support systems are most effective when roles, referral pathways, local actors, and service information are coordinated rather than left to individual helpers to reconstruct during a crisis.

4.2 Build your institutional support map

Use the table below as a self-guided preparation exercise. Complete it with local information. If a contact is difficult to find, mark it as a gap to raise with institutional leadership.

SITUATION	OFFICE, PERSON, OR SERVICE	CONTACT INFORMATION	WHEN TO USE
Academic advising or course planning			
Accessibility or disability support			
Counselling or psychological support			
Financial difficulty			
Housing, food, documents, transport, or practical needs			

SITUATION	OFFICE, PERSON, OR SERVICE	CONTACT INFORMATION	WHEN TO USE
International, displacement, or mobility barriers			
Violence, abuse, exploitation, or safeguarding concern			
Immediate danger or emergency			
Educator is unsure what to do			
Educator needs support after a difficult interaction			

4.3 Clarify procedures and authority

Knowing the name of a service is not enough. Educators also need to understand what they may offer independently and what requires approval. This is particularly important for extensions, alternative assessment formats, attendance requirements, temporary study plans, and interruptions of study.

- What academic flexibility may I approve directly?
- Which adjustments require the programme coordinator, examination board or accessibility office?
- What should I do if a student mentions self-harm, suicide, violence, or immediate danger?
- Can I contact a support service directly, or should the student self-refer?
- What information should be documented after a serious concern?
- Where should documentation be stored, and who may access it?
- What can I say about confidentiality, and what should I never promise?
- Who can I consult if I am unsure whether a concern is urgent?
- What is the emergency procedure in this institution and in the student's local jurisdiction?
- What support is available to educators after a distressing or high-stakes interaction?

4.4 Set communication boundaries

Crisis-affected teaching can expand communication across e-mail, learning platforms, messaging applications and informal channels. Without clear boundaries, both students and educators may assume permanent availability. Preparation means deciding which channels will be used, normal response times, what students should do in urgent situations, and when communication will be redirected to a more appropriate service.

A boundary is most effective when it is communicated before a problem occurs. Include a short statement in the syllabus or learning platform. For example:

"I respond to course-related messages within two working days. This inbox is not monitored as an emergency service. If you are unsafe or need urgent support, contact [local service]."

4.5 Prepare for disruption and low connectivity

Digital teaching depends on infrastructure that may be unstable. Educators can reduce the academic impact of disruption by identifying in advance which materials are essential, which can be downloaded, what asynchronous options exist, how students can communicate through low-bandwidth channels, and whether an alternative submission format is possible. Preparation should not require a separate version of every activity. It means knowing the minimum path through the course when ordinary participation becomes impossible.

- Provide concise written instructions that can be downloaded or read on a phone.
- Identify the essential learning outcome before selecting an alternative format.
- Use one primary communication channel and one backup channel.
- Avoid making synchronous participation the only way to access critical information.
- Make recordings, transcripts, slides, or summaries available when feasible.
- State what students should prioritise after a period of disconnection.

If you would like to know more about low connectivity scenarios, please check the **Repository of Case Studies** and discuss them with people at your institution.

4.6 Prepare the course, not only the response

Preparation also occurs at the course design level. A course that has clear weekly priorities, downloadable materials, visible deadlines, and a defined process for requesting support is easier to navigate during disruption. This does not mean anticipating every possible emergency. It means reducing avoidable complexity and ensuring that the student can identify the essential route through the course.

- State the essential learning outcome for each major task.
- Separate required work from optional enrichment.
- Explain how students should return after an absence.
- Publish one short guide to requesting flexibility.
- Identify which materials remain accessible offline or on a mobile device.
- Use consistent labels and locations for announcements, tasks, and support contacts.
- Avoid introducing multiple new platforms during an already unstable period. Use one clear official communication channel and explain response times.
- Include a short wellbeing and boundaries statement in the syllabus or LMS.
- Identify essential learning outcomes and realistic academic options before crisis disruption intensifies.
- Prepare a whole-class message template and a private check-in message.
- Keep support and emergency contacts visible and current.
- Agree within the teaching and institutional team on who handles complex, repeated, or urgent concerns.

4.7 Quick Tool: My Prepare Card

Complete this card and keep it where you can find it quickly.

ITEM	MY LOCAL INFORMATION
Student support contact	
Counselling or wellbeing contact	
Safeguarding contact	
Emergency and after-hours contact	
Programme coordinator or academic adviser	
Academic flexibility I may offer directly	
Flexibility requiring approval	
Documentation route and authorised system	
Educator support or occupational-health contact	
My official channel and usual response time	
One boundary phrase I can use	
One thing I should never promise	

4.8 Prepare a response plan for non-response

Sometimes the educator reaches out and receives no reply. Preparation should include a proportionate plan for what happens next. The plan should distinguish ordinary non-response from a pattern that creates a wellbeing or safety concern. It should also avoid turning the educator into an investigator.

For an ordinary academic concern, one clear follow-up and the normal course process may be sufficient. For example: "I am following up on my previous message. Please reply by [date] or contact [academic support route]. If I do not hear from you, the usual course procedure will apply." If the student has previously disclosed serious distress, has disappeared after an alarming message, or there are other reasons to be concerned about safety, the educator should consult the designated institutional service rather than repeatedly contacting the student alone.

SITUATION	PREPARED ACTION
No reply to a routine academic message	Send one concise follow-up; state the deadline and normal course process.
Repeated disengagement plus practical or wellbeing concern	Consult academic or student support; use the agreed referral route.
No reply after a message suggesting possible danger	Use the local safeguarding or emergency consultation procedure; do not manage alone.
The student has formally withdrawn or transferred	Follow the institutional record and avoid unnecessary personal outreach.

5. Look: Notice Changes Without Diagnosing

Looking means paying attention to changes in participation, communication, academic functioning, practical access, and safety. It is not a clinical assessment. The educator is not trying to determine a diagnosis or the complete cause of the student's difficulty. The aim is to notice enough to decide whether a check-in, academic adjustment, referral, or urgent escalation may be needed.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCES

For student self-reflection on changes in access, functioning, and support needs, see the Student Toolkit sections **Learning During Crisis Is Different** and Know **When Study Strategies Are Not Enough**. For optional non-diagnostic self-check tools, see the **Psychological Skills Library**.

5.1 Look for change and pattern

One isolated event may have many explanations. A pattern deserves more attention. A student who has always submitted work irregularly may need different support than a student whose participation suddenly changes after previously stable engagement. Consider what changed, when it changed, whether the change is repeated, and how strongly it affects learning.

- sudden absence or withdrawal from classes or online platforms;
- repeated missed deadlines after previously stable participation;
- sharp decline in the coherence, completeness, or quality of work;
- messages showing hopelessness, panic, intense guilt, anger, numbness, or exhaustion;
- difficulty following instructions that were previously manageable;
- repeated references to displacement, unsafe conditions, lack of food, medication, electricity, or internet;
- visible distress, confusion, or extreme fatigue during an interaction;
- statements such as "I cannot continue", "I cannot cope", or "I do not know what to do".

5.2 Look at context, not only behaviour

The same academic behaviour can have different meanings. A missed synchronous session may reflect avoidance, but it may also reflect an air-raid warning, caregiving, time-zone displacement, lack of privacy, or an electricity cut. A short or irritable message may reflect conflict with the educator, but it may also be written under severe stress. Context does not excuse harmful behaviour, yet it helps the educator choose a response that is proportionate and useful.

Use the information the student has already provided. Do not investigate. The educator can ask about the impact on learning and what is currently possible without asking for traumatic or private details. Asking personal and private information can trigger more traumatic responses.

5.3 Ask four orienting questions about the student you notice is showing signs of disengagement

1. What has changed in participation, communication, or academic functioning?
2. Could practical or crisis-related barriers be affecting learning?
3. Is there a wellbeing concern that goes beyond coursework?
4. Is there any indication of immediate danger or inability to remain safe?

5.4 Use a simple level-of-concern guide

The green–yellow–red guide is a visual aid, not a second framework. It supports the central Prepare – Look – Listen – Link sequence.

LEVEL	TYPICAL SITUATION	EDUCATOR RESPONSE
GREEN — academic continuity	A deadline, access problem, brief absence, or course confusion with no clear wellbeing or safety concern.	Clarify the task, allow for permitted flexibility, identify one next step, and monitor.
YELLOW — wellbeing or complex barrier	Repeated disruption, grief, emotional overload, serious practical hardship, distress affecting functioning, or uncertainty about risk.	Respond with care, avoid forced disclosure, link to support, and consult if unsure.
RED — urgent safety or serious safeguarding	Self-harm or suicide concern, threat to others, immediate danger, severe disorientation, inability to remain safe.	Do not manage alone. Follow local emergency or safeguarding procedures immediately.

5.5 What not to infer

Educators should avoid converting signs into diagnoses. Difficulty concentrating does not prove trauma. Withdrawal does not prove depression. An emotional message does not by itself establish immediate risk. Similarly, calm communication does not prove that a student is safe. The educator's task is not to reach clinical certainty. It is to recognise when a situation requires a proportionate academic response, support, connection, or escalation in accordance with policy.

LOOK DOES NOT MEAN "LABEL"

Use observations that can be described: "The student has missed three deadlines and stopped replying," rather than interpretations such as "The student is unstable" or "The student does not care."

OBSERVATION NOTE

OBSERVATION	NOTES
What has changed?	
How long has it been happening?	
What learning impact is visible?	
What contextual barrier may be relevant?	
Is there a wellbeing concern?	
Is there any possible urgent safety concern?	
Who can I consult?	

5.6 Look at group-level patterns

Not every concern should be treated as an individual student problem. If many students begin to miss the same task, misunderstand the same instruction, or report the same access barrier, the course design or institutional environment may be part of the problem. Group-level patterns can indicate an unclear announcement, an unrealistic deadline, a platform failure, a collective crisis event, or a policy that is difficult to navigate.

Before sending multiple individual warning messages, check whether the pattern is widespread. A whole-class clarification, revised instruction, or programme-level response may be more appropriate. This reduces duplicated work and avoids framing a structural problem as repeated individual failure.

- Are several students affected at the same time?
- Did the pattern begin after a course change, platform failure, or crisis event?
- Is the task or instruction clear in a low-bandwidth format?
- Does the response require a course-level or institutional adjustment rather than individual exceptions?

6. Listen: Respond with Care, Clarity, and Limits

Listening in the educator role is usually brief and purposeful. It may occur in an email, a short conversation after class, a scheduled online check-in, or a message on the learning platform. The goal is not to gather the full story. The goal is to communicate respect, understand the learning impact, identify immediate needs, and decide what should happen next.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCES

For brief grounding, emotion-regulation, and communication tools that students or educators may use privately, see the **Psychological Skills Library**. For student guidance on contacting an educator without disclosing unnecessary personal details, see the Student Toolkit section **Communicate and Ask for Academic Support**.

6.1 Reach out without blame

A supportive opening describes what the educator has noticed and leaves room for the student to respond. It does not accuse, diagnose or demand personal information. Compare "You have failed to engage with the course" with "I noticed that you have not been able to participate recently, and I wanted to check in." The second formulation is clearer and less likely to produce shame or defensiveness.

The educator may also state explicitly that the student does not need to share private details. This reduces the risk that students feel they must disclose trauma to justify academic support.

6.2 Use care, clarity, and limits

PRINCIPLE	MEANING	EXAMPLE
Care	Acknowledge the difficulty and communicate respect.	"I am sorry that things are so difficult right now."
Clarity	Name the academic issue and the next realistic step.	"For the course, let us focus on one manageable task."
Limits	Explain the educator's role and connect wider needs to appropriate support.	"My role is to support your learning, and I can help you identify the right service."

6.3 Invite limited sharing

Students may need to explain how circumstances affect learning, but they do not need to provide a detailed account of violence, loss, abuse, or other traumatic events. Questions should focus on current impact and practical needs.

Helpful questions include:

- "What is making participation most difficult at the moment?"
- "What is the main impact on your coursework?"
- "Which task feels most urgent or most difficult?"
- "What kind of academic option would be realistic this week?"
- "Do you already know which support service you can contact?"

6.4 Validate without minimising or promising

Validation means recognising that the student's difficulty makes sense in context. It does not mean agreeing with every interpretation, removing all course requirements, or promising a particular outcome. A short statement such as "Given the circumstances, it makes sense that concentration is difficult" can reduce shame. Statements such as "Everything will be fine" or "You need to stay positive" may feel dismissive because the educator cannot know what will happen.

6.5 Keep the response manageable

A distressed student may have limited capacity to process a long message. Use short paragraphs, direct language, and one or two clear options. Avoid sending a long list of services without explaining which one is relevant. When possible, separate the next academic step from the broader support recommendation.

A USEFUL RESPONSE SEQUENCE

1. Acknowledge.
2. Clarify that detailed disclosure is not required.
3. Identify one academic next step.
4. Link to appropriate support (look into the Link section).
5. State what will happen next.

6.6 Useful phrases

SITUATION	POSSIBLE WORDING
Checking in	"I noticed that you have not been able to participate recently, and I wanted to check in."
Reducing disclosure pressure	"You do not need to share details you do not want to discuss."
Acknowledging difficulty	"Given the situation, it makes sense that studying may be difficult."
Focusing on the course response	"Let us identify one manageable academic next step."

SITUATION	POSSIBLE WORDING
Clarifying role	"My role is to support your learning, and I can also help connect you with the right service."
Encouraging wider support	"This sounds like something you should not have to manage alone."
Clarifying confidentiality	"I will treat this with care, but I cannot promise absolute confidentiality if there is serious concern about safety."

6.7 Phrases to avoid

- "Tell me exactly what happened."
- "Why did you not tell me earlier?"
- "Are you traumatised?"
- "Can you prove what happened?"
- "Why can everyone else manage?"
- "Everything will be fine."
- "I know exactly how you feel."
- "You can contact me anytime, day or night."
- "I will solve this for you."
- "You are overreacting."
- "This is not serious."
- "This is not my problem."

BEFORE YOU SEND: MESSAGE CHECK

Before sending a difficult message, ask:

- Does the message describe what I noticed without blame?
- Does it allow the student to keep personal details private?
- Does it identify a clear academic next step?
- Does it avoid promises I cannot keep?
- Does it direct the student to the right support if the issue exceeds coursework?
- Does it protect appropriate boundaries around availability and responsibility?

7. Link: Connect Students to Academic and Wider Support

Linking means helping the student move from difficulty to an appropriate next step. In higher education, this usually has two dimensions: academic linking and support linking. Academic linking keeps learning possible. Support linking connects needs that exceed the course to the people, services, or procedures designed to address them.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCES

For institutional referral responsibilities, service continuity, and escalation routes, see the **Institutional Toolkit** sections **Referral, Escalation, and Service Continuity**. For students mapping trusted people and services, see the Student Toolkit section **Quick Tool 7: My Support Network Map**.

7.1 Academic linking

Academic linking should reduce ambiguity and identify what matters most. The aim is not to eliminate the course requirement. It is to create a realistic path toward the learning outcome under disrupted conditions.

When the main concern is academic continuity, a helpful response may include:

- clarify the essential task or learning outcome;
- identify one manageable next step;
- offer an adjusted deadline when policy allows;
- allow an alternative format that still demonstrates the learning outcome;
- provide a recording, transcript, slides, or concise summary;
- reduce or postpone non-essential work;
- create a short temporary study plan;
- connect the student with a tutor, academic adviser, or programme coordinator.

Academic linking should be specific. “Catch up when you can” leaves the student to reconstruct the whole course. “Read the latest announcement and submit Part A by Friday; we will review the remaining tasks afterwards” provides a usable path.

7.2 Support linking

Students affected by crises may need assistance that no course can provide: counselling, medical care, disability support, financial advice, housing support, legal information, safeguarding, emergency assistance, or community-based services. The educator can share relevant contact information and explain why the service may help. Referral is not abandonment. It is a form of responsible connection.

Where possible, avoid simply giving the student a generic webpage. Name the service, state what it does, and explain how to make contact. If the system is complex, help the student identify the first point of entry without taking over the whole process.

7.3 When referral is needed

Linking the student to additional support may be appropriate when:

- distress extends beyond coursework or persists despite academic adjustments;
- the student mentions violence, grief, displacement, severe anxiety, trauma-related difficulty, or inability to cope;
- basic needs such as food, housing, medication, finances, or safety are affected;
- the student requires medical, psychological, legal, or specialised support;
- the educator feels unsure, overwhelmed, or outside their professional role;
- the concern requires coordination with student services, programme leadership, or safeguarding staff.

7.4 Urgent escalation

Immediate action may be required when there is a concern about self-harm or suicide, threat of harm to others, immediate physical danger, severe disorientation, inability to care for oneself safely, abuse, exploitation, or another serious safeguarding issue. The educator should not conduct a clinical risk assessment or manage the situation alone. Follow the institution's emergency or safeguarding procedure and contact the designated service.

DO NOT WAIT FOR PERFECT CERTAINTY

If the situation may involve immediate danger, seek guidance and use the local escalation route. The educator's role is to activate the system, not to become the system.

7.5 Link with consent when possible

For non-urgent situations, explain the reason for referral and involve the student in deciding the next step. Ask whether they are willing to contact the service and whether they need help identifying the correct route. In urgent or safeguarding situations, consent and confidentiality may have limits defined by local policy and law. Be transparent about these limits rather than promising secrecy.

7.6 Follow up without taking over

A brief follow-up can communicate continuity: "Were you able to contact the service?" or "Shall we confirm the next course step?" Follow-up should not become ongoing counselling or surveillance. The educator remains responsible for the academic relationship, while the appropriate service remains responsible for specialised support.

7.7 Documentation and privacy

Document only what institutional policy requires. Use factual language, record relevant actions, and avoid speculative labels. Do not place sensitive information in informal personal notes, unsecured devices, or group chats. Privacy, safeguarding, and data-protection requirements differ across institutions and countries; the final local version of this toolkit must be reviewed accordingly.

REFERRAL PHRASE BANK

PURPOSE	POSSIBLE WORDING
General referral	"What you are describing deserves support beyond what I can provide in the teaching role. I encourage you to contact [service]."
Academic plus wider support	"We can agree on one course step, and I also recommend contacting [service] for the wider situation."
When the student is reluctant	"You remain in control of what you share. The service may still be able to help with the impact you are experiencing."

PURPOSE	POSSIBLE WORDING
When the educator is unsure	"I want to respond appropriately, so I am going to consult [designated contact] about the correct next step."
Urgent concern	"I am concerned about your immediate safety. I cannot manage this alone, so I need to contact [emergency/safeguarding service]."

7.8 When support services are unavailable or inaccessible

In some crisis-affected settings, the ideal service may not exist, may be overloaded, may not operate in the student's language, or may be inaccessible because the student is in another country. The absence of a service does not expand the educator's professional role. It means the institution needs a clearer contingency plan and a broader map of possible support.

The educator can still help the student identify the most appropriate available route: a general student support office, a primary health-care service, a local community organisation, a national helpline, an accessibility service, an international office or a trusted emergency contact. Avoid presenting an unverified online resource as equivalent to professional care. Where no suitable route is known, consult programme or institutional leadership and document the gap as a service problem requiring action.

IMPORTANT BOUNDARY

A missing referral option is an institutional gap, not permission for an educator to provide care outside their role and competence.

Institutions should maintain an updated and accessible support directory that distinguishes local, national and remote services, languages available, opening hours and relevant eligibility restrictions. Where this information is incomplete or unavailable, educators should raise this as an institutional preparedness gap rather than being expected to reconstruct referral pathways individually.

8. Decision-Making with Look – Listen – Link

LOOK - LISTEN - LINK

A decision-support flowchart for higher education educators in crisis-affected contexts.

START
You notice a change in a student's engagement, communication, or academic functioning.

Examples:
- absence or withdrawal
- missed assignments
- emotional or distressed messages
- confusion or difficulty concentrating
- visible exhaustion or distress
- references to unsafe or unstable living conditions

1. LOOK
What am I noticing?

Ask yourself:
- Has the student's behavior changed?
- Is this new or repeated?
- Could crisis-related barriers be affecting learning?
- Do I have reason to be concerned about wellbeing or safety?

2. LISTEN
What type of issue does this seem to be?

A. MAINLY A LEARNING CONTINUITY ISSUE?
Examples:
- internet/electricity problems
- displacement affecting deadlines
- difficulty accessing materials
- temporary disconnection from the course

IF YES

RESPOND: Academic support

You can:
- clarify essential tasks
- offer flexibility where possible
- provide an alternative format
- suggest one manageable next step
- follow up briefly

Outcome:
monitor and check if the student re-engages

B. A WELLBEING CONCERN, BUT NO IMMEDIATE DANGER?
Examples:
- student feels overwhelmed
- anxiety, grief, exhaustion
- emotional withdrawal
- distress affecting study capacity

IF YES

RESPOND: Supportive and boundaried response

You can:
- acknowledge the difficulty
- respond calmly and respectfully
- avoid forcing disclosure
- offer one realistic academic option
- share support contacts
- encourage help-seeking

LINK (REFER)
Refer to student/institutional support when:
- distress goes beyond coursework
- the student mentions trauma, grief, violence, or inability to cope
- the student needs psychological, medical, social, legal, or financial support
- you feel the situation is beyond your role

Outcome:
support learning + connect to appropriate services.

C. POSSIBLE IMMEDIATE SAFETY RISK?
Examples:
- mention of self-harm or suicide
- immediate danger
- severe disorientation
- inability to care for self safely
- threat of harm to self or others

IF YES

LINK (ESCALATE) IMMEDIATELY

You should:
- follow institutional emergency procedures
- contact the appropriate student support / safeguarding / emergency services
- not manage the situation alone
- document according to policy

Outcome:
urgent support and escalation.

3. ROLE BOUNDARIES

Within the educator role:
- Notice changes
- Reach out with care
- Listen briefly
- Offer academic flexibility where possible
- Refer appropriately

Outside the educator role:
- Diagnose
- Provide therapy
- Investigate trauma
- Promise absolute confidentiality
- Take sole responsibility for safety

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCES

Use this flowchart together with the Institutional Toolkit referral and escalation map. Students can use the Student Toolkit sections **Know When Study Strategies Are Not Enough** and **When Things Feel Unsafe or Too Heavy** to prepare their side of the support pathway.

9. Trauma-Informed Communication and Flexible Teaching

Communication is part of the learning environment. During a crisis, unclear messages, sudden changes, public criticism, and unexplained rules can increase stress. Clear, respectful and predictable communication can restore some sense of direction even when the wider situation remains uncertain.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCES

For low-connectivity course design, continuity options, and institutional minimum standards, see the Institutional Toolkit sections **Sustainable Workload, Availability, and Academic Flexibility** and/or **Student Wellbeing, Accessibility, and Inclusive Participation**. See also the **Repository of Case Studies** for examples of mobile-first, asynchronous, and low-tech continuity approaches. Student-facing planning tools are available in the **Student Toolkit**.

9.1 Communication principles

Be clear: Use direct instructions, identify priorities, and state the next action.

Be predictable: Explain when the student can expect a response and what will happen next.

Be transparent: State what can be adjusted, what cannot be adjusted, and who makes the decision.

Reduce disclosure pressure: Ask about learning impact rather than demanding personal details.

Offer realistic choice: Provide limited, meaningful options rather than vague or unlimited flexibility.

Protect dignity: Use private communication for individual concerns and avoid shaming language.

Keep messages manageable: Use short paragraphs and avoid overwhelming students with multiple tasks or contacts.

9.2 Communication template bank

The templates below are starting points. Adapt them to the course, institution and local support system.

BEGINNING-OF-COURSE STATEMENT

TEMPLATE

My aim is to maintain a clear academic structure while recognising that crisis-related circumstances may affect participation and access. You do not need to share personal or traumatic details in order to ask for academic support. Please use [channel] for course-related requests. I normally respond within [timeframe].

STUDENT HAS DISAPPEARED

TEMPLATE

I noticed that you have not been able to participate recently, and I wanted to check in. You do not need to share personal details. If current circumstances are affecting the course, we can identify one manageable next step. Support is also available through [service].

MISSED ASSIGNMENT

TEMPLATE

I noticed that the [assignment] was not submitted. Please send me a short update by [date] so that we can identify what is still possible and whether an adjustment is appropriate.

REQUEST FOR FLEXIBILITY

TEMPLATE

Thank you for letting me know. Let us look at what can be adjusted while still preserving the main learning outcome. One possible option is [option]. Please confirm whether this is realistic for you.

EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD

TEMPLATE

I am sorry that things feel so overwhelming. For the course, let us focus on one small next step: [task]. I also encourage you to contact [support service] if the wider situation feels too heavy to manage alone.

DISCLOSURE OF DISTRESS OR TRAUMA

TEMPLATE

Thank you for trusting me with this. You do not need to share more details. We can discuss the academic impact and possible adjustments. I also encourage you to contact [service], which is better placed to support the wider concern.

ANGRY OR ACCUSATORY MESSAGE

TEMPLATE

I can hear that you are very frustrated. I would like us to focus on the specific course issue and identify a realistic next step. I also ask that our communication remain respectful.

REPEATED APOLOGY OR GUILT

TEMPLATE

My focus is not on blame. Let us identify what is still possible. The next useful step is [task].

BOUNDARY-SETTING AVAILABILITY

TEMPLATE

I usually respond to course-related messages within [timeframe]. If you feel unsafe or need urgent support, contact [emergency/support contact] directly rather than waiting for my reply.

RETURNING AFTER DISRUPTION

TEMPLATE

I want to acknowledge that recent events may be affecting many of us. We will keep the session structured and manageable. The essential task this week is [task]. Please use [alternative] if live participation is not possible.

CONNECTIVITY DISRUPTION

TEMPLATE

Let us focus on what is feasible under your current conditions. You may complete [alternative format] or use [low-bandwidth option]. Please tell me which option is realistic.

REFERRAL ENCOURAGEMENT

TEMPLATE

My role is to support your learning, but this situation also deserves support from people trained to help with these concerns. I encourage you to contact [service].

WHOLE-CLASS MESSAGE DURING A CRISIS

TEMPLATE

Dear students, I recognise that the current situation may be affecting safety, access, concentration and participation in different ways. For now, please prioritise [essential task or information]. The available academic options are [options]. You do not need to disclose personal or traumatic details. Course updates will be posted through [official channel]. For support beyond the course, contact [service]. Best wishes, [Name]

REQUEST FOR CONFIDENTIALITY

TEMPLATE

Dear [Name], I will treat what you share with care and respect. I cannot promise absolute confidentiality if there is a serious concern about your or someone else's safety, because I may need to follow university procedures. You do not need to share personal details in order to ask for academic support. For the course, we can discuss [option]. For support beyond the course, contact [service]. Best wishes, [Name]

UNABLE TO ATTEND SYNCHRONOUS SESSIONS

TEMPLATE

Dear [Name], I understand that attending live sessions may not be possible under your current circumstances. The essential learning activity is [activity]. You can complete it through [recording, transcript, alternative task or asynchronous discussion] by [date]. Please let me know through [channel] if this option is not accessible. Best wishes, [Name]

GROUP-WORK DISRUPTION

TEMPLATE

Dear [Name/group], I understand that unstable participation is affecting the group task. Please focus on the core outcome: [outcome]. The available options are [redistribute roles, submit an individual component, reduce scope, or change communication mode]. Please agree on one workable plan and send it through [channel] by [date]. Best wishes, [Name]

TRAUMATIC PERSONAL MATERIAL IN AN ASSIGNMENT

TEMPLATE

Dear [Name], Thank you for your work. I have noticed that the assignment includes highly personal and distressing material. You are not required to disclose traumatic experiences in order to meet the learning outcome. You may revise the task using a fictional, public, or less personal example. If writing this material has caused distress, please consider contacting [support service]. Best wishes, [Name]

SUPPORTIVE FEEDBACK ON INCOMPLETE WORK

TEMPLATE

Dear [Name], Thank you for submitting what you were able to complete. The strongest part is [specific point]. To meet the essential learning outcome, the next step is [small, specific task]. You can complete it by [date] using [format]. Please use [channel] if you need clarification. Best wishes, [Name]

9.3 Flexible teaching without losing structure

Flexibility is not the absence of standards. It is a deliberate adjustment to timing, sequence, format, or participation so that the student still has a realistic opportunity to meet the learning outcome. The educator should begin with the learning outcome, not the original task format.

QUESTION	WHY IT MATTERS
What is the core learning outcome?	Prevents the original format from being treated as the only possible demonstration of learning.
What is essential and what is secondary?	Helps prioritise when time, energy, or access is limited.
What can I adjust within policy?	Keeps decisions fair and sustainable.
What requires approval?	Prevents informal arrangements that later create problems for the student or educator.
What is the minimum useful next step?	Supports re-engagement without asking the student to solve everything at once.
Is this adjustment becoming a repeated programme-level issue?	Signals the need for institutional rather than individual action.

9.4 Types of reasonable academic flexibility

Depending on institutional rules and the learning outcomes of the course, possible adjustments may include:

- extended or staged deadlines;
- alternative submission formats, such as audio, oral, or shorter written work, when they still demonstrate the outcome;
- asynchronous access to materials and participation;
- prioritisation of essential tasks and temporary reduction of non-essential workload;
- partial submission followed by completion;
- temporary learning plans or re-entry plans after absence;
- alternative individual work when group participation is not feasible;
- accessibility adjustments through the appropriate institutional process.

9.5 Fairness is not always identical treatment

Treating every student identically may reproduce unequal barriers. Fairness means applying transparent criteria, preserving learning outcomes, and using authorised options consistently. Flexibility should not depend on how much traumatic detail a student is willing to disclose or on whether the educator personally finds the explanation persuasive.

Where possible, use standard course-level options available to all students, such as a limited grace period, asynchronous alternatives, or a clear process for requesting adjustments. This reduces the burden on students to negotiate individually and reduces invisible workload for educators.

9.6 Re-engagement after absence

Students who have been absent may avoid returning because the course now feels too large, too confusing, or participation too shameful. The educator can reduce this barrier by identifying the latest essential information, the first required task and the next communication point. Avoid sending a long list of everything the student missed unless the list is prioritised.

A RE-ENTRY MESSAGE

"Start with the latest course announcement. The first essential task is [task]. Complete Part A by [date], and then contact me so that we can review the next step."

9.7 Assessment and feedback during disruption

Assessment can become a major source of uncertainty during a crisis because students may not know whether incomplete participation will permanently damage their progression. Educators should communicate which assessments are essential, what evidence of learning is required, what alternatives are authorised, and how extensions affect later deadlines. Feedback should identify the next useful action rather than focusing only on what is missing.

When work is incomplete but shows engagement, feedback can distinguish between the learning already demonstrated and the part still needed. For example: "You have explained the first concept

clearly. To meet the outcome, add one application example. Submit that section by [date]." This preserves academic standards while making the next step visible.

When giving feedback for activities and assessments during sensitive times and crisis:

- Avoid using traumatic personal experience as an implicit or explicit assessment requirement.
- Allow public cases, fictionalised examples, or general reflection when personal disclosure is not necessary.
- Do not penalise a student for using an authorised alternative format.
- Coordinate repeated adjustments with the programme so that deadlines do not accumulate invisibly.
- Explain how academic integrity expectations apply when access and collaboration conditions have changed.

9.8 Communicating with the whole class after a collective disruption

A collective event may affect many students at once: violence, disaster, sudden displacement, an institutional closure, a major infrastructure failure, or the death of a community member. A whole-class message can acknowledge the disruption without assuming that everyone is affected in the same way or inviting public disclosure.

The message should be brief, factual, and connected to course decisions. State what has changed, what remains the same, which task is essential, what flexibility is available and where support can be found. Avoid dramatic language, political assumptions, demands for emotional participation, or statements that the class should return to normal immediately.

WHOLE-CLASS TEMPLATE

I want to acknowledge that recent events may be affecting members of our class in different ways. For this week, the essential course task is [task]. [Deadline/attendance requirement] has been adjusted to [new arrangement]. You do not need to share personal details to request support. Course questions can be sent through [channel], and wider support is available through [service].

When teaching resumes, provide a predictable structure. Explain whether participation in discussion is optional, give advance notice if the course content itself may be distressing, and offer an academically appropriate alternative when personal or crisis-related disclosure is not necessary for the learning outcome.

10. Professional Boundaries, Confidentiality, and Escalation

Professional boundaries make support safer. They protect students from receiving help that is inappropriate or insufficient, and they protect educators from becoming the only person carrying a complex situation. Boundaries are not the opposite of care. They are the structure that allows care to remain clear, ethical, and sustainable.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCES

For institutional definitions of responsibility, documentation, confidentiality, safeguarding, and escalation, see the Institutional Toolkit sections **Governance, Roles, and Decision Authority** and **Referral, Escalation, and Service Continuity**. For optional private coping tools, see the **Psychological Skills Library**.

10.1 Within the educator role

Within their educational role, educators can:

- notice changes in participation, communication, and academic functioning;
- reach out with care and respect;
- listen briefly without forcing disclosure;
- clarify course expectations and essential tasks;
- offer reasonable academic flexibility where permitted;
- suggest one manageable next step;
- share support information and refer appropriately;
- follow up once when useful;
- consult programme leadership, student support, or safeguarding staff when unsure.

10.2 Outside the educator role

Educators are not expected to:

- diagnose mental health conditions;
- provide therapy, counselling, or trauma treatment;
- ask for detailed descriptions of traumatic events;
- promise absolute confidentiality;
- be available twenty-four hours a day;
- become students' primary emotional support or safety plan;
- take sole responsibility for urgent risks;
- provide medical, legal, housing, or financial advice unless this is an official role;
- make adjustments that contradict institutional policy;
- hold serious safety information without consulting the designated service.

10.3 The caution zone

Some situations are not clearly urgent but still require boundaries and consultation. Examples include repeated emotionally intense messages, strong dependence on one educator, requests for secrecy, repeated exceptions without a workable academic plan, a student who discloses serious difficulty but refuses support, or an educator who feels unusually responsible, worried, or overwhelmed.

In the caution zone, pause. Clarify the educator's role, encourage support-seeking, consult the appropriate service, document according to policy, and set communication boundaries. Do not wait until the educator is exhausted or the student is entirely dependent on one relationship.

10.4 Confidentiality and its limits

Educators should treat personal information with care and share it only through authorised routes. However, they should not promise complete secrecy when there may be serious risk to the student or another person. The exact limits of confidentiality depend on local law, safeguarding policy, institutional procedure, and the educator's professional role.

POSSIBLE WORDING

"I will treat what you share with care and respect. At the same time, I cannot promise absolute confidentiality if there is a serious concern about your or someone else's safety."

10.5 Boundary-setting phrases

SITUATION	POSSIBLE WORDING
Ongoing emotional support	"I care about your wellbeing, but I am not the right person to provide ongoing emotional support. Please contact [service]."
Availability	"I respond to course messages within [timeframe]. For urgent support, contact [service] directly."
Issue beyond coursework	"This goes beyond what I can support in my educator role, but I can help you identify the right office."
Declining an unrealistic request	"I am not able to offer that option, but the available alternatives are [A] and [B]."
Need to consult	"I want to respond appropriately, so I need to consult [role/service] before confirming the next step."

10.6 Boundary checklist before responding

1. What is the academic issue?
2. What is the wellbeing or practical concern?
3. Is there any possible urgent safety risk?
4. What is within my role?
5. What is outside my role?
6. What can I realistically offer?
7. What should I avoid promising?
8. Which service or colleague should I consult?
9. How will I protect privacy and document appropriately?
10. What boundary will protect both the student and me?

10.7 When a student declines a referral

A student may decline the support suggested by the educator. In a non-urgent situation, the educator should respect the student's autonomy while maintaining course boundaries. The educator can explain the available options, keep the focus on academic support, and avoid repeatedly pressuring the student to disclose or accept help.

The educator may say: "I respect that the decision is yours. The service remains available if you change your mind. For the course, the options I can offer are [A] and [B]." If the concern is repeated or the educator remains unsure, consultation with the designated institutional service may still be appropriate, using the minimum necessary information.

When there is a serious safety or safeguarding concern, refusal of a referral does not automatically end the educator's responsibility to follow institutional procedures. Explain the limits of confidentiality and use the local escalation route. Do not negotiate urgent safety solely through repeated private messages.

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