LEARNING IN DIFFICULT TIMES

A Self-Guided Toolkit for Higher Education Students

Crisis-Affected Cloud, Hybrid and Disrupted Learning

CLOUD HED

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Toolkit at a glance

INTENDED AUDIENCE	Higher education students studying during crises, conflicts, displacement, infrastructure disruptions, prolonged uncertainty, or other unstable conditions.
PURPOSE	To help students maintain realistic learning continuity, request academic support or flexibility, navigate services and act when study strategies are no longer enough.
LEARNING GOALS	• Maintain learning continuity by recognising how crisis conditions may affect learning, identifying one realistic next step, and creating a minimum viable study plan with access fallbacks. • Communicate and access support by requesting appropriate flexibility, mapping available personal, academic, community and professional support, and keeping verified contacts ready. • Recognise when additional help is needed and take appropriate action when study strategies or informal support are no longer sufficient.
USE AND CONNECTIONS	The toolkit functions independently. It contains its own support, privacy, and urgent safety guidance and does not require completion of another resource. Cross-references point to the **Psychological Skills Library** for optional personal tools.

About this toolkit

This toolkit is for higher education students who are trying to continue learning while living through war, displacement, insecurity, loss, family responsibilities, financial pressure, unstable infrastructure, health concerns, or other serious disruptions. It is designed for independent use. You may read it from beginning to end or go directly to the section that matches what you need today.

The focus is practical: staying connected to learning, identifying what is still possible, communicating with educators, asking for realistic academic support, rebuilding participation after absence and knowing when study strategies are not enough.

The toolkit is psychologically informed but non-clinical. It does not diagnose or treat trauma, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder or any other condition. It does not replace counselling, health care, safeguarding, emergency services or local institutional procedures.

> You do not need to manage crisis, distress or disrupted learning alone. When everything feels too much, begin with one realistic learning action and one appropriate point of support.

What this toolkit can help with

- Identify what matters most when study demands feel unmanageable.
- Create a minimum viable study plan for unstable conditions.
- Stay connected when the internet, electricity, devices or a safe study space are unreliable.
- Return to a course after an absence without trying to fix everything at once.
- Ask for academic flexibility without disclosing private or traumatic details.
- Map personal, academic, community, professional and urgent support, and keep local contacts ready.
- Recognise when study tools are not enough, and more support is needed.
- Prepare clear local contacts and urgent safety steps before they are needed.
- Bring essential decisions together in a one-page crisis learning plan.

What this toolkit is not

It is not therapy, counselling, diagnosis, trauma treatment, Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) treatment, suicide treatment or emergency response. It does not replace professional, medical, psychological, institutional, safeguarding or emergency services. It also does not place responsibility for crisis resilience only on the individual student. Learning conditions, institutional procedures, relationships and access to resources all matter.

IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTE

If you feel unsafe, unable to care for yourself, at risk of harming yourself or someone else, or in immediate danger, do not wait for an educator to reply. Contact local emergency services, a crisis service, a trusted person, a health service or the nearest safe and supervised place.

Toolkit map

PART	WHAT IT COVERS
1	Learning During Crisis Is Different
2	Start with What Is Possible
3	Build a Minimum Viable Study Plan
4	Return After Absence
5	Communicate and Ask for Academic Support
6	Learn with Disrupted Access
7	Map Your Support Network and Find the Right Route
8	Privacy, Disclosure and Boundaries
9	Know When Study Strategies Are Not Enough
10	When Things Feel Unsafe or Too Heavy
11	Create a Seven-Day Continuity Plan
REFERENCES	Selected References

The sections follow a deliberate order: understand what crisis may be doing to learning; reduce the task to what is possible; rebuild academic continuity; communicate; connect to support; and know when to seek urgent or specialised help.

SECTION 1

Learning During A Crisis Is Different

Difficulty learning under abnormal conditions is not evidence of laziness or lack of ability.

Learning depends on more than intelligence or motivation. It also depends on safety, attention, time, energy, stable routines, access to technology/electricity, physical and mental health, emotional capacity and a sense that effort can lead somewhere. Crisis can disrupt several of these conditions at the same time.

You may still care about your course and be unable to participate consistently. You may understand the material and struggle to begin an assignment. You may miss messages, forget instructions, avoid the learning platform or feel ashamed about falling behind. These changes can be understandable responses to overload and instability.

How crises can affect academic life

AREA	POSSIBLE IMPACT
ATTENTION	Reading the same paragraph repeatedly; losing the thread of a lecture; difficulty filtering news, noise, or worry.
MEMORY	Forgetting deadlines, instructions, appointments, or material that was previously manageable.
MOTIVATION	Wanting to continue but feeling that tasks have lost meaning, feel impossible, or require too much energy.
PARTICIPATION	Missing live sessions; disappearing from group work; avoiding messages; delaying contact because of feelings of shame.
COMMUNICATION	Writing very short, confused, apologetic or emotional messages; not knowing what to say to an educator.
PLANNING	Difficulty deciding what matters first; treating every task as equally urgent; making plans that assume ideal conditions.
ACCESS	Unstable internet, electricity, devices, housing, transport, documents, learning space, or privacy.
BELONGING	Feeling disconnected from classmates, the institution, or a future academic identity.

Resilience is not "being strong enough"

Resilience does not mean hiding difficulty, working without rest, or adapting to every demand alone. It is a changing process shaped by your own capacities, relationships, resources, environment, and institutional conditions. A student can be resourceful and still need flexibility, protection, material support, or professional help.

A MORE USEFUL QUESTION

Instead of asking "Why can't I study like before?", ask "What conditions have changed, what is still possible and safe for me today, and what support would make the next step more realistic?"

Related CLOUD-HED resource

If it is hard to separate the situation from self-blame or identify what you need, use **Tool 4: Name What Is Happening** or **Tool 8: Control-Influence-Acknowledge Map** in the Psychological Skills Library. Return here to identify the academic impact and the support that may help.

Barriers that can affect my learning

Barrier:	Examples:	Possible response:
Academic	Unclear priorities, missed material, overlapping deadlines.	Ask what is essential; request a realistic plan; reduce the number of active tasks.
Practical (Access, Time)	Internet, device, housing, transport, caregiving, documents.	Use alternative formats; contact institutional services; request low-bandwidth options.
Relational	Isolation, group disruption, difficulty contacting staff.	Reconnect with one classmate, tutor, adviser or service; do not rely on one person for every need.
Wellbeing or safety	Distress, fear, grief, exhaustion, health concerns, unsafe conditions.	Seek appropriate wellbeing, health, safeguarding or emergency support; academic tools may not be enough.

Self-guided check-in

The main change affecting my learning is:

The academic impact I notice most is:

One condition I cannot change immediately is:

One condition I may be able to influence is:

One person, service or resource that may help is:

QUICK TOOL 1

One Small Step

PURPOSE

Use this page when a task feels too large, you do not know where to begin, or you are avoiding the course because everything feels connected.

The course or task I am worried about is:

The next useful outcome is:

The smallest action I can take in 5–20 minutes is:

I can make the action easier by:

The person or resource that could support this step is:

I will review what happened at this time/date:

KEEP IN MIND

A small step is not the same as giving up on the full task. It is a way to create movement when the full task is currently not manageable.

SECTION 2

Start with What Is Possible

CAPACITY BEFORE PRODUCTIVITY; ONE DECISION AT A TIME.

When everything feels urgent, trying to solve the entire situation can increase paralysis. A practical first move is to separate immediate safety and basic needs from academic priorities. Academic action matters, but it should not be placed above safety, health or essential care responsibilities.

A three-question starting point

1. Am I safe enough and well enough to focus on one academic step right now?
2. Which course or task has the greatest consequence or value if I take one step?
3. What is the smallest useful action that fits my actual time, energy and access?

WHEN THE ANSWER TO THE FIRST QUESTION IS "NO"

The next step is support, safety, or basic needs! Do not force yourself through academic work. Contact an appropriate person or service and return to the academic plan when conditions allow.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCE

If immediate overload is making it hard to choose an academic action, use **Tool 1: Pause and Orient** and **Tool 9: One Manageable Next Step** in the **Psychological Skills Library**. Return to this section to decide the academic priority. The psychological tools do not replace academic information, flexibility or support.

Priority triage

Not every task deserves equal attention during disruption. Use the following categories to decide what to do, ask about, or pause on.

CATEGORY	MEANING	ACTION
ESSENTIAL NOW	A task connected to progression, safety, enrolment, a major assessment, or an immediate deadline.	Clarify the minimum acceptable next step and communicate early if possible.
IMPORTANT BUT ADJUSTABLE	A task that matters but may allow an extension, a staged submission, or an alternative format.	Ask for one realistic adjustment and agree on a new plan.

CATEGORY	MEANING	ACTION
CAN WAIT	A non-essential reading, optional activity, or task with low immediate consequence.	Pause intentionally and record when you will reconsider it.
NEEDS CLARIFICATION	You do not know whether the task is essential or what is expected.	Do not guess for days. Send one short question to the educator, tutor or programme contact.

Reduce the decision load

- Focus on one course at a time, and open only the materials you need for the next task.
- Use one written priority list rather than holding tasks in memory.
- Choose a short work period that matches your conditions, even if it is only ten minutes.
- Write down the stopping point so that returning requires less effort.
- Decide in advance what you will do if the internet, electricity, time or concentration becomes unavailable.
- Ask for clarification before investing limited energy in the wrong task.

A 60-second orientation pause

Before beginning, notice where you are, what device and time you have, and whether the environment is safe enough for the task. Name the task aloud or in writing. Choose one action.

EXAMPLE

"I have fifteen minutes and mobile access. I will read the assignment instructions, highlight the required output and send one question. I will not try to complete the whole assignment now."

QUICK TOOL 2

Priority Triage Card

PURPOSE

Use this page to decide what needs action, clarification, adjustment or an intentional pause.

TASK / COURSE	CATEGORY	NEXT ACTION
	Essential now / Adjustable / Can wait / Clarify	
	Essential now / Adjustable / Can wait / Clarify	
	Essential now / Adjustable / Can wait / Clarify	
	Essential now / Adjustable / Can wait / Clarify	
	Essential now / Adjustable / Can wait / Clarify	

KEEP IN MIND

Your priority list should reflect real consequences and available capacity, not guilt. Revisit it when conditions change.

SECTION 3

Build a Minimum Viable Study Plan

PROTECT CONTINUITY WITHOUT PRETENDING THAT CONDITIONS ARE NORMAL.

A Minimum Viable Study Plan is the smallest realistic plan that keeps you connected to the most important learning outcomes under current conditions. It is not a permanent lowering of expectations. It is a temporary way to maintain continuity when time, safety, energy, access, or concentration is limited.

MINIMUM VIABLE DOES NOT MEAN MEANINGLESS

The plan should preserve the most important learning requirement while reducing unnecessary volume, complexity, platform use or simultaneous demands.

The five parts of the plan

PART	QUESTION
1. Essential outcome	What learning outcome, assessment requirement, or course action matters most?
2. Minimum useful version	What smaller or staged output would still show progress toward the outcome?
3. Realistic format	Text, audio, handwritten notes, mobile upload, offline work, asynchronous contribution, or another permitted format.
4. Conditions and support	When, where, and with what device, material, person, or adjustment can the work happen?
5. Contingency	What will you do if your access, safety, health, or available time changes again?

Make the plan academically meaningful

A minimum plan should still align with the course's purpose. Before reducing a task, ask what it is meant to demonstrate. If the original format is impossible, an educator may suggest another way to demonstrate the same learning. If they do not, you can ask them what is possible, communicating your needs. Do not assume that every alternative is automatically permitted; communicate when approval is needed.

Examples under disrupted conditions

CONDITION	MINIMUM VIABLE APPROACH	COMMUNICATION NEED
Limited internet	Download instructions and readings when connected; work offline; submit when access returns.	Tell the educator if the deadline will be affected.
Mobile-only access	Read short materials; record notes; draft in a simple app; request a mobile-compatible submission route.	Ask whether audio, photo or plain-text submission is acceptable.
Low concentration	Work from headings and required outputs; use short periods; complete one defined component.	Ask which component is most important.
Care responsibilities	Choose a narrow time window; break the task into stages; protect one realistic deadline.	Request staged submission or a revised timeline.
Missed teaching	Read the latest announcement; access core slides or notes; ask a classmate or educator what to prioritise.	Avoid asking for every missed detail; ask for the essential next step.
Group disruption	Agree on one specific contribution; use asynchronous updates; document availability.	Inform the group and educator early when possible.

Weekly review

- What did I complete or reconnect with?
- What was less realistic than expected?
- What requires communication rather than more of my own effort?
- What should be reduced, delayed, delegated or clarified?
- What is the next essential outcome?

KEY MESSAGE

A useful plan is based on actual conditions, not the conditions you wish you had. It can change when your situation changes.

QUICK TOOL 3

Minimum Viable Study Plan

PURPOSE

Complete this page for one course or one week. Keep it simple enough to use when your capacity is low.

Course or assessment:

The essential learning outcome or requirement is:

The minimum useful version I can work toward is:

The format that is realistic for me is:

The time, place, device or material I can use is:

The support or flexibility I need is:

If conditions change, I will:

CHECK BEFORE RELYING ON THE PLAN

Have I confirmed which requirement is essential?
Have I communicated rather than assumed that an alternative will be accepted?
Is the plan feasible given my current access and capacity?
Do I know what I will do if the situation changes?
Is academic support enough, or do I also need practical or wellbeing support?

SECTION 4

Return After Absence

RE-ENGAGEMENT IS A SEQUENCE, NOT A SINGLE LEAP BACK TO NORMAL PARTICIPATION.

Students may disappear from a course because of crisis, displacement, illness, unstable access, family responsibilities, fear, grief, exhaustion, or emotional overload. After an absence, shame can become a new barrier: the longer you are away, the harder it may feel to open the platform or contact the educator.

Returning does not require catching up on everything before you make contact. In many cases, contact is the step that helps you identify what you actually need to catch up on.

The avoidance loop

STAGE	WHAT MAY HAPPEN
1. Disruption	You miss a class, task, or message.
2. Uncertainty	You do not know what has changed or what matters most.
3. Shame or fear	You expect criticism, feel too far behind, or avoid the course space.
4. More absence	You miss additional information, and the task grows.
5. Re-entry feels harder	The solution is a small contact-and-priority step, not waiting until you can fix everything alone.

The Re-Engagement Ladder

PURPOSE

Choose the first possible step. You may start in the middle of the ladder if you have already completed earlier steps.

1. Check whether you are safe enough and have enough capacity for one academic action.
2. Open one course - not every course at once.
3. Read the most recent announcement or message.
4. Identify one essential task, deadline or decision.
5. Send a short message asking what to prioritise if this is unclear.
6. Work for a short, defined period on the smallest useful component.
7. Submit a partial or alternative-format response only where appropriate and permitted.
8. Reconnect with one classmate, tutor, adviser or support service.
9. Write a short plan for the next three to seven days.

KEEP IN MIND

After choosing a step, write:

Course:

First action:

Person to contact:

Review date:

Do not try to recover every missed item

Courses often contain essential tasks, supporting material and optional enrichment. Ask what is still required for progression and what can be deprioritised. Trying to read every missed discussion or complete every low-stakes activity may use the energy needed for the most important assessment or communication.

Message asking what to prioritise

Dear [Name],

I have not been able to participate recently due to [situation (you don't need to share a lot of details)], but I would like to reconnect with the course.

I am not able to catch up on everything immediately. Could you please help me identify the most important task or next step?

Best wishes, [Name]

KEY MESSAGE

Do not wait until you feel fully caught up to reconnect. Reconnection is how you learn what matters now.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCE

If shame or harsh self-judgement is making return harder, use **Tool 11: A Kinder and More Realistic Inner Response** in the **Psychological Skills Library**. Then return to the Re-Engagement Ladder and choose the first possible step.

SECTION 5

Communicate and Ask for Academic Support

FOCUS ON ACADEMIC IMPACT, ONE REALISTIC REQUEST AND A CLEAR NEXT STEP.

You do not need to provide a detailed account of trauma, health, family circumstances, or crisis exposure to ask for academic support. In most situations, the useful information is the academic impact: what you cannot currently access or complete, what is still possible and what decision or adjustment you are asking the educator or programme to consider.

What can I ask an educator?

MY NEED	AN EDUCATOR MAY BE ABLE TO	ANOTHER ROUTE MAY BE NEEDED WHEN
I do not know what to prioritise	Clarify current expectations, essential tasks and the next course-level step.	Programme progression or several courses are affected.
I need a revised deadline or format	Discuss options permitted by the course and policy.	Formal approval, accessibility support, or another office is required.
I have been absent	Help identify what still matters and a realistic first point of return.	Interruption, withdrawal, or programme-level changes are being considered.
I need to explain the impact	Listen briefly, focus on the academic consequence and respond respectfully.	The wider need concerns health, housing, finance, violence, or specialised care.
I am distressed or unsafe	Share contacts and follow institutional safeguarding or emergency procedures.	Professional or urgent support is needed now; do not wait for an academic reply.

A useful request has four parts

PART	WHAT TO INCLUDE
1. Name the academic issue	Identify the course, task, deadline, and any attendance or participation requirements.
2. State the impact briefly	Describe the current academic effect, not your whole personal history.
3. Ask for one realistic option	For example: priority guidance, a revised deadline, staged work, an alternative format, or asynchronous participation.
4. Confirm the next step	Ask what is permitted and, where possible, state a realistic action or date.

Academic messages by purpose

ASKING WHAT TO PRIORITISE

Dear [Name],

I am currently unable to manage all course requirements at once. Could you please confirm which task or requirement I should prioritise first?

I would like to stay connected to the course and focus my available time on the most important next step.

Best wishes, [Name]

ASKING FOR ONE REALISTIC ACADEMIC OPTION

Dear [Name],

I am experiencing circumstances that are affecting my ability to complete [task or participation requirement] as planned. The main academic impact is [brief impact].

Would [a revised deadline / staged submission / alternative format / asynchronous participation] be possible? I believe I can [realistic action or date]. Please let me know what is permitted.

Best wishes, [Name]

COMMUNICATING WITHOUT DETAILED DISCLOSURE

I'm not comfortable sharing personal details, but the situation is significantly affecting my [concentration/attendance/access/participation]. I would like to discuss what is still possible academically.

For a message specifically about the internet, electricity, or device disruptions, see ***Section 6****.*

IF THERE IS NO REPLY

- Check that you used the official course channel and the correct contact.
- Review stated response times before sending repeated messages.
- Send one concise follow-up that includes the course, task, and deadline.
- If the deadline is urgent, contact the programme office, tutor, adviser, or designated student-support route.
- Keep a copy of the message. If safety or health is involved, use the appropriate support route rather than waiting for an academic response.
- If the request is declined or the issue is outside the person's role.

A declined request does not mean your situation is unimportant. Ask what options exist, whether a formal process applies and which office can advise you. The correct route may be academic advising, accessibility support, student services, a formal interruption procedure, or another institutional service.

MESSAGE TEMPLATE - ASKING TO BE REDIRECTED

"Thank you for your response.

If this request is outside your role, could you please tell me which person, office, or service I should contact next?"

PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY AND KEEP THE REQUEST FOCUSED

State what is needed for your learning. You do not need to persuade an educator by sharing additional personal or traumatic details. Wellbeing, practical, safeguarding or safety needs should also be directed to the appropriate service.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCE

If you feel pressured to reply immediately, disclose more than you want, or agree to an unrealistic plan, use **Tool 5: STOP Before Reacting** in the **Psychological Skills Library**. Return here to draft a clear, bounded request.

QUICK TOOL 5

Academic Support Request Builder

PURPOSE

Draft the main elements before sending a message. Then turn them into a short, respectful request.

Course, task or requirement:

The current academic impact is:

The one adjustment or clarification I am requesting is:

The action or date that is realistic for me is:

The official contact or channel is:

If this route cannot help, the next institutional contact is:

SECTION 6

Learn with Disrupted Access

PLAN FOR UNSTABLE INTERNET, ELECTRICITY, DEVICES, PRIVACY, AND OTHER CHANGING CONDITIONS.

Cloud and hybrid learning may appear flexible, but it can depend on stable electricity, connectivity, devices, data, software, a quiet place and predictable time. Crisis can make any of these unavailable. A useful plan assumes interruption is possible and prepares simple alternatives before the next outage or relocation.

Prepare a small offline academic pack

- the latest course announcement and assessment instructions;
- one or two essential readings in a format your device can open;
- contact details for the educator, tutor, programme office, and support services;
- a plain-text note with current priorities and deadlines;
- a place to draft work offline;
- a record of files already submitted and questions still unanswered.

Match the task to the access you have

ACCESS CONDITION	POSSIBLE ACTION	QUESTION TO ASK
Short connection window	Download first, upload completed work, and copy the essential instructions.	Which material is essential this week?
Mobile only	Use plain text, short documents, audio notes, or photographs where permitted.	Are the platform and submission format mobile-compatible?
Live attendance impossible	Use slides, notes, transcript, or recording where available; complete an asynchronous task.	What activity can replace or provide evidence of participation?
Shared device	Schedule a narrow access period; prepare offline; keep files organised and protected.	Can the deadline or format reflect limited device access?
No private learning space	Choose tasks that require less speaking or exposure; use headphones where safe; protect personal information.	Is an asynchronous or text-based alternative possible?
Frequent interruption	Use short work blocks; record the stopping point; separate tasks into independent parts.	Can the task be submitted in stages?

Group work under disruption

- State your realistic availability and communication channel early.
- Agree on one clearly defined contribution rather than remaining vaguely responsible for everything.
- Use asynchronous updates and a shared record when live coordination is unreliable.
- Tell the group and educator when circumstances change; disappearing may create additional confusion.
- Avoid sharing sensitive personal details to justify every limitation.
- Ask for an alternative if the original group format is no longer possible or safe.

Privacy and safety

Use official platforms and institutional channels when possible. Be cautious about sharing location, documents, health information, or crisis details in group chats and public course spaces. If a form or staff member requests sensitive information, ask why it is needed, how it will be stored and whether a formal procedure applies. Local data-protection and safeguarding rules differ, so this toolkit cannot provide universal legal guidance.

Contingency sentence

WRITE ONE SENTENCE

"If [connection/electricity / device/location] becomes unavailable, I will [offline action] and contact [person or office] through [alternative route] when possible."

MESSAGE: ACCESS DISRUPTION IS AFFECTING PARTICIPATION

FULL MESSAGE

Dear [Name],

Unstable [internet / electricity / device access] is affecting my ability to [attend / access materials / submit the task].

Could you please confirm whether I may use [an offline, asynchronous, low-bandwidth or alternative submission option]? I expect to be able to [realistic next action] by [date, if known].

Best wishes, [Name]

SHORT VERSION

My access is currently unstable. What offline, low-bandwidth or alternative option should I use?

QUICK TOOL 6

Low-Connectivity and Interruption Plan

PURPOSE

Prepare this before access fails. Keep a screenshot or printed copy if that is safer and more practical.

The essential material I need offline is:

The file or task I can work on without internet is:

My main device and backup option are:

The official course contact is:

My alternative communication route is:

If I cannot attend live, I will:

If I cannot submit on time, I will send this short message:

The personal or sensitive information I should not place in public course spaces is:

KEEP IN MIND

A contingency plan cannot solve structural access problems. Use institutional, digital-access, or practical support where available.

SECTION 7

Map Your Support Network and Find the Right Route

SUPPORT IS NOT ONE PERSON. DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS, SERVICES AND ROUTES CAN HELP WITH DIFFERENT NEEDS.

A support network includes personal relationships, academic connections, community resources, and formal services. A close friend may provide care but may not be familiar with the university procedure. An educator may clarify course priorities but may not be able to address housing, health or safety needs. A formal service may not know you personally but may have the authority or resources needed to help.

Crisis, displacement, disrupted access, and prolonged absence can change a network. Some connections may become unavailable, geographically distant, strained, or unsafe. New academic, community, or professional connections may become more important. Mapping the network can help you see what is available, what is missing and where one new connection may be useful.

PRIVACY

This map is for you. Use names, initials, roles or service names. You do not need to share the completed map with an educator or institution. Do not add anyone whose involvement may currently increase risk.

QUICK TOOL 7

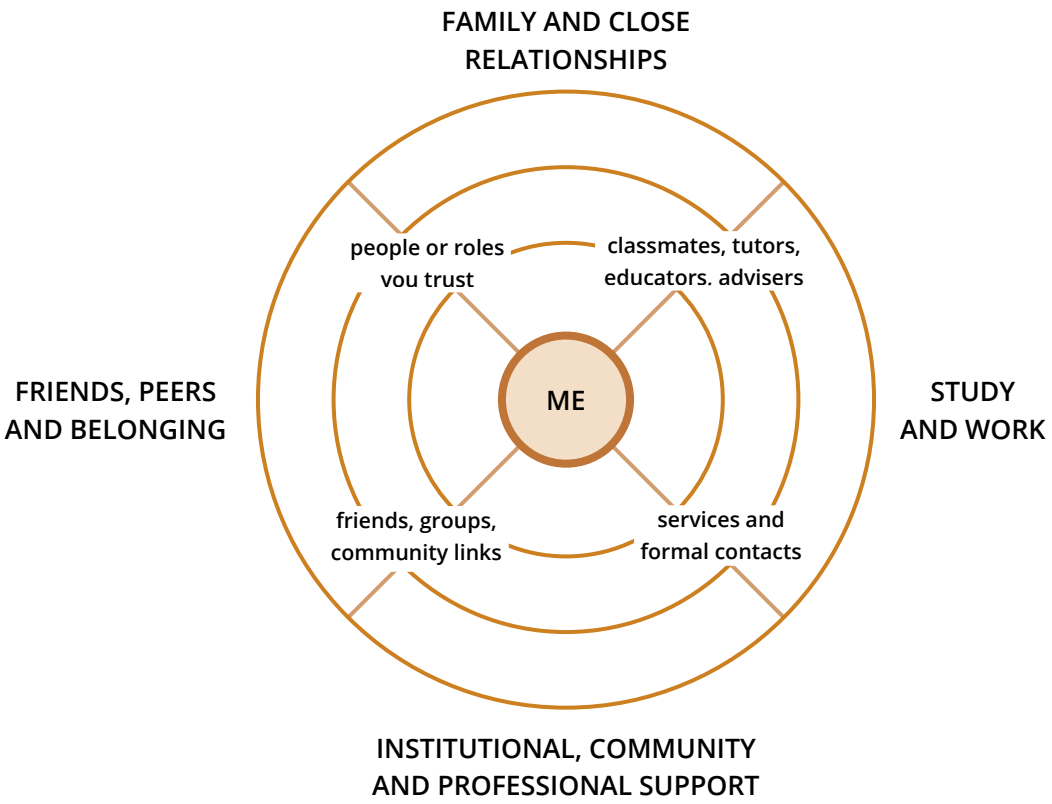
My Support Network Map

PURPOSE

Identify the people, relationships, groups, and services that may support different parts of your life and learning. The purpose is not to create a perfect or large network. It is to see what is currently available, identify gaps, and determine which connections may be useful to activate or develop.

How to use the map

1. Place yourself in the centre.
2. Add people, groups, roles, or services to the four areas.
3. Place them closer to or further from the centre according to how close, accessible, or available they feel now.
4. Use initials or role names, as you prefer.
5. After completing the map, identify what each connection may realistically provide.



Adapted for self-guided educational use from Sluzki's social network mapping approach (1997).

How to place connections

CIRCLE	USE IT FOR
Inner circle	People, roles, or services that are easier to contact, more available or more trusted now.
Middle circle	Meaningful connections that are less regular, less available, or more uncertain.
Outer circle	Formal, possible, developing, or reconnecting contacts that may still be useful.

What can each connection provide?

CODE	FUNCTION
C	Company and belonging
E	Emotional support
A	Academic information or guidance
P	Practical or material help
G	Guidance, perspective or decision support
R	Referral or access to another contact
H	Health or professional wellbeing support
S	Safety, safeguarding or urgent support

You can add one or two codes beside each name or role. For example: “classmate - A/C”, “student support - P/G/R” or “counselling service - H”.

Read your map

- Is one person carrying too many different support functions?
- Do I have academic contacts but no practical, relational, or wellbeing support?
- Do I have people who care but do not know how to navigate the institution?
- Is there someone who could introduce me to another person or service?
- Which connections are unavailable, uncertain, or unsafe?
- Do I have a backup contact if my main academic contact does not reply?
- Do I know which contact to use in case of concerns for my safety?
- Which relationship or service would be most useful to verify or reconnect with?

Network gaps

SUPPORT FUNCTION	I HAVE A CONTACT	I MAY NEED TO ADD OR VERIFY ONE
Academic information		
Practical help		
Emotional support		
Connection and belonging		
Professional health/ wellbeing support		
Safeguarding or urgent support		
Referral to another person or service		

WHERE DOES AN EDUCATOR FIT?

An educator is one connection in the study and work area of the network. See Section 8 for a clear guide to what educators can do, what they cannot replace and when another service is needed.

My Verified Support Contacts

Add current local information. Include a backup route where possible, especially for services with limited hours or delayed response times.

NEED	PERSON OR SERVICE	HOW TO CONTACT	BACKUP ROUTE
Course clarification			
Programme or progression advice			
Accessibility or formal adjustment			
Internet, device or learning materials			
Financial, housing or practical support			
Health or psychological support			
Safeguarding or protection			
Urgent or emergency support			

Messages for activating support

RECONNECTING WITH SOMEONE

Hi [Name],

We have not been in contact recently, but I am going through a difficult period and would appreciate reconnecting.

Would you be available for [a short conversation / a check-in / help with ___]?

ASKING FOR ONE SPECIFIC KIND OF SUPPORT

Hi [Name],

I am currently dealing with [brief situation or impact].

Would you be able to help me with [specific request]? It is completely okay to tell me if this is not something you can do.

ASKING A SERVICE WHERE TO BEGIN

Dear [Service/Office],

I am dealing with difficulties that are affecting my studies and wellbeing. I am not sure which service is the appropriate starting point. Could you direct me to the right contact?

Best wishes, [Name]

ASKING TO BE REDIRECTED

Thank you for your response. If this request is outside your role, could you please tell me which person, office or service I should contact next?

IF THE MAP FEELS EMPTY

A small or empty map is information, not failure. It may reflect displacement, isolation or unclear institutional pathways. Begin by adding one verified formal contact: an adviser, student-support office, health service, community organisation or helpline. Ask that contact for the specific help you need or for direction to the correct service.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCE

For a shorter function-based list of contacts and a backup contact, use **Tool 12: Support Network Map in the Psychological Skills Library**. Use the map in this section when you want to examine closeness, availability, network gaps and institutional routes in more detail.

SECTION 8

Privacy, Disclosure and Boundaries

SHARE WHAT IS NEEDED FOR SUPPORT WITHOUT FEELING REQUIRED TO TELL THE WHOLE STORY.

You can ask for academic support while keeping personal information limited. The goal is to provide enough information for the person or service to understand the current impact and respond appropriately, not to prove that your experience is serious by disclosing more than you want to share.

Three decisions before sharing

QUESTION	WHAT TO CONSIDER
What does this person need to know?	Usually the academic impact, the request, and any time-sensitive information.
How may the information be used?	Ask whether it will be documented, stored, or shared with another person or service.
Is this the right route?	Use academic contacts for course needs and the appropriate service for health, practical, safeguarding, or emergency needs.

Describe the impact, not the whole story

A useful explanation focuses on what has changed in your learning: attendance, concentration, access, participation, deadlines or the ability to complete a particular task. You may name the type of circumstance in general terms, but you do not need to provide traumatic details unless you choose to and the information is relevant to an appropriate formal process.

Educator role and limits

Educators have a responsibility to respond within their educational role and to follow relevant institutional procedures. Their role is primarily academic and connective, not clinical or emergency-based.

W HAT EDUCATORS CAN OFTEN DO

- Clarify course expectations, priorities, deadlines, and essential tasks.
- Discuss reasonable academic options within course or institutional policy.
- Listen briefly and respond respectfully.
- Focus on academic impact without requiring unnecessary traumatic or private details.
- Share verified institutional contacts and referral information.
- Consult programme, student-support, or safeguarding staff and follow relevant procedures when needed.

WHAT EDUCATORS CANNOT REPLACE

- Therapy, counselling, diagnosis, or trauma treatment.
- Medical, legal, financial, housing, or emergency services.
- Formal decisions assigned to another office or a guaranteed adjustment outside their authority.
- Specialist assessment of mental health or safety risk.
- Twenty-four-hour crisis support or constant availability.
- The student's wider personal, practical, professional and emergency support network.

CONFIDENTIALITY HAS LIMITS

An educator or service should treat personal information carefully, but absolute confidentiality cannot always be promised. If there is a serious concern about your or someone else's safety, or if a safeguarding duty applies, designated staff or services may need to be involved. Institutions should explain their privacy, documentation and safeguarding procedures. You may ask what will happen with the information before sharing more than is needed.

What you can say

LIMITING DISCLOSURE

I am not able to discuss the personal circumstances in detail. I can explain the current impact on my learning and the academic support I am requesting.

ASKING HOW INFORMATION WILL BE HANDLED

Before I share more, could you explain whether this information will be documented, who may have access to it, and whether it may be passed to another service?

SEPARATING ACADEMIC AND WIDER SUPPORT

I need academic guidance on the course. I am seeking appropriate professional or institutional support for the wider situation.

SECTION 9

Know When Study Strategies Are Not Enough

MORE PLANNING IS NOT THE ANSWER TO EVERY FORM OF DISTRESS OR CRISIS.

One Small Step, a Minimum Viable Study Plan and academic flexibility can help with disrupted learning. They cannot make unsafe conditions safe, treat a health condition, replace sleep, secure housing, resolve violence, or provide specialised psychological support. Sometimes the most responsible academic action is to stop trying to solve the problem through productivity and contact appropriate support.

Consider more support when

- distress is intense, persistent or worsening;
- you feel unsafe or unable to care for yourself;
- you are thinking about harming yourself or someone else;
- you feel hopeless, trapped, or unable to continue;
- you cannot sleep or function for several days;
- panic, fear, numbness, intrusive memories, or strong reactions are affecting daily life;
- you are using alcohol, medication or substances in unsafe ways;
- academic difficulties are connected to violence, abuse, exploitation, housing, health, grief, or serious practical insecurity;
- you feel completely alone with something too heavy to carry.

Choose support by need

MAIN NEED	POSSIBLE STARTING POINT	URGENCY
Academic confusion or falling behind	Educator, tutor, adviser, programme office.	Routine or time-sensitive academic contact.
Practical barrier	Student services, financial aid, housing, digital access, accessibility, or community support.	Use urgent routes if basic needs or safety are affected.
Emotional or psychological distress	Counselling, mental health professional, health service, doctor, helpline, or appropriate community service.	Sooner if intense, worsening or affecting safety and functioning.
Violence, abuse, exploitation, or safeguarding concern	Designated safeguarding/protection service, emergency service, or specialist organisation.	Urgent when danger is current or immediate.
Immediate danger or inability to stay safe	Emergency services, crisis service, the nearest emergency department, or a trusted person who can act now.	Immediate.

Help-seeking messages

- To a service: "I am dealing with difficulties that are affecting my studies and wellbeing. I am not sure what kind of support I need. Could I speak with someone or be directed to the appropriate service?"
- To a trusted person: "I am having a difficult time and I do not want to manage this alone. Could you stay in contact with me or help me reach support?"
- For an academic message about a temporary course step, use the templates in Section 5.

DO NOT WAIT FOR CERTAINTY

You do not need a diagnosis or perfect explanation before asking for help. You can begin by describing what is happening, how it is affecting your functioning and whether you feel safe.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCE

To prepare before distress becomes urgent, use **Tool 14: Personal Stabilisation Plan** in the **Psychological Skills Library**. If self-help is no longer enough, use **Tool 15: When These Tools Are Not Enough** and contact verified human, professional or urgent support.

QUICK TOOL 8

Support Decision Card

PURPOSE

Use this card to identify the type of need and the first appropriate contact. It is not a diagnostic checklist.

WHAT IS HAPPENING	FIRST CONTACT	MY ACTION
I mainly need course clarification.	Educator/tutor/ adviser	
I need formal academic options or advice on progression.	Programme / academic office	
I need practical, financial, housing, digital, or accessibility help.	Relevant student or community service	
I need health or psychological support.	Health/counselling / professional service	
I am unsafe or at immediate risk.	Emergency/crisis / safeguarding route	

KEEP IN MIND

If you are unsure, contact one trusted service and ask to be directed. If there is immediate danger, use urgent support rather than routine academic channels.

SECTION 10

When Things Feel Unsafe or Too Heavy

A BRIEF URGENT-SUPPORT AND NEXT-HOUR PLAN.

This section is intentionally brief. It is not therapy, diagnosis, suicide treatment, or a substitute for a professionally developed safety plan. It helps you identify immediate actions and contacts when study tools are no longer appropriate.

IF THERE IS IMMEDIATE DANGER

Contact the local emergency number or crisis service.

Go to the nearest emergency department, health service, safe public place or supervised setting.

Contact a trusted person and say clearly: "I am not safe right now. I need help."

Use the university emergency or safeguarding route if it is appropriate and available.

Do not wait for an educator to read an email or learning-platform message.

Next-hour actions

- Move to a safer or more supervised place.
- Stay near another person or ask someone to remain in contact.
- Move away from anything or any location that may increase immediate risk.
- Avoid alcohol or other substances that may increase danger or reduce judgement.
- Call or message a crisis, health or emergency service.
- Use a brief grounding or orientation practice only while waiting for support, not instead of support.
- Focus on the next hour rather than on solving the whole future.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCE

While waiting for human or professional support, you may use Tool 1: Pause and Orient only if it feels safe and helpful. It does not replace urgent contact, safeguarding or emergency action.

QUICK TOOL 9

Urgent Support Card

PURPOSE

Complete this with verified local information. Keep it somewhere accessible. Do not rely on generic international links as the only route.

CONTACT	DETAILS
Local emergency number	
University emergency or safeguarding contact	
Crisis line or urgent mental health contact	
Nearest emergency department or health service	
Trusted person who can act quickly	
After-hours student support route	

Messages when immediate support is needed

TO A TRUSTED PERSON

I do not feel safe right now. I do not want to be alone with this. Can you call me, stay with me or help me contact urgent support now?

ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION AFTER URGENT SUPPORT HAS BEEN ACTIVATED

Dear [Name],

I am currently dealing with a serious situation that is affecting my ability to study safely and consistently. I am seeking appropriate support beyond the course.

I do not feel able to share further details, but I may need help with [deadline/participation / a temporary study plan]. Could we discuss a realistic next step in academia when possible?

Best wishes, [Name]

YOU ARE NOT A BURDEN BECAUSE YOU NEED HELP

Urgent help is appropriate when safety is at risk. The academic plan can wait.

SECTION 11

Create a Seven-Day Continuity Plan

BRING THE TOOLKIT TOGETHER WITHOUT CREATING ANOTHER OVERWHELMING PLAN.

A continuity plan is not a promise that conditions will remain stable. It is a short record of what matters, what is possible, who needs to be contacted, and what you will do if the plan breaks down. Keep the horizon short enough to review.

Include four kinds of action

ACTION	PURPOSE
One academic action	A small task connected to the most important course outcome.
One communication action	A message, question, or formal request that reduces uncertainty.
One support action	Contact with a person, service, or office appropriate to the need.
One contingency action	What will you do if access, safety, health, or available time changes?

Plan review questions

- What is essential?
- What can be paused without creating unnecessary harm?
- What assumption in the plan depends on stable access or energy?
- What requires communication rather than more effort?
- Which support contact is most important this week?
- What would tell me that study strategies are no longer enough?

FINAL REMINDER

You do not need to return to ideal performance to learn again. Begin with one action, one contact and one review point.

RELATED CLOUD-HED RESOURCE

To include recovery and early-warning signs alongside the academic plan, see **Tool 13: Small Recovery Actions** or **Tool 14: Personal Stabilisation Plan in the Psychological Skills Library**.

QUICK TOOL 10

My Seven-Day Continuity Plan

PURPOSE

Use one page for the next seven days. Review it sooner if conditions change.

The most important course or outcome this week is:

My one academic action is:

My one communication action is:

My one support action is:

The barrier most likely to interrupt the plan is:

If that happens, I will:

The sign that I need more or urgent support is:

My review date and time are:

KEEP IN MIND

A plan is allowed to change. Revising it is an adaptation to new information, not a failure.

Message Finder

Use this page to locate a message in the toolkit to support you during the process.

I NEED TO	GO TO
Reconnect after absence	Section 4
Ask what to prioritise	Sections 4-5
Request a revised deadline, staged work or another academic option	Section 5
Communicate without detailed disclosure	Sections 5 and 8
Explain an internet, electricity or device problem	Section 6
Reconnect with a person or ask a service where to begin	Section 7
Ask how personal information will be handled	Section 8
Contact professional or specialised support	Section 9
Ask someone to help me stay safe	Section 10
Communicate academically after an urgent situation	Section 10

Quick Reference Summary

SITUATION	FIRST RESPONSE
When everything feels overwhelming	Choose one small academic action and one point of support.
When priorities are unclear	Ask what is essential now, what is adjustable, what can wait, or what needs clarification.
When conditions are unstable	Use a Minimum Viable Study Plan and prepare an interruption route.
When you have been absent	Reconnect before trying to catch up on everything.
When you need flexibility	Describe the academic impact and ask for one realistic option.
When access is disrupted	Work offline where possible; use simple formats; communicate through official routes.
When you feel isolated	Use the network map to see who is available, what is missing, and which contact to activate or verify.
When the need exceeds teaching	Use educators for academic guidance and connection; use the appropriate service for wider needs.
When you are unsafe	Use emergency, crisis or safeguarding support immediately; do not wait for an academic reply.

THE SEQUENCE

1. Safety and basic needs.
2. One realistic academic action.
3. Clear communication.
4. Appropriate support.
5. Review and adapt.

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