

**GOING  
TO BE**

**SAMH's campaign for  
young people's mental health**

# **STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT**

# STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH IS A HUGE IMPORTANT NATIONAL ISSUE.

While universities and colleges will usually offer mental health and wellbeing support, provision can be inconsistent and patchy between institutions; and demand for services like student counselling is outstripping availability.

At SAMH, we know that while studying can be an exciting and interesting time, it can also be challenging, and it may affect your mental health at times.

We've been campaigning for better mental health support for young people since 2017, through our Going To Be campaign. In that time, we've seen some fantastic progress being made; for example, Scottish Government has committed to funding 80 additional counsellors at further and higher education institutions.

However, there's much more that can be done, and as a student, you're in a great position to campaign for change, both within your college or university, and on a national level.

## THIS TOOLKIT PROVIDES YOU WITH THE FOLLOWING:

- A guide to campaigning for better mental health support in your college or university;
- A guide to campaigning for better national mental health support for students; and
- A space to record the support and services available to you.

The back pocket of this toolkit also includes some information and advice, including a booklet on how to cope with student life. You'll also find our SAMH View on Student Mental Health, which outlines the issues we've been campaigning on – this might give you some ideas for your own campaign.

When you're considering campaigning for better student mental health support, here's a few things to remember:

- It's really important to do your research first, so that you know what support is already available, where to find it, and what the gaps are.
- Anyone can campaign – whether you're a distance learner, an international or mature student, or studying part-time.
- Always put your own mental health and wellbeing first – campaigning for change can be really rewarding, but it can also be demanding. Make sure you're looking after your own mental health and wellbeing, and that you have enough time to keep up with your coursework.

We'd love to hear how you get on – please do keep a record of how your campaigning efforts are going, and share with us on social media or get in touch at: [communications@samh.org.uk](mailto:communications@samh.org.uk)

Thank you for your support, and good luck!

-  [SAMHmentalhealth](#)
-  [@SAMHTweets](#)
-  [samhscotland](#)

# HOW TO CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AT YOUR COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

Campaigning for better mental health support at your college or university is a great way to influence improvement in this area, but it can be hard to know where to start.

Here are some simple ideas on how to plan and carry out a campaign, and ensure that you really make an impact:

- 1** Visit your **Student Support Service**. There you should be able to find out what advice and support is already on offer. Find out as much detail as you can – for example if your college or university has counselling services, find out things like how to refer to the service, how long the waiting lists are, and how many sessions you can expect to receive.
- 2** Find out if your college or university has a **Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA)**. An initiative led by **Think Positive** on behalf of **NUS Scotland**, SMHAs bring student associations and their institutions together in a formal agreement to work jointly on mental health issues. They provide a framework for universities and colleges to build strong support for students and staff around mental health, including existing policies and staff training.  
  
You can read more and find out if your college or university has a SMHA at the Think Positive website. Your student association should be able to tell you what's in the SMHA so you can see what they've committed to.

- 3** Read your **Student Association's manifestos**. Every elected member, including the Student President, will have one. Most colleges or universities will have an elected member who specifically covers mental health, for example a Student Wellbeing Officer.  
  
Find out what they pledged in terms of mental health support, and then see if they've delivered on this. Remember that you can hold them accountable on what they've committed to.  
  
Elections coming up? You might want to think about standing for election, influencing the manifestos that the candidates draw up, or campaigning for a specific candidate.
- 4** **Classroom representatives** are a statutory requirement for any course, so find out who yours is. Class reps act as a link between students and staff, and have a duty to represent any issues with your course, class, or lecturers.

- 5** Does your college or university have a **mental health and wellbeing society**? If it does, join! If it doesn't, why not set one up? You'll usually be able to access a small amount of funding from your student union to do this.  
  
And if you're a member of another society, think about whether there is or could be a mental health and wellbeing element to it – for example an LGBT+ or Women's Society might want to consider the mental health and wellbeing issues specific to their members.
- 6** Look at the **National Student Survey (NSS)** and find out where your college or university stands. The NSS gives students a powerful, collective voice, and the results are valued by senior staff. As such, it can be a great opportunity to feed back, but can also be a really useful incentive for encouraging action.
- 7** Does your college or university provide **student accommodation**? Most halls of residence will have a representative who is responsible for looking after student welfare.

Have they been trained in mental health? Do they know where to signpost any students who might come to them for help? If not, is this something you might want to campaign for?

- 8** Are there initiatives running throughout the year that you could link your campaigning work to, for example does your university or college have a **mental health awareness week**? There's also World Mental Health Day every year on the 10th of October. These can be great opportunities to raise awareness, but also to influence change. It's important that these weeks have a meaningful impact, and are backed up by action throughout the year.
- 9** **Make some noise**. Once you've decided what you're campaigning on and how, share your messages in the student newspaper, radio station, intranet, or over social media channels. Remember that empowering stories can be really motivational.
- 10** **Share this toolkit!** You can't do it all on your own, so share this toolkit with your friends or classmates; or think about where you could leave it for someone else to find.



# HOW TO CAMPAIGN NATIONALLY FOR BETTER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

This guide includes a number of ideas and tips to help you as an individual student or a group effectively lobby your political representatives to make change happen.

Remember, even if you are an international student you can still campaign and lobby your political representatives. Your local MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament) and Scottish Government have a duty to represent you and respond to your concerns.

**1** **Get in contact with your local Members of the Scottish Parliament - MSPs.** Responsibility for mental health and higher and further education is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Your MSPs will be able to advise or help you with local (“constituency”) issues as well as raise your concerns with the Scottish Government and Parliament on your behalf.

Everyone in Scotland is represented by eight MSPs – one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs. Constituency and regional MSPs have exactly the same powers and responsibilities, so it’s a good idea to contact all eight when campaigning! You can find out who your MSPs are on the Scottish Parliament website. Your MSPs can be contacted in a number of ways: All MSPs have an email address (found on Scottish Parliament website) and all can be written to at their Scottish parliamentary offices.

Meeting your MSPs face to face is also a good way to let them know about your campaign – and get an immediate reaction. **All MSPs hold local surgeries.** Surgeries are regular meetings held in a MSP’s constituency, often in a local community centre or library, where members of the public can meet their MSPs face to face and raise issues with them. Details of surgery locations and times can usually be found on the MSP’s website or from their local constituency office. You don’t usually need an appointment to attend. Alternatively you could invite your MSPs to visit you at your university or college.

Don’t forget **social media!** Most MSPs will have their own social media accounts which they monitor and reply on quickly. Social media is also a great way to get your campaign seen by a wider audience.

**2** Create and submit a petition to the **Scottish Parliament’s Public Petition Committee.** Members of the public can submit petitions directly to the Scottish Parliament. Petitions can then be discussed by MSPs on the Public Petitions Committee. The Committee can then take further evidence on the issue and recommend the Scottish Government takes action. The process is simple, with full information on submitting a petition found on the Scottish Parliament’s website. The main rules are that **the petition must be on a national issue about something that is within the powers of the Scottish Parliament** – such as student mental health.

**3** **Get in contact with the Scottish Government.** The Scottish Government is responsible for all devolved policy, including health and education. Contacting the Government directly as an individual or as a campaign group is a good way to ensure your issues are heard! Why not write a letter to the **Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science?**

**“I don’t think I’d appreciated what an enormous change going to university would be...”**

I went to boarding school where every hour of every day was planned out for me. Staff and pupils knew each other’s names and I had a close support network. Apart from getting stressed about exams, I was happy... We’re all supposed to have ‘the time of our lives’ at university, and when you’re not, it just feels like added pressure.”

ALEXANDRA

**4** **Link in with existing national campaigns.** A collective voice can be the most powerful when campaigning for change. Find out if other organisations are campaigning on student mental health and see if you can join them. Good places to start would be [NUS Scotland](#), [Student Minds](#) and [SeeMe Scotland](#). You might also want to consider becoming a SAMH campaigner or media volunteer – see our website for details.

**5** Contact your local **Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MYSYSP).** The Scottish Youth Parliament is the democratically elected voice of Scotland’s young people (aged 14 – 25). The Youth Parliament is politically impartial – with MYSYSPs not representing any political party. The Youth Parliament campaigns for issues important to Scotland’s young people, including mental health.



## TIPS WHEN CONTACTING POLITICIANS AND CAMPAIGNING

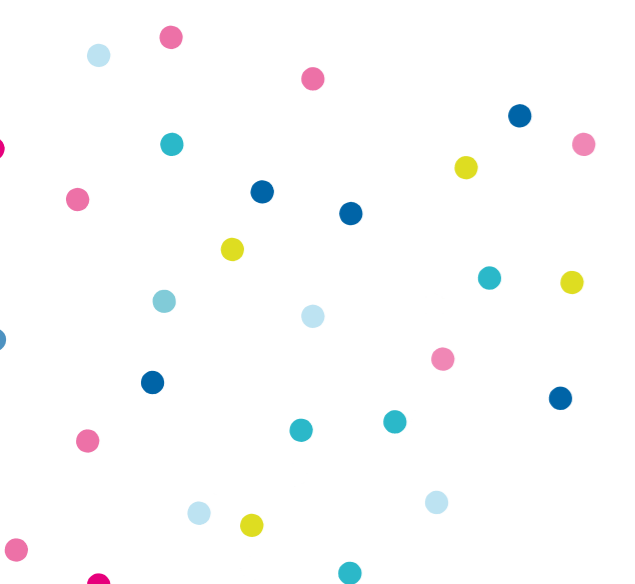
- Do your research and clearly outline the issue you are raising. This includes being clear about what you are asking for, and what you would like the politician to do.
- Keep any letters or emails as short as possible – MSPs and Government Ministers receive a large amount of mail every day, so keeping communication short will ensure they give it proper attention.
- If possible, personalise your campaign or communication – this is more likely to get the attention of political representatives. For example if you were writing about student counselling services, try to include things like counselling waiting times at your college or university and numbers of counsellors.
- Target the right politician. If the campaign issue is on a “devolved” issue such as health and education target MSPs and the Scottish Government. For “reserved” issues such as equalities or employment law target MPs and the UK Government.
- Think about allies. A collective voice is more likely to get attention. Are there other groups campaigning on similar issues you could link in with – for example, student societies or local think tanks?



**“Everyone was really supportive, there was genuine empathy and understanding...”**

The Dean of Pastoral Care was incredible and together we decided I should take a semester out. If needed, it could be longer. Importantly, I was told that my place at Uni was safe and they shared stories of others who’d had similar health issues but gone on to brilliant medical careers, that gave me confidence and I recognised that people seldom take a direct path to where they want to be. Throughout my time away the University kept in touch, academic performance was put to one side, the priority at all times was my health and wellbeing. It’s enabled me to be back here today.”

HEATHER



# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT

The following template can be a useful place for you to keep a record of the support and services available to you while you're studying.

You might want to include contact names and details, opening hours, and any other useful information.

GP Surgery	
Student support services	
Student counselling service	
Student support helpline eg. Nightline	
Class Representative	
Halls of residence representative (if applicable)	
Other support or services at university or college	
Third sector services in local area, eg. support groups	

Self-care Plan	
Who I can speak to when I'm struggling	
What things make me feel better	
Things to avoid	

## USEFUL CONTACTS:

### SAMH (Scottish Association for Mental Health)

You can find details of our local services, information about mental ill health and sign-posting by getting in touch.

9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday

t: 0344 800 0500

e: [info@samh.org.uk](mailto:info@samh.org.uk)

### B-eat

Support and services for those dealing with an eating disorder, including a YouthLine open 4pm – 10pm, every day.

t: 0808 801 0711

w: [b-eat.co.uk](http://b-eat.co.uk)

### Breathing Space

A confidential out of office hours telephone line for people experiencing low mood, anxiety or depression.

t: 0800 83 85 87

w: [breathingspace.scot](http://breathingspace.scot)

### Childline

A free, private and confidential service for anyone under 19 in the UK, available 24/7.

t: 0800 1111

w: [childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk)

### Think Positive

NUS Scotland's student mental health project.

w: [thinkpositive.scot](http://thinkpositive.scot)

### The Mix

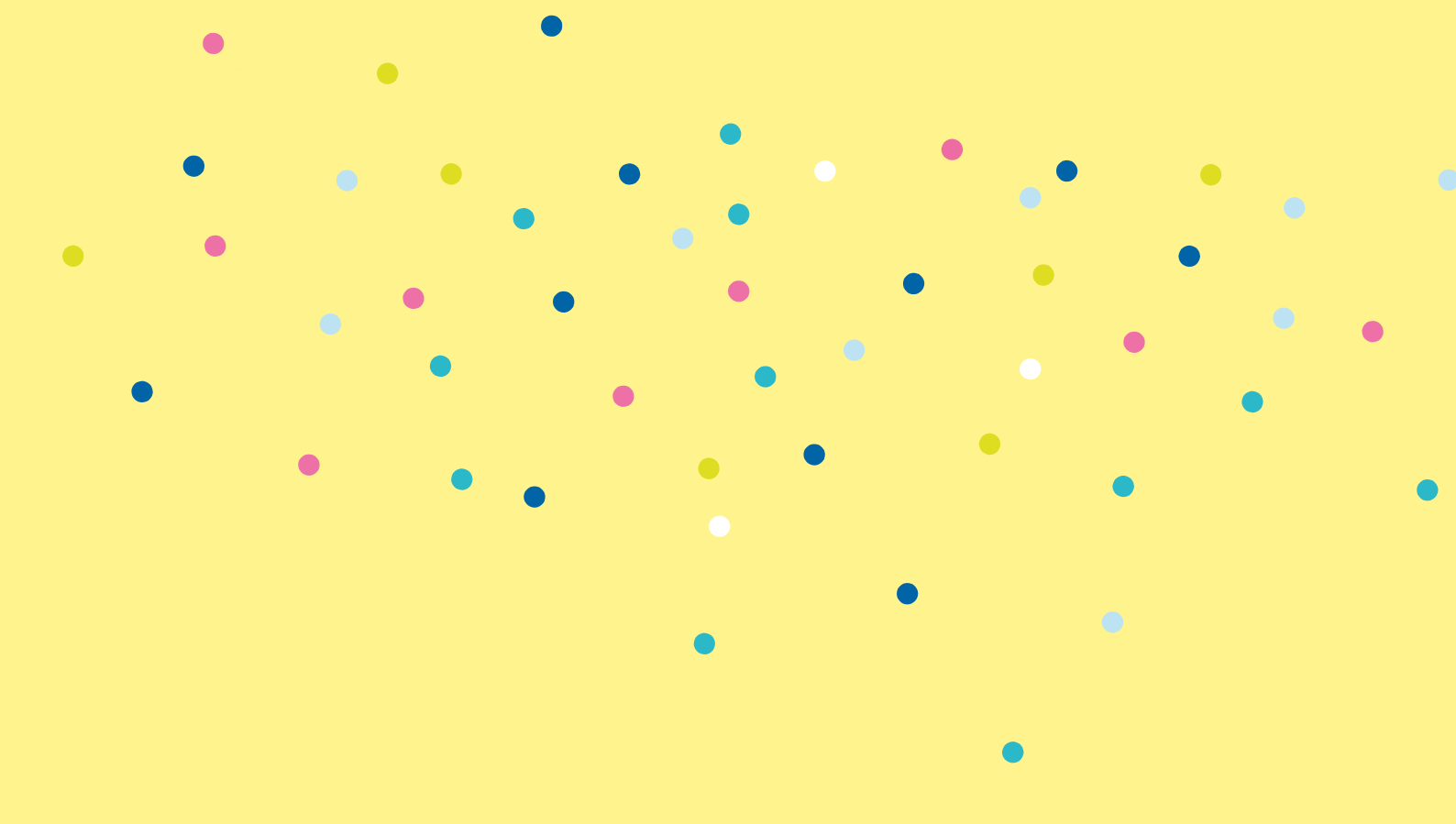
Free, confidential support for young people under 25 via online, social and mobile.

t: 0808 808 4994

w: [themix.org.uk](http://themix.org.uk)

If you don't feel you can keep yourself safe right now, seek immediate help.

- Go to any hospital Accident & Emergency department.
- Call 999 and ask for an ambulance if you can't get to A&E, or tell someone and ask them to contact 999 for you.
- If you need some support right now, but don't want to go to A&E, here are some other options for you to try:
  - Call NHS 24 on 111.
  - Call the Samaritans on 116 123, they're open 24 hours and are there to listen.
  - Contact your GP for an emergency appointment.



**“It’s so good for students to be able to open up because the amount of students that drop out because they can’t cope is huge. If you know you have support from the start, I’d say the drop out rates will become less. It definitely takes a weight off your shoulders to be able to speak to someone.”**

STEPHANIE

SAMH is the Scottish Association for Mental Health.  
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