



# Guide for Peer Advising During the Coronavirus Outbreak

**Note:**

These sample materials were developed at UCF and are included in the CREATES Toolkit Peer Advising as an example of guidelines on Peer Advising during and in the aftermath of the Coronavirus outbreak. For more information and additional educational tools, visit:

<http://europe-creates.eu>

## Peer Advising during and in the aftermath of the coronavirus outbreak Guide for UCF peer advisors

Dear peer advisors,

We sincerely hope that you are all doing well, and that the coronavirus outbreak has not been very harsh on you. This is arguably one of the most challenging times of our lives, when we need each other like never before, both during and in the aftermath of the coronavirus outbreak. In times when meeting in person is not allowed in larger groups, but students need support perhaps more than ever, innovative solutions for providing peer advising must be found. For that reason, we have been trying to create a virtual space for the peer advising program to continue functioning.

We acknowledge that peer advising is not straightforward, particularly in times like this, yet it is as rewarding and valuable to you, peer advisors, as it is for your advisees. Therefore, it is very important to create a safe and comfortable environment for both you and the advisees, which is exactly why we suggest focusing on rather less formal but more relaxing activities during these next few weeks or months.

There are several things to consider before and during the actual advising process:

### **1. Mindset**

Ensure that you feel reasonably good before you give away more energy on helping others. Advising can provide an outlet to take your mind off the current situation and feel good about helping others, but you must make sure that you are in a good place before supporting others with their challenges.

### **2. Boundaries**

Re-examine the boundaries you have set with your advisees at the beginning of your relationship. What can you support them with; is it the same things as before? How much time can you offer them? What are their expectations from you and what are your expectations from them? Make sure to reflect on these questions before you start advising again.

### **3. Clarifying the current situation**

It makes sense to clarify where your advisees are with their studies and their plans before starting to support them. How has the current situation impacted them? How do they feel about the current situation? What are their major worries and concerns? What do they hope to achieve in the short term, as well as long term? You can also ask yourself all these questions, as they are indeed quite reflective.

### **4. Active listening**

Remember that active listening is one of the most valuable contributions a peer advisor can make. It is intuitive and aims to explore the meaning behind someone's words. It will allow you to understand your advisee far better, which ultimately lets you guide them in a better way.

### **5. Being open-minded**

Remember that you should support your advisees and help them explore their options. This is often challenging, and you might end up being judgmental to your advisees occasionally. Yet, it is very important to remain open-minded. Try not to be too directive, i.e. try not to tell your advisees what to do. Remember that being an advisor is being a guide - supporting but not making decisions for the advisees.

Here are several practical suggestions for you to consider:

2

### **1. Weekly advisor-advisee check-in**

It is important to show emotional support, as well as provide encouragement and validation to the first-year students. This can be done by setting up a weekly advisor-advisee check-in, by telephone, e-mail, or chat group, to make sure that the support is ongoing. You should also try to encourage the advisees to be proactive and reach out to you more; for instance, you can stress out the possibility to have an individual appointment with you, e.g. over the phone or video call, whatever suits you best. Thereby, you make sure that the advisees know they can talk to you and ask for advice.

Social media can be a particularly useful and quick way to reach out to your advisees and make sure they know that they can also reach out to you with any questions or concerns. One suggestion would be to create a chat group / room on social media, where continuous, yet quick interaction between you and your advisees could take place. Encourage the advisees to pose questions and speak about their concerns / issues. Moreover, make sure that you are really there for them. For example, you could express that by acknowledging their messages and answering their questions always within a certain timeframe (e.g. 1-2 days).

### **2. Organizing the next peer advising meeting**

Again, it is important to create a safe and comfortable space for everyone involved. We suggest organizing an informal virtual get-together, with some engaging activity included and not just "advising". For instance, a good approach would be to organize a lunch / dinner together online, while giving the advisees the necessary platform and time to voice their concerns or questions. Considering that almost all activities have moved to the virtual space in the past and next few weeks, you should make it clear to the advisees that they should perceive this meeting as a break from e.g. the online classes and the studying, from all the concerns and the uncertainty. That way you can make the meeting more tempting to attend.

Setting up a survey within your advising group should be an easy way to find a suitable date and time for reaching as many advisees as possible. Try to provide more flexibility by offering several options for the meeting. On the other hand, if you notice that there might be some issues, or mentees reach out to you before the actual meeting, please make sure to provide support and guidance.

We have decided to create virtual space for you to hold your meetings. Namely, we opted for Jitsi Meet, which is the University of Freiburg Webmeeting-Server. It allows you to have a virtual "room", where all of your meetings can take place repeatedly. We have created a room for each of the advising groups. The link to your room can be found in the e-mail in which you have received this document.

### **3. Using the available resources**

There are many resources available currently, which are dedicated to providing support during and after the current situation. We strongly encourage you to use them yourself, but also share them with your advisees.

Here is a list we compiled with the most essential websites and contacts to keep in mind. In case you think anything should be added, please let us know.

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### **4. Feedback and Self-Help**

We would very much appreciate to receive feedback from you on a regular basis, in order to be able to encapsulate how students and you, as peer advisors, are dealing with the current situation. Moreover, we feel it is important to give you a platform where you can discuss troubles and problems with which you might need additional help not only from us, as the support, but also from the other peer advisors. For that reason, we created a Google Doc for you, a document where we can all work together on overcoming peer advising challenges. The document is also partly intended as a self-help peer advising tool. Namely, the questions and answers by you - the peer advisors, and us - the support, will be saved and available for you to check out at any point. The link to the document is: