

UW-Whitewater University Handbook

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Mental Health Emergencies Policies and Procedures

Source: Office of the Assistant Chancellor for Student Affairs

INTRODUCTION

This policy is concerned with the assessment of psychological crises, and the procedures and responsibilities associated with their management. It is understood that a number of staff persons within the University community may be involved with the resolution of individual student concerns. It is the intent of this policy to clarify the process, thus making it possible to respond effectively and efficiently to the psychological crisis or a mental health emergency of a student. Specific procedures and responsibilities, as outlined, are consistent with the structure and parameters provided by the Administrative Code of the State of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Statutes. This policy statement is meant to operationalize the general guidelines presented in the UW-W Emergency Operations Program. For more information related to the policy, or for assistance with responding to emergencies, please consult with staff at the Counseling and Development Center.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISES--DEFINITIONS

A psychological crisis exists when an individual is threatening harm to self or others, or is out of touch with reality. Uncontrollable behavior and/or hallucinations could be manifested (definition taken from Emergency Operations Program, 1991).

The following are examples of psychological crises

1. Self-damaging behaviors - overt physical actions such as inflicting wounds, ingestion of toxic substances, or overdoses of medications.
2. Behavioral disturbances not self-damaging, but of major concern to others = e.g. repeated threats of suicide, threats to hurt other persons or damage property, bizarre behaviors not characteristic of individual's normal functioning.

It is important to note that there are numerous and diverse interventions which may be appropriate and necessary with each individual including counseling, discipline, advising, etc. Respondents should know their responsibilities and limitations, and ask for guidance and support from others throughout the process. Staff members at the Counseling and Development Center are available to assist with emergencies during normal working hours. The Crisis Line, located at the Walworth County Department of Human Services, (phone 472-5770) is available for consultation for persons in crisis or to those responding 24 hours a day.

Given the incidence of suicide threats and attempts on a college campus, specific attention will be focused on dealing with suicidal concerns following a general description of intervention strategies with persons in psychological crisis.

INTERVENTION ALTERNATIVES

It is difficult to generalize about responses during the time of a crisis. If you determine immediately that you will need assistance, the Emergency Operations Program suggests that you do the following:

1. Stay Calm
2. Notify University Police at ext. 1111. Provide the following information: your name, precise location, observed symptoms of behavior and individual's name if known.
3. Until help arrives, be pleasant, considerate and understanding to avoid aggravating the situation.
4. Do not argue with the individual. Try to determine and accept the individual's point of view. Do not confront/detain the individual if violent/combative.
5. Have someone meet the University Police at the entrance to the building and provide up-to-date information.

When University Police become involved with the resolution of psychological crises, they will determine necessary actions in consultation with other staff (including Counseling and Development Center, Residence Life, Health Services, etc.) and help arrange for services which might be required depending upon the nature and intensity of the psychological crisis. Some preliminary interventions prior to involvement of the University Police may include:

1. Mediation: Direct communication with student regarding observed behaviors and specific concerns. A clear understanding of expected behavior changes is essential in the observation/confrontation stage. Documentation of communications is important. Staff are encouraged to share concerns with immediate supervisors as soon as possible.
2. Voluntary referral to Counseling and Development Center: Students who are evidencing behavior problems and/or psychological crises should be encouraged to seek assistance from the Center especially if they are not already doing so. Staff persons can be helpful in the referral process by helping to make those connections with the Counseling and Development Center.
3. Referral to student judicial system: At times, it may be appropriate to request that the staff in the Office of Residence Life or the Associate Dean of Students become involved with the student in a disciplinary setting. Clear distinctions should be made about the roles of helping professionals in these different offices. Ultimately, if a student becomes involved with the involuntary withdrawal process, the incident is processed within guidelines of the University disciplinary code.

Involvement of University Police: staff members can ask for the assistance of University Police at any point in the process. A number of alternatives, including the three named above, are available to University Police depending on the needs of the individual involved. Two alternatives which are available only to police officers include emergency detention and protective custody. In both cases, students would be transported to Walworth County Department of Human Services in Elkhorn, Wisconsin; transportation would be provided by either University Police (if restraint is necessary) or UPNET (when restraint is not necessary). The Department of Human Services for Walworth County contracts for services with other hospitals and agencies to provide the necessary intervention and treatment services. Human Services staff may choose to consult with campus personnel, parents or others as necessary and appropriate in the problem-solving process. Human Services staff will attempt to notify Residence Life personnel about a student's anticipated return to campus following an emergency detention or protective custody.

SUICIDE

The majority of psychological crises with which university staff members will deal relate directly to suicidal thoughts, attempts or completions. Definitions of each are offered below.

Threatened suicide: A statement or behavior, direct or indirect, that implies a wish and intention to kill oneself.

Attempted suicide: An intentional act or behavior directed toward ending one's own life.

Completed suicide: An intentional act or behavior resulting in death.

Assessment of severity or immediacy of the threat or intent is generally difficult. The SAL method is recommended as a guideline for an initial assessment; it is summarized briefly as follows.

Specificity of the plan - How specific is the person's suicide plan?

Availability of the means - How available is the method chosen to commit suicide? If they have decided to use a gun for example and they are from a family that owns guns, the risk is high.

Lethality of the method - How lethal is the method chosen? If they plan to use a gun or hang themselves, for example, the risk is very high.

All statements of intent to harm oneself or someone else should be treated seriously; information regarding threats and attempts should be shared immediately with appropriate staff so that reasonable and timely actions might be taken.

RESPONDING TO SUICIDE CONCERNS IN THE RESIDENCE HALLS

Following are the specific procedures which should be followed by residence hall staff when responding to suicide threats or attempts. While these procedures are specific to the residence halls, the general guidelines may be useful to any staff person who is in a position to respond to a suicide threat, attempt or completion.

1. In cases of suicide threats, the hall director* should be notified immediately by the resident assistant, or any student who becomes aware of the problem. The hall director will talk with the student who has threatened suicide, and call the additional help/assistance as necessary as outlined on the "Mental Health Emergencies Call List" which is found in the Resident Assistants' Handbook. If the hall director can not be located immediately, reference to the call list will help to enlist the involvement of appropriate staff. Residence Life Staff will determine if it is appropriate to seek further consultation at the time; the Crisis Line (5770) is available for 24-hour consultation and is an important resource. In addition, if the student is working with a member of the Counseling and Development Center, the involvement of that staff person is important at the time of the incident. University Police may also need to be involved, depending upon the nature of the incident. University Police officers can arrange for Emergency Detentions in conjunction with Walworth County Human Services if the person shows a substantial probability of harm to self or others. It is especially important that there be adequate follow-up with suicide threats. It may be necessary or helpful to ask the student to sign a mental health contract (see Appendix A) which would outline alternatives for getting assistance with the problem. Referrals to the Counseling and Development Center or to other mental health agencies should be made as soon as possible after the first indication of a problem. Students who refuse assistance and continue to be dangerous to themselves or others become involved with the discipline process within the Residence Life structure. As outlined on page 8 of this procedure, students may ultimately face involuntary withdrawal from the university if their threats and/or attempts do not cease. Staff at the Counseling and Development Center are prepared to help deal with emergencies, and can offer consultation about necessary postvention.

*When reference is made to the hall director, it is to be understood that the assistant hall director will be notified in the absence of the hall director.

2. Responses in the event of attempted suicides will be dependent upon the immediate needs of the individual who has made the attempt. If the person is unconscious or in immediate physical danger, the Rescue Squad (9-911) should be contacted immediately. Students will be

transported to Walworth County Human Services unless this would place the person at significant medical risk in which case they would be transported to Fort Atkinson Hospital. After the unconscious student has been transported, the hall director and the appropriate Residence Life Central Staff person should also be notified. Walworth County personnel will determine appropriate interventions and facilitate the admission to the hospital if necessary.

If the student who has attempted suicide is conscious and not in immediate physical danger, the University Police should be contacted and asked to make a decision (in consultation with Rescue Squad personnel if necessary) about the need to transport the student to Walworth County Human Services (see transportation of students for treatment, on page 5 of this document). If transported, Walworth County staff will work with the student to determine appropriate interventions and the need for hospitalization.

3. If a student has completed suicide, the Rescue Squad should be called immediately (9-911). Then the University Police should be called at 1111. Finally, the hall director and the Area Coordinator should be notified. The Area Coordinator will ensure that other university officials are informed as appropriate. If the student is dead at the scene, the police will summon the coroner. If the student is pronounced dead at the hospital, the physician will inform the parents and Residence Life staff who will in turn inform the Assistant Chancellor for Student Affairs who will notify the Chancellor.

It is imperative that all persons who have been directly involved with suicide attempts and completions have an opportunity for "debriefing" and dealing with their thoughts, feelings and concerns. Counseling and Development Center staff will provide assistance with this process.

REPORTING OF CRISES AND TRANSPORTATION OF STUDENTS FOR TREATMENT

Generally, the reporting of crises is consistent with the administrative structure of the university. Consideration must be given to the "need to know", defined in terms of who might be of assistance to the individual and at what point in time. Regardless of the time of day, immediate contact should be made with those persons who are best able to provide the needed services. In the case of a student who is a client at the Counseling and Development Center, the involvement of that staff person may be most appropriate at the time of the crisis if the student agrees. Immediate priority must be given to handling the most urgent needs first at the time of the crisis.

When reporting the crisis and the recommended or required follow-up, the information should be timely, clear, concise, and confidential. The information is shared only with those offices with a need to know; depending on the residence of the student, the type of emergency or the follow-up required, that list of offices will vary from one situation to the next. Included may be the Office of Residence Life, Student Health Services, Associate Dean of Students, University Police, and the Counseling and Development Center. In some cases, other staff members may be involved and informed as well. Remember, care must be taken to protect the confidentiality of the individual as much as possible throughout the process.

TRANSPORTATION

In cases of medical emergencies and when emergency transport is necessary, the Rescue Squad will provide the transportation. The Rescue Squad is contacted by calling 9-911 from campus phones or 911 off-campus.

When non-emergency transport is appropriate, University Police will make necessary arrangements with contracted services. University Police should be contacted at 4660. Generally, it is advised that individual faculty, staff or students not take responsibility for transporting a person involved with a mental health emergency.

In the case of protective custodies or emergency detentions where restraint is necessary, University Police will be involved directly with the transportation to Walworth County Human Services.

In all cases which may warrant it, the students experiencing mental health emergencies will be transported to Walworth County Human Services in Elkhorn, Wisconsin unless the immediate medical needs dictate transportation to Fort Atkinson Memorial Hospital.

VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL FOR MEDICAL REASONS

When a student initiates a voluntary withdrawal from the university for medical or psychological reasons, the general guidelines established by the institution will be followed. The paperwork for this process is initiated by the student, beginning in the Registrar's Office, and is then processed by the Associate Dean of Students. Professional staff members within the Counseling and Development Center may become involved in the assessment of these cases, and offer recommendations to the Associate Dean of Students regarding the withdrawal and refund request. In some cases, a psychiatric evaluation may also be required if a student is seeking reimbursement. If the withdrawal is determined to be for medical or psychological reasons, there may be some opportunity for partial reimbursement of tuition and fees. Partial withdrawals will not result in reimbursement of tuition and fees, and would be accomplished using the "drop" or "late drop" processes described below.

LATE CANCELLATION OF COURSES

If a student is interested in dropping one or more classes after the official "drop date", that student will go through the university's "late drop" process. The College Dean (or Graduate Dean for graduate students) or designee may request supporting documentation from the staff of the Counseling and Development Center if the student indicates he/she has been a client at the Center during the semester in question. The student will be required to sign a "release of information" form before such records can be released. If the student has not been a client at the Center, a referral by the Dean to the Center may be appropriate, but the diagnosis of the problem and the speculation about the timing of the onset may be difficult depending on the situation. It is understood that for undergraduate students, all decisions rest with academic departments and colleges in the late drop process. For graduate students, all decisions rest with the Graduate School.

INVOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL

If a senior staff member of the Counseling and Development Center or a physician in the University Student Health Services concludes that a mental health problem may be the cause of a student's engaging, or threatening to engage, in conduct that constitutes a potential for serious harm to himself/herself or to the safety of other members of the university community or of university property, he/she shall submit that conclusion in writing to the Student Conduct Officer. The Student Conduct Officer or designee shall evaluate the information provided and discuss the evaluation with the appropriate referring professionals.

If the Student Conduct Officer agrees with the conclusion, he/she shall attempt to confer with the student and parent/guardian/spouse or other family representative to attempt to secure voluntary withdrawal and referral for treatment. A student who withdraws voluntarily and later seeks reinstatement must comply with University procedures and conditions for reinstatement in force at the time he/she submits a reinstatement application.

If a student does not withdraw voluntarily, he/she may be subject to temporary suspension provisions of section UWS 17, Wis. Adm. Code (Appendix A). When the Student Conduct Officer deems it appropriate, he/she may require that within ten days the student be evaluated by a psychiatrist or an appropriate mental health medical professional, licensed to practice and practicing in Wisconsin, mutually agreeable to the student and to the Student Conduct Officer, for a medical determination of whether the student poses a threat to safety of himself/herself or others. The university shall bear the costs of the evaluation. Upon receipt of the psychiatrist's evaluation, the Student Conduct Officer shall comply with provisions of section UWS 17.12, Wis. Adm. Code, in making a determination of whether the student should be temporarily suspended. If the student refuses to be evaluated by a psychiatrist, as may be ordered by the Student Conduct Officer, the student may be subject to the provisions of chapter UWS 17, Wis. Adm. Code, as determined by the Student Conduct Officer.

The Student Conduct Officer is not required in all cases to order a psychiatric evaluation. If the Student Conduct Officer concludes that the student poses an imminent threat of safety to himself/herself or others, then he/she may seek immediate temporary suspension, under section 17.12, Wis. Adm. Code (Appendix A).

At any time that the Student Conduct Officer concludes that the student may not be competent to participate in these processes, if the student is not already being assisted or represented by another party, he/she shall arrange for the student to be assisted or represented by an advocate.

IMMEDIATE INTERIM WITHDRAWAL

If it is the consensus of the referring party (Residence Life Staff member, faculty, other student, etc.) and a Counseling and Development Center Senior Staff member that waiting ten days for a psychiatric evaluation to be done may result in imminent danger or harm to the student or to others, the Chancellor or his/her designee may approve immediate interim withdrawal

The student may be required at this time to obtain an immediate psychiatric evaluation and the content of the evaluation, with the student's permission, will be conveyed to the Chancellor or his/her designee to help in the TEMPORARY SUSPENSION PROCEDURES as authorized in UWS Chapter 17. (See Appendix A.)

In the event that the student refuses to comply with the requirement of an immediate psychiatric evaluation, or if an immediate psychiatric evaluation is not available, then the procedure in TEMPORARY SUSPENSION 17.12 UWS Chapter 17, will ensue without the evaluation and he/she will be automatically withdrawn from the University. The student forfeits his/her right to an administrative hearing through this process. If the student believes that these procedures are unfair, he/she must file a grievance through the student grievance procedure.

Reinstatement procedures must be followed to reenter the University.

SUMMARY/PLAN FOR DISSEMINATION

At the time of a crisis, prompt and effective responses are critical. Familiarity with these procedures will help to ensure competent and informed responses. While it may seem ideal for all persons to be knowledgeable about responses to psychological crises, the distribution of this document has been limited to positions listed below. It is the responsibility of these individuals to further disseminate this information as necessary and appropriate. Questions related to these policies and procedures can be directed to the Director of the Counseling and Development Center or the Associate Dean of Students. Each time the procedures are updated and approved by University Administration, new copies will be sent to the offices listed below.

Chancellor
 Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
 Assistant Chancellor for Student Affairs
 Assistant Chancellor for Administrative Affairs
 Dean, College of The Arts
 Dean, College of Business and Economics

Dean, College of Education
 Dean, College of Letters and Sciences
 Dean, Graduate School
 Associate Dean of Students
 Registrar
 Director of Residence Life
 Director of Student Health Service
 Campus Police Chief
 Walworth County Human Services

APPENDIX A

A copy of the UW-Whitewater "Mental Health Contract" is available in the [Forms Downloading Area](#).

UWS 17.12 TEMPORARY SUSPENSION

1. A student may be temporarily suspended by the Chancellor pending final action on the charges against him/her if his/her continued presence on campus would constitute a potential for serious harm to himself/herself or to the safety of other members of the university community or of university property. Except as otherwise provided in sub.(3), the student shall be afforded an opportunity for a preliminary hearing prior to imposition of the temporary suspension. In order to illustrate the types of conduct which warrant temporary suspension, the following examples are set forth. These examples are not meant to illustrate the only situations or types of conduct intended to be covered.
 - a. A student who was arrested and charged with possession of controlled substances with intent to deliver was discovered to have large quantities of LSD, heroin, methamphetamines, or barbiturates in his/her university dormitory room.
 - b. A student who was arrested for throwing a fire bomb into a university classroom building.
 - c. A student who assaulted another student in the student union was arrested for engaging in conduct regardless of human life.
 - d. A student whose behavior was judged by a psychiatrist to be psychotic, posing a threat to safety of himself/herself or others.
2. Before a temporary suspension may be imposed, the chancellor shall make an initial evaluation of the reliability of the information received and make such further investigation as circumstances permit. If the chancellor concludes that the conduct alleged warrants temporary suspension of the student, the chancellor shall notify the student of an intention to temporarily suspend the student and, at the earliest practicable opportunity, provide the student with an opportunity to be heard.
3. The chancellor shall maintain records of all attempts to notify the student in accordance with sub.(2), and, if all reasonable efforts to notify the student are unsuccessful, the chancellor may impose the temporary suspension without a preliminary hearing, provided, however, attempts to notify the student continue, and the student is afforded a preliminary hearing at the earliest practicable opportunity.
4. (a) The preliminary hearing shall be held as soon as possible.

(b) At the hearing, the student shall be given a statement of charges as required by s.UWS 17.07 (2) (a) and (b) and a summary of the reason(s) for concluding that the alleged conduct warrants temporary suspension.

(c) The issues shall be limited to consideration of the reliability of the evidence against the student and whether the alleged conduct warrants temporary suspension.

(d) The chancellor's decision may be rendered orally but shall be confirmed in writing as soon as practicable. The decision must be supported by credible evidence which is sufficient to indicate that there is probable cause to believe that the student engaged in the alleged conduct and at such conduct warrants temporary suspension.

5. The hearing on the charges as required by s. UWS 17.09 shall be commenced not later than 15 calendar days after the imposition of the temporary suspension unless the student requests a delay of the hearing and continuation of the temporary suspension until a later date.

UWS 1703 RIGHT TO PETITION FOR READMISSION. A student who has been expelled or suspended may petition for readmission. The petition must be in writing and directed to the chancellor of the institution which initiated the charges for which the student was suspended or expelled. Such petition may not be filed before the expiration of one year from the date of the final determination in expulsion cases, or before the expiration of one-half of the suspension period in suspension cases. The chancellor shall after consultation with the elected committee which serves as the faculty's executive arm and with the elected officers of the principal student organization, adopt procedures for determining whether such petitions will be granted or denied.

