

# Crises Response Protocol for Suicide Ideation and Attempts

## Paul Smiths College

For Faculty and staff of Paul Smiths College  
Developed and supported from the Counseling Center

*These guidelines are intended to assist faculty, professional staff, administrators and other College employees with addressing student related crises. While some campus officials play more active roles in responding to student crises, it is important for all College faculty and Professional staff to have a working knowledge of these guidelines. Although the College strives to respond in a consistent manner, the specific facts and circumstances of any crisis may lead the College to adjust the actions suggested in these guidelines.*

### Acknowledgements:

Appalachian State University

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Pensacola State College

Postvention: A Guide for Response to Suicide on College Campuses

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## Introduction and Purpose

### Introduction

Suicide, and the threat of suicide, is an issue every college campus in America faces. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults, accounting for over 1,000 college student death a year. Among those aged 15-24 years old, for every one death by suicide, there are approximately 100-200 suicide attempts.

If you are confronted with a student contemplating or threatening suicide, be assured there are knowledgeable and well-trained Paul Smith College staff members ready to assist the at-risk student and you.

Here is how to respond:

**Call for assistance by following the Suicide Prevention and Response Protocol on the following page.**

### Purpose

When a student in the College community is facing a crisis, the entire College can be affected. Therefore, it is critical that a basic framework exist, to enhance coordinated efforts that protect the safety and well-being of the student in crisis and each member of the campus community. The primary goals of these crisis response strategies are:

- 1) To provide support and assistance to the students in crisis and to ensure their safety and the safety of others.
- 2) To respond, as confidentiality regulations permit, to persons or groups such as:
  - The student' parents, legal guardians, and/or significant others;
  - The students friends, roommates, suitemates, and hall residents;
  - Various College offices that may provide services and support to the student and other affected members of the College community.
  - The College and surrounding communities, as appropriate.
- 3) To address system-wide issues surrounding the crisis.
  - Restore the environment to pre-crises stability
- 4) To work toward the prevention of similar crises in the future
  - Reduce imitation, contagion, and ripple effect

Paul Smith College seeks to manage crises in the community compassionately and to respect the needs of individuals to respond in their own ways, while also attempting to restore the community to a state of equilibrium as quickly as possible.

Please keep in mind that the strategies listed in this document are not all-inclusive. As additional needs for specific intervention strategies arise, the College will work toward making these additions or modifications.

## **Risk Factors and Warning Signs**

*Detecting early signs of a crisis can prevent potential harm to self or others by getting students the help they need quickly.*

### **Risk Factors**

*Risk factors are characteristics that make it more likely that an individual will consider, attempt, or die by suicide. Someone who has these characteristics may not be actively suicidal, attempt suicide or die by suicide, but they are at higher risk for dying by suicide than someone who does not possess these characteristics.*

Mental Disorders	Bullying	Easy Access to Lethal Means
Substance Abuse Disorders	Self-Harm	Lack of Social Support
Hopelessness	Previous Suicide Attempt	Stigma Associated with Seeking Help
Impulsive Tendencies	Family History of Suicide	Aggressive Tendencies
Job or Financial Loss	History of Trauma or Abuse	Relational or Social
Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Care		Knowing Someone Who has Died by Suicide

### **Warning Signs**

Warning signs are behaviors that signal, "I'm in trouble. I need help right now." Keep in mind that the presence of warning signs does not constitute a definitive diagnosis of suicide, but these are red flags and show that the student is currently struggling and does need help. Warning signs should never be ignored. If a student is acting in a way that is not how they normally act, you should check in on them. If you notice any of these warning signs, take action. Talk to the student.

Agitated	Showing rage	Falling grades	Anxious
Looking for a way to kill oneself	Wanting to seek revenge		Feel trapped
Feel hopeless	Extreme mood swings		Feel like a Burden
Having no reason to live	Sleeping too much or too little		Withdrawing and isolating
In unbearable emotional pain	Increased use of substances		Reckless behavior
Communication about suffering via social media		Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself	

## **Emergency Contact Resources**

## IS SOMEONE IN IMMINENT DANGER?

***Imminent Danger:*** Risk of death is high. They have a plan and access to a lethal means, are planning to make an attempt very soon, or are currently in the process of making an attempt.

YES



Call 9 1 1

Campus  
Safety:  
518-327-  
(6300)

UNCERTAIN



On-Campus

518-327-  
(6300)

NO



Call the  
Counseling Center

During Business  
Hours:

518-327-  
(6358)

For assistance  
after hours call  
Campus Safety  
and they will  
contact the  
counselor on call:

518-327-  
(6300)

*\*The Counseling Center emergency on call counselor is only when classes are in session. On-call is unavailable during college breaks, such as over Thanksgiving break, Winter break and Spring break. For assistance when class is not in session call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to facilitate connection to local mental health services. Campus Safety is available 24/7/365, even when classes are not in session.\**

## How to Respond to an At-Risk Student

*Take every complaint or reference to suicide very, very seriously. Apply the A.P.P.S. Intervention [Approach/Acknowledge, Probe, Promote Hope, Share Referrals].*

## **Judgement**

Any staff member involved in a crisis at the College must use his/her own best judgment regarding how to respond.

Questions which should be addressed include:

- 1) Which issues require immediate action?
- 2) What else should be done for the student in crisis?
- 3) Who else may be affected, and what support is available for them?
- 4) Who should be notified?

These questions must be answered quickly in an emergency. Guidance on answering many of these questions is presented in the following pages. When in doubt, consult with other professionals.

**Approach** the student. **Acknowledge** their pain. Be specific about the things you have noticed that have led you to start this conversation. Was it past behavior? Have they said things that have you worried? Is their class performance suddenly deteriorating? Make sure to have this conversation in a private place and give yourself plenty of time to talk to the at-risk student.

**Probe.** Ask questions about what is going on in the student's life. If you think suicide is on the student's mind, the best way to help the student is by asking them directly about suicide. Ask "Are you thinking about suicide" or "Have you thought about killing yourself?" Make sure you ask about suicide. If you ask someone who is suicidal if they are thinking about "hurting" themselves, they may say no. "Hurting yourself" and "killing yourself" are two very different things. If the student is thinking about suicide, ask questions that will get you the following information:

- Is there a suicide plan?
- Is there a means to carry out the plan?
- Is there a timeframe?

If the student has a plan and access to a lethal means, is planning to make an attempt very soon, or is currently in the process of making an attempt, this student is in imminent danger and should not be left alone. Get the student help immediately by calling 9 1 1.

**Promote Hope** by listening to the student. Try not to interrupt them and be willing to sit with them as they talk about the reasons why they want to die. Let them get all those reasons out, and then listen as they come up with their own reasons to live. Do not tell the student what you think their reason for living should be, as what you think are reasons to live may be stressors to the student. While listening, do not rush to judgement. Let them know they are not alone and that help is available.

**Share Referrals.** Have your resources on hand. While arranging for help, stay with the student. Do not leave them alone. Form a safety net. Ask the student if there is anyone else they feel comfortable talking to about this (parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, friends, priests, professors, mentors or coaches). For a list of resources you can refer the students to, see Appendix A.

If the student has a weapon, remove yourself from the area and call 9 1 1, and then inform Campus Safety immediately 518-327-(6300).

Recognize the limits of your expertise and responsibility. Help is available from one of the professional counselors in the Counseling Center 518-327-(6358). If after hours, call Campus Safety 518-327-(6300) and they will get a hold of the counselor on call.

***\*The Counseling Center emergency on call counselor is only when classes are in session. On-call is unavailable during college breaks, such as over Thanksgiving break, Winter break and Spring break. For assistance when class is not in session call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to facilitate connection to local mental health services. Campus Safety is available 24/7/365, even when classes are not in session.\****

## **How to respond to Suicidal Ideation or Gesture**

Suicidal ideation is a common medical term for thoughts about suicide, which may be as detailed as a formulated plan, without the suicidal act itself. Although most people who experience suicidal ideation do not die by suicide, a significant number of individuals do go on to make suicide attempts. The range of suicide ideation varies greatly from detailed planning, role playing, self-harm and attempts, which may be deliberately constructed to be discovered, or where death may be fully intended.

If a College staff member or faculty member is concerned about someone being a threat to themselves, they should follow the guidelines below. If you do not have the training or knowledge to conduct a suicide risk assessment and determine the safety of a student, consult a mental health professional. If you are unsure about what actions to take, consult with the Counseling Center at 518-327-(6358). If after hours call campus safety 518-327-(6300) and they will connect you to the counselor on-call. Remember, when a person's life is in danger, safety takes priority over privacy. Please note that at times, threats are vague or ambiguous and/or may be aimed at a future event or time. These threats should also be taken seriously and consultation should be sought as soon as possible.

## **Guidelines**

- 1) Ask the following questions in order to gain more full understanding of the scope of imminent danger:
  - a) Does the student want to attempt suicide?
  - b) Does the student have a plan to attempt suicide?
  - c) Does the student have the means to carry out that plan?
  - d) Has the student ever attempted suicide in the past?
  - e) If so, what methods of attempt have been used in the past?

The answers to these questions will help drive next steps. The answers to these questions will also help inform the Counseling Center or another mental health provider of the depth of the situation. If the student has a plan and access to a lethal means, is planning to make an attempt very soon, or is currently in the process of making an attempt, this student is in imminent danger and should not be left alone. Get the student help immediately by calling 9 1 1 and then contact Campus Safety at 518 327-(6300).

- 2) **Residence life staff** having this conversation should follow the guidelines laid out in the Residence Hall Crises Management Manual section
- 3) If the student is not in imminent danger, ask the student if they would like to speak to a counselor, and if they agree, contact the Counseling Center 518-327(6358). During regular office hours, the student can be walked over to the Counseling Center, but it is recommended that you call first, if possible.

If after hours or weekend, and the student would like to speak to a counselor, contact Campus Safety 6300 and they will get them in contact with the counselor on-call.



If the student does not want to speak to anyone else, consult with a colleague and/or call counselor on-call to consult about next steps. The Counseling Center 518-327-(6358) during regular business hours is available to consult with anyone concerned with a student in the Paul Smiths College community. During off hour please contact Campus Safety 518-327(6300) and they will get you in contact with the counselor on-call. Convey to the students that their safety is of utmost importance, and you want to make sure you are providing all the assistance you can, which includes reaching out for help. Follow the recommendation of the Counseling Center.

- 4) If the student is taken to the hospital, notify the VP of Student Affairs and Campus Life office 518-327-(6490) and the Counseling Center 518-327-(6358) so that a follow up visit can occur at the hospital. If after hours, call Campus Safety 518-327-(6300) and request to speak to Counselor on-call, also inform the VP of Student Affairs and Campus Life.
  - a) The counselor should create a case and follow-up as appropriate with additional information to key individuals as necessary.
  - b) If the student is transported, a Campus Safety officer will ask if student would like to sign a release of information for to be contacted at the hospital. The release of information form will be sent to the counseling center and to the admitting hospital.
- 5) If the student lives on campus, alert Residence life 518-327-(6337) about the concern, within the confines of confidentiality.
- 6) While arranging for help, do not leave the student alone. Stay with the student until help arrives.
- 7) In all circumstances of clear and imminent danger, call the 9 1 1 for immediate response. In all incidents involving PSC students, always contact Campus Safety 518-327-(6300).
- 8) Always remember that, when in doubt, consult with a professional.

### **How to Respond to Suicide Attempts**

The stress of the college experience and the normal developmental issues of young adulthood place some students under emotional pressure that occasionally manifest in an attempt by the student to

take his or her own life. It is philosophy and practice of the College to assist students with the stress and developmental issues of college and to render assistance to students by helping them resolve these issues. Among other offices, the College staffs and maintains the Counseling Center. It is charged with the responsibility for assisting students in need of counseling and psychotherapy.

The College is also aware that, when a student attempts suicide, other people in the College community are affected by this act. In a residence hall this would include those students who live in the same living unit with the student who attempted suicide. Significant others, roommates, teammates, and instructor are also affected by the attempted suicide of a student. The College has an interest in supporting other in the College community with the emotional stress and crisis atmosphere that accompanies attempted suicides. The Counseling Center and the VP of Student Affairs and Campus Life reaches out to individuals and groups that are most affected by the attempt. This usually takes the form of facilitating discussions of affected groups such as residence hall, circles of friends, classmates or academic departments. The Counseling Center is available upon request for postvention processing and debriefing following any significant event. Individuals are encouraged to seek help, if they desire it, in the Counseling Center.

### **Guidelines**

- 1) Upon learning that a student is attempting suicide, Campus Safety 518-327-(6300) should be notified immediately by telephone (issues of confidentiality do not apply when a person's life is in danger – In many instances, a suicide attempt constitutes a medical emergency e.g. bleeding from self-injury, confusion, or coma from drug overdose). If the suicide attempt is occurring on campus, contact Campus Safety 518-327-(6300).

If the attempt occurs on campus and is discovered by residence hall staff, staff should follow the guidelines laid out in the Residence Hall Crises Management Manual section.

- 2) Campus Safety will notify:
  - a) Notify 9 1 1 to dispatch medical personnel & NY State police if needed
  - b) The Counseling Center 518-327-(6358) or their on call counselor is the Counseling Center is closed
  - c) The VP of Student Affairs and Campus Life
  - d) Coordinator of Residence Life
- 3) **Medical emergency personnel** will transport the student to the hospital.

In some case in order to ensure the student's safety or that of other members of the campus community, a police officer may be required to escort student and direct the person's transport to the hospital for evaluation. These circumstances include violence, serious injury, or conduct likely to result in immediate serious harm to the student or others.

If the student is not experiencing a medical emergency, but is experiencing emotional crises, the counselor on-call will conduct an evaluation. If hospitalization is warranted, Campus Safety will contact 9 1 1.

- 4) The counselor on call will go to the hospital and render assistance as needed. When appropriate, VP of Student Affairs and Campus Life will contact the family of the student who attempted suicide and support will be given to family members and significant others at the hospital as needed. The VP of Student Affairs and Campus Life will coordinate their activities and involvement with the Crises Team at the hospital.
- 5) If the student is hospitalized, the counselor will do the following:
  - a) Gather as much information as possible, including the current condition of the student and the precipitating event that led to hospitalization, whether the student is in the ER and what their room number is, whether anyone such as friends or family is currently with the student, whether family, friends, faculty or anyone else has been notified of the hospitalization, and how the student was transported to the hospital.
  - b) Gather available information from available resources and online database to get a full picture of student status.
  - c) Check Student's FERPA access before having any conversations with parents.
  - d) If visiting the hospital, take business cards. Check in with the hospital's Crises Team before going to the room so that they will be aware you are there to see the student. If the student is able to converse, assess the student's needs, and offer to send out a faculty notification. If the parents are on their way, find out when they will arrive to meet them at the hospital if necessary.
  - e) If the student is hospitalized outside the Saranac Lake area, make a call to the treating hospital to see if it is possible to speak to the student.
- 6) The counselor will report all relevant information regarding the attempted suicide, including contacts with significant others, through the College care and concern database and case notes sharing as appropriate with the College's Housing, Counseling Center and other.
- 7) If the Counseling Center deems it advisable to, on behalf of the student, communicate with the VP of Student Affairs and Campus Life, the Counseling Center will have the student sign a release of information and facilitate that communication.
- 8) The VP of Student Affairs and Campus Life will discuss academic options with the student.

If the student decides that it is in their best interest to leave school, the VP of Student Affairs shall assist the student with navigating the withdrawal process.

If the student decides to remain at the College, the student will be encouraged to be engaged in psychotherapy. The Counseling Center will work with other College departments to reintegrate the student to campus environment and to develop with the student appropriate support mechanism. Additional support is provided and discussed at CARE Team meeting.

### **Follow Up**

**Any member of the College involved in the intervention of the suicide attempt** may call the **Counseling Center** to consult about how to best help the student following the attempt or to cope with their own emotions.

If hospitalization occurred, the counselor should create a case in the College care or concern database around the incident that resulted in the hospitalization. Make sure housing is notified if the student lives in the residence halls, and make them aware of any possible discharge date so that a wellness check can be done. Gather student's class schedule and information to send out a faculty notification on the student's behalf. Continue to touch base with student, and family, as needed. Make sure the Counseling Center is aware that a student has been hospitalized for mental health reasons and provide them with any details around the mental health concern

## **How to Respond to a Student Death by Suicide**

All students at Paul Smith's College are equally valued. Because all student deaths impact our community, whether that death be accidental, due to illness, or the result of self-inflicted injury, Paul

Smith's College responds to and recognizes all student deaths in a consistent manner. Faculty, staff and employees at Paul Smith's College are encouraged to read and abide by this protocol. No on student is more important or less important than another, and having a consistent approach to responding to all deaths is an important part of upholding this value.

### **Confidentiality Concerns**

College staff members who respond to crises must remain aware that students have a right to privacy and that, in some instances, they may not wish to have information shared with others. The Family

Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects the privacy of student education records. Once observations become written (electronically or on paper) they become FERPA Protected, unless these records are written by and remain in custody of the police. College police records are subject to Public Records laws.

As outlined in the Paul Smith's College Policy Statement on FERPA ([www.paulsmiths.edu/registrar/ferpa](http://www.paulsmiths.edu/registrar/ferpa)) staff may disclose FERPA information without consent when the disclosure is to Paul Smith's College officials (e.g. a person employed by the college in an administrative, supervisory, academic, research or support staff position, including health and medical staff, a person employed by the College Campus Safety) who have a legitimate educational interest in the records. An official has a legitimate educational interest if that official is performing a task specific to their position description, performing a task related to the discipline or education of a student, proving a service or benefit to the student or student's family (e.g. healthcare, counseling, job placement, financial aid) or maintaining the safety and security of the campus.

More information about FERPA:

Questions or concerns about FERPA should be directed to the College Registrar office 518-327-(6231) or by email at [registrar@paulsmiths.edu](mailto:registrar@paulsmiths.edu) .

In any situation, it is always best to attempt and obtain the student's permission to release information.