

## **MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE POLICIES**

### **University of Wisconsin, Whitewater 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 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. 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.

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.