

MENTAL HEALTH SAFETY POLICY

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to describe the College's approach to promoting the safety and security of students, with particular emphasis on mental health, and dealing with critical incidents such as suicidal behaviour.

Applicability

The policy applies to all students and all part-time, full-time and casual College employees participating in both the College's physical and online communities. This Policy should be read in conjunction with the [First Aid Policy](#); [Health Safety and Wellbeing Policy](#), [Code of Conduct](#), [Records Retention Policy](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

Introduction

Students in Higher Education are statistically more likely to suffer from mental health issues than their non-studying peers. Studies suggest that as many as one in four students will have a mental health issue at some point which can impact on (among other things):

- Academic performance
- Likelihood of completion
- General behaviour
- Personal safety (and the safety of others)
- Legal relations with the College

In extreme cases personal safety can be compromised up to the point of serious injury or even death. (It is important to note that suicide is not necessarily a mental health issue. There can be other causes.)

At the time of writing (September 2020) there are even greater pressures on students as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic which has meant unusual isolation, stress, and concern for the future (especially employment). We should anticipate therefore even higher numbers of students with mental health issues and prepare accordingly.

From a regulatory perspective, mental health is encompassed by the Safety and Wellbeing matters within the Learning Environment domain of the Higher Education Standards.

We are required to comply with all Standards at all times so this policy is directed at satisfying those parts of the Standards and providing

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guidance to staff in identifying and dealing with students with mental health problems. In this, it must be emphasized that College staff are not equipped nor trained to deal with mental health problems themselves. Accordingly, any action we take ought to be in the way of listening, support, consultation and referral. Under no circumstances should we ever attempt to “solve” the problem.

Higher Education Standards

The Standards that are directly concerned with wellbeing and safety are in Part A of the HES Framework (Standards for Higher Education) as a separate Section (2.3) within the Learning Environment domain. The Standards encompass (paraphrased):

- 2.3.1 avenues and contacts for support for students if needed
- 2.3.2 availability of specific types of personal support services
- 2.3.3 ensuring that support services offered reflect the needs of student cohorts
- 2.3.4 promotion of a safe environment
- 2.3.5 management of critical incidents.

The ‘support’ components of these Standards complement and supplement the learning support requirements encompassed by the Standards in Section 3.3: Learning Resources and Educational Support.

Intent of the Standards

The HES Framework broadly contemplates a provider recognising that it has a range of responsibilities to students and, in so doing, taking active responsibility for fostering an environment of wellbeing and safety for its students. This includes:

- conducting effective risk assessments and implementing preventative controls for the risks identified
- providing advice about actions to take, staff to contact and support services that are accessible (whether directly or through another party) if students’ personal circumstances are having an adverse effect on their education, including:
 - conducting evidence-based sexual violence, drug and alcohol abuse prevention education programs
 - providing support for affected students where needed (whether directly or through another party)
 - having systems and processes to respond to incidents and prevent recurrences.

These actions presuppose the provider will have an overarching framework of guiding policies and effective processes for these functions, and that there is sufficient corporate commitment to promoting wellbeing and safety with enough resources to support these activities. The Standards also presuppose that the provider will identify risks to wellbeing and safety, take steps to understand the

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support needs of particular student cohorts, and implement effective mitigation and management strategies for identified risks.

Mental Health Safety

Bearing in mind the size of the College and the short course duration for the great majority of students, it is not necessary for the College to have a dedicated Mental Health resource as is found in most universities. That does not relieve us of the need to have some other proportionate approach to dealing with students with mental health safety issues.

The College's approach is to act in accordance with the following steps:

- Identification
- Consultation
- Offer of counselling
- Referral to health professional or other appropriate institution such as Lifeline
- Referral to emergency service such as Suicide Callback Service
- Referral to emergency service such as 000 (last resort in only the most extreme and urgent cases)

Identification

In most cases a student with mental health issues will self-identify (often at enrolment). If they do not, and we have concerns regarding a particular student, we need to be sensitive, cautious and discreet. The best approach is to go straight to consultation without attempting diagnosis or referring to any specific problem.

If a student does self-identify as having a mental health issue, the student should be asked whether they would like the College to make any particular arrangement on their behalf. All such requests should be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Requests should be referred to the relevant Executive Director or, if the student requests it, the Student Liaison Officer.

Consultation

Ask whether a student is having any particular problems and whether there is anything the College can do to help.

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If the student reports a mental health issue or otherwise would like assistance, ask with whom they would prefer to speak. The normal options would be the relevant Executive Director or the Student Liaison Officer. It is important to emphasise that neither of these people are health professionals but they can organize access to counselling if that is the student's request.

Counselling

As per the Program Manual at 5.2.5, where a student has problems which go beyond his/her enrolment with the College of Law but have the propensity to affect his/her ability to complete the Program, the student should contact the Program Director or the Student Liaison Officer who will, if requested and in appropriate cases, arrange a consultation for the student with a professional counsellor. The College will pay for one such first consultation for the student.

Referral – Critical Cases

Where a student seems particularly distressed or potentially in danger, we should ask whether they might benefit from speaking with a health professional such as a GP.

If the problem seems urgent we might suggest to the student that they consult one of several hotline services such as Lifeline or Suicide Call Back Service (see below for details).

Any advice you give at this point ought to be referred immediately to the relevant Executive Director.

Suicidal Behaviour

Suicidal behaviour is defined as: talking about, threatening, planning or taking action to end one's own life.

Response to Suicidal Behaviour

Once again emphasizing that we are not health professionals nor trained to adequately deal with mental health or related critical incidents, there are still warning signs which require us to take notice.

If a staff member becomes aware of suicidal behaviour, the most important action is just to listen. However, they should try to ascertain the immediate safety and location of the student. They should ask whether the student would like to speak with anyone (eg, GP,

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counsellor, psychologist or Lifeline). They should then notify the relevant Executive Director to discuss.

In the most extreme cases where the threat of suicide seems urgent and imminent the Executive Director should determine whether a call to emergency services (such as 000) is warranted. Such a call is a last resort to be taken only where the Executive Director is concerned that the risk of inaction outweighs the inevitable invasion of a student's privacy.

If the Executive Director is not available, the staff member should attempt to contact the CEO, Deputy CEO or Student Liaison Officer. If none of these are available, the staff member is entitled to decide for themselves whether an emergency call is warranted.

Listening Tips

Before making any suggestion to the student, staff members dealing with a suicidal behaviour should limit themselves to listening.

Listening tips suggested by mental health experts include:

- Be patient and calm while the suicidal person is talking about their feelings.
- Listen to the suicidal person without expressing judgment, accepting what they are saying without agreeing or disagreeing with their behaviour or point of view.
- Ask open-ended questions (i.e. questions that cannot be simply answered with 'yes' or 'no') to find out more about the suicidal thoughts and feelings and the problems behind these.
- Show you are listening by summarising what the suicidal person is saying.
- Clarify important points with the person to make sure they are fully understood.
- Express empathy for the suicidal person.

Notwithstanding these listening tips, take every opportunity to refer the student to a health professional.

Administration and Follow Up

The College has a number of Mental Health First Aid Officers on staff as provided for under the Enterprise Agreement. These officers are available to debrief with any staff member who has had firsthand dealings with students evincing mental health or suicidal behaviour, should the staff member desire that. However, they are not trained as

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clinicians and should not be regarded as a resource for dealing with student problems. The list (and location) of the Mental Health First Aid Officers is [here](#).

Where the College has assisted a student with a mental health safety issue, including suicidal behaviour, a record of that assistance (and other arrangements, such as deferral) must be recorded in Salesforce without referring to any label beyond mental health safety. That note should be made by the senior staff member dealing with the issue, such as the relevant Executive Director or the Student Liaison Officer.

The senior staff member should also undertake to contact the student at an agreed future date (or dates) to check on welfare, irrespective of whether the student has re-enrolled with the College. Notes of such further checks should also be recorded in Salesforce and all such notes are subject to the College's Privacy Policy.

Additional Resources

Emergency Numbers

[Kids Helpline](#) 1800 55 1800

[Lifeline](#) (24-hour crisis telephone counselling) 13 11 14

[Suicide Callback Service](#) 1300 659 467

Call 000 for urgent medical attention or police attendance

Further Resources

[Mental Health First Aid Guidelines](#)

[Black Dog Institute: Suicide Prevention Resources](#)

[Beyond Blue](#)

[Public Health Association of Australia: Suicide Prevention Policy](#)

[Statement](#)

[TEQSA Wellbeing and Safety: Good Practice Guideline](#)

[Reach Out: Suicide Resources](#)

Related Documents

- Privacy Policy
 - Records Management Policy
 - Code of Conduct
 - Enterprise Agreement
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Note:

If there is a related Procedure that your Policy relates to please insert the name of the procedure within the document as a "[hyperlink](#)".

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