



STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SAFETY POLICY NZ

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 wellbeing, and dealing with critical incidents such as suicidal behaviour.

Reference throughout this policy to mental health is inclusive of a wider spectrum of mental health and wellbeing matters, from wellbeing through to, and including, diagnosed mental illness.

Reference throughout this policy to ‘student’ is to people actively enrolled in the applicable College programmes.

Applicability

The policy applies to all students enrolled in the College’s award based programmes, including: Professional Legal Studies Course; the New Zealand Applied Law Masters programme; or New Zealand Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice programme.

The policy also applies to all part-time, full-time and casual COLNZ employees participating in both COLNZ’s physical and online communities.

Introduction

Students in tertiary 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 and wellbeing 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.

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From a regulatory perspective, mental health and wellbeing for students in New Zealand is encompassed by the Education Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners Code of Practice 2021 ('the Code'). The Code extends to students in the College's Professional Legal Studies Course.

For students in the College's NZ Applied Law Masters programme, or NZ Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice, the Australian Higher Education Standards encompass safety and wellbeing matters.

This policy outlines COLNZ's practices which satisfy those parts of the above regulations, as well as providing guidance to staff in identifying and dealing with students with mental health and wellbeing challenges.

Mental Health Safety

COLNZ, through its subsidiary company FrontTier, have suitably trained psychotherapists employed as staff or independent contractors. These professionals can be called upon, in urgent or emergency situations discussed further in this document, for support with student mental health and wellbeing crises.

However, due to the size of COLNZ, and the short course duration for the great majority of students, the abovementioned staff are not intended to be dedicated mental health resource for student support (like what is found in most universities).

Instead, COLNZ adopts a proactive and staged approach to addressing mental health and wellbeing concerns that arise in the student population.

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

- Proactive identification
- Consultation
- Offer of support
- Referral to health professional or other appropriate institution
- Referral to emergency service such as Lifeline
- Referral to emergency service such as 111

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Proactive Identification

In most cases a student with mental health or wellbeing 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.

If a student does self-identify as having a mental health or wellbeing 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 Programme Director, or Education Support Manager.

All staff engaged with students must be alert to emerging concerns about student mental health or behaviour, including information provided by other students or external stakeholders, within the boundaries of privacy legislation.

If any staff member becomes aware of information in regard to the above, consent from the student should be requested and then the information should be escalated to the Programme Director or the Education Support Manager in a timely manner.

Consultation

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 Programme Director or the Education Support Manager. It is important to emphasise that neither of these people are health professionals but they can organize access to counselling or other resources if that is the student's request.

Counselling and other supports

Where a student has come to the attention of the Programme Director or Education Support Manager, such people will liaise with the student to identify the nature of support required.

If the Education Support Manager is of the opinion that the student may require support from a psychotherapist, the Education Support Manager

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must advise the Chief Academic Officer (NZ) (CAONZ) of this, or the CEO in the CAONZ’s absence.

If required - and if the student is in agreement - they will be put in touch with a psychotherapist for a triage call. The role of this psychotherapist is to determine, in their professional opinion, the appropriate next steps of support for the student.

If the Programme Manager or Education Support Manager believe that other support is required, and the student is in agreement, appropriate steps to direct or link students to community and public resources will be made. This may include resources around housing, food, clothing, finance, or other as necessary.

Referral – Critical Cases

Where a student seems particularly distressed or potentially in danger, we should recommend they speak with a health professional such as a GP or, if available, a member of the FrontTier team.

If the problem seems urgent we might suggest to the student that they consult one of several hotline services such as Lifeline (see below for details), and should offer to support them to make the call.

Any advice you give at this point ought to be referred immediately to the CAONZ or CEO if you are unable to advise the CAONZ.

Suicidal Behaviour

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

Response to Suicidal Behaviour

to If a staff member becomes aware of suicidal or harm 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 recommend the student speak with a professional (eg, GP, counsellor, psychologist or Lifeline) and offer to support to make the call.

If suicide or harm is mentioned, or there is a danger to the student or another person, we have a duty to disclose this information. The staff member should then notify the CAONZ to discuss, or the CEO if the CAONZ is not available.

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The CEO or CAONZ should determine whether a call to emergency services (such as 111) is warranted. Such a call is a last resort to be taken only where the CAONZ is concerned that the risk of inaction outweighs the inevitable invasion of a student’s privacy.

If the CAONZ or CEO is not available, the staff member should attempt to contact the Programme Director, or Education Support Manager. 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

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.

The senior staff member should also undertake to contact the student at an agreed future date (or dates) to check on welfare, irrespective of

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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. Students should be provided with an anonymous survey/form in which they can provide feedback on the process.

In addition, where applicable, this will also be noted in workplace health and safety reporting anonymously.

Any staff member involved in a crisis situation with a student or another staff member is able to access the College’s employee assistance programme to support their own mental wellbeing.

Other wellbeing matters

Where a staff member becomes aware of a wellbeing matter that is not related to mental health, this should be referred to the Education Support Manager within 48 hours. The Education Support Manager will liaise with the student to identify the nature of support required.

If the matter is an urgent medical event or crisis and the student is not in a College premise or hired venue: the Education Support Manager should be contacted so that the student’s emergency contact person can be notified, and so that the Education Support Manager can alert emergency services (if required) to the address on file. The most effective means of communication is through a phone call. In the event you are unable to reach this person, the following people can also be contacted: Programme Director, CAONZ, CEO.

If the matter is outside of standard business hours (for example the instructor is teaching an evening online class), the staff member should attempt to contact the four above listed people via their mobile numbers. However, at the staff member’s discretion, if they feel emergency services are required, they should attempt to contact emergency services with the information that they have available to them, while continuing to attempt to contact the four above people as well.

Where a staff member is dealing with a first aid or medical emergency on a College site or hired venue, the College’s First Aid Policy applies.

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Additional Resources

Emergency Numbers

Lifeline 0800 543 345 or free text 4357

Suicide Crisis Helpline 0508 828 865

Call 111 for urgent medical attention or police attendance

Further Resources

[Mental Health First Aid Guidelines](#)

[Mental Health Foundation](#)

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

[Beyond Blue](#)

[Reach Out: Suicide Resources](#)

[The Low Down](#)

Related Documents

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the:

[Student Code of Conduct \(see Appendix 7\)](#);

[Records Management Policy \(Open\)](#); and

[Privacy Policy \(Open\)](#).

In addition, this document applies with reference to the College's Internal First Aid Policy and Health Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Policy review

This policy is reviewed annually. On review, input received from students and other stakeholders, including any quantitative or qualitative data or complaints, are incorporated into the College's practices in this area.

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