

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE GUIDELINES

### SUICIDE THEAT / PSYCHOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

#### **Crisis Intervention**

If a crisis (i.e., when a student becomes very agitated, aggressive, or threatens the health and safety of him- or herself or others) occurs, the situation requires immediate and specific attention. The following guidelines for managing a crisis are recommended for all college staff and instructors:

*Remain calm.* Take a deep breath and relax. A calm demeanor will have a soothing impact on the student. A calm persona will help keep the situation in control and reassure the student.

#### **Unusual, Disturbing or Suspicious Behavior**

1. *Listen to the student.* Allow the student to talk about what has happened and vent his or her feelings. Respond to the student's feelings with empathy and respect. Avoid confrontational behavior.
2. *Focus the student.* Help the student to focus on the here and now.
3. *Ask for direction.* Is there something that the student wants done or that he or she wants to do by him- or herself? What would the student like you to do?
4. *Refer the student to help.* Before leaving the student, make sure that he or she is calm and in control. If there are any questions about the student being in control, do not leave him or her. Call Public Safety (517-264-7800) for assistance, or walk the student to Counseling Center, and make sure he or she is seen by somebody who is skilled in handling such situations.

These pointers are for situations in which you must respond immediately or for those in which you choose to respond on your own. Please be assured that whenever possible you are welcomed and encouraged to consult with either the Department of Public Safety (517-264-7194) and/or Counseling Center (517-264-7193). Please call either office whenever you have any concerns or questions about a student's behavior or utilize the Student Assistance Program:

<http://www.sienaheights.edu/personal/retention/>

1. *The Student Who Is Verbally Aggressive* A student may become verbally aggressive when he or she feels frustrated or out of control. He or she will lash out at others as a way to express these feelings. **Do** allow the student to vent and describe what is upsetting him or her but indicate that verbally abusive behavior is not acceptable. If the student gets too close to you, sit down and ask him or her to move back. Be aware of the closest exit. If necessary, walk the student to a quieter, but public place; if the student agrees, walk him or her to the counselor's office or to University Public Safety. **Do not** enlist the aid of other students to quiet the student down. **Do not** threaten, taunt, or push the student. **Do not** press for an explanation of the student's behavior. **Do not** get physically cornered.

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2. *The Student Who Is Violent or Physically Destructive* A student may become violent when he or she feels totally frustrated and unable to do anything about it. Being frustrated over a long period of time may erode the student's control over his or her behavior. This behavior may present the most immediate danger to staff and to other students. **Do** get help immediately from the Department of Public Safety (517-264-7800). **Do** present a calm appearance and let the student talk. Respond to him or her calmly and quietly. Explain that only behaviors that are safe for others are acceptable. Call for assistance, but first tell the student of your intention. **Do not** threaten, taunt, or push the student. **Do not** press for an explanation of the student's behavior. **Do not** confront or threaten the student. **Do not** get physically cornered.
3. *The Student Who Is in Poor Contact with Reality* A student in poor contact with reality may be having hallucinations or delusions or have difficulty separating fact from fantasy. He or she may behave in strange or unusual ways and is most likely scared, frightened, and overwhelmed; he or she probably is not dangerous. **Do** respond to the student with care and kindness, and maintain eye contact. Acknowledge the student's fears without either supporting or contradicting his or her misconceptions. Try to change the focus from the student's delusion to the immediate reality. Contact the Counseling Center or the Department of Public Safety. **Do not** argue or try to convince the student that he or she is irrational. **Do not** play along with the student's delusions. **Do not** demand, command, or order the student. **Do not** expect customary responses.
4. *The Student Who Is Depressed* A student who is depressed may go unnoticed. His or her behavior may indicate low energy, lack of interest in what is going on around him or her, feelings of sadness and hopelessness and difficulties with eating and sleeping. His or her personal hygiene may be poor. **Do** express concern and privately inquire if he or she is receiving any help. If not, make a referral using the Student Assistance Program or escort the student to the Counseling Center (517-264-7193). **Do not** discount the significance and intensity of the student's feelings. **Do not** say things such as, "Crying won't help."

**Do not** discount a suicide threat. If the student says he or she is contemplating suicide, notify the Department of Public Safety (517-264-7800). **Do not** leave the student unattended.

5. *The Student Who Is Anxious* A student who is anxious appears overly concerned with trivial matters. He or she may require very specific guidelines and seek more structure in assignments. Unfamiliar or new situations often raise his or her anxiety. Apprehension over assignments and concerns about perfection may be a result of unreasonably high self-expectations. **Do** be clear and explicit about expectations. Let the student express his or her feeling and thoughts. Recommend that he or she seek counseling. Remain patient with the student's demands for clarification and structure. **Do not** discount the student's anxiety by saying, "It's not really that bad, is it?" **Do not** blame yourself for the student's anxiety.

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6. *The Student Who Is Dependent* A student who is dependent may attach him- or herself to staff and demand more and more time. He or she is often lonely and has poor interpersonal skills. The student may see the amount of attention given to him- or herself as a reflection of his or her self-worth. **Do** set limits on the time spent with the student and limits on which subjects will be discussed. **Do** let the student make his or her own decisions. Refer the student for counseling or the Student Assistance Program. **Do not** let the student use staff as his or her only source of support. **Do not** assume the role of parental figure, give advice, or give more time and energy than can be realistically spent or is appropriate.
7. *The Student Who Is Suspicious* A student who is suspicious often is tense and distrustful. He or she may interpret minor oversights as personal rejection and overreact to insignificant occurrences. He or she is overly concerned with fairness and being treated equally. The student may place staff in seemingly no-win situations because he or she views attention as the staff wanting something from him or her and inattention as the staff having it in for him or her. **Do** express compassion without overstating friendship. Suspicious students often have trouble relating to others.  
**Do** be firm, steady, punctual, and consistent. Be specific and clear regarding the standards of behavior expected from the student. **Do** make a referral to Counseling Center (517-264-7193) or Student Assistance Program. **Do not** become the student's friend. **Do not** be overly warm and nurturing. **Do not** be cute or humorous; this can be misinterpreted as slights or rejections. **Do not** challenge or agree with any misconception.
8. *The Student Who Is Seductive* A student who is seductive may behave flirtatiously, ask many personal questions, make demands on staff time, and request special treatment. The student may misinterpret attention as meaning staff has special feelings for him or her. **Do** set limits on the amount of time spent with the student and which subjects will be discussed. See the student only in a classroom or an office. Keep the door open during meetings. Be careful about giving double messages or saying things that might be misinterpreted as having a personal interest in the student beyond the normal student/teacher relationship. **Do not** encourage the student by responding positively to inappropriate behavior. **Do not** give the student special treatment.
9. *The Student Who Talks About Suicide* The student who talks about suicide may mention in an offhand way that he or she wants to kill him- or herself or that he or she thinks about being dead or in a better place. The student may feel depressed and hopeless. He or she may threaten to do something that will end his or her life. **Do** take these threats or comments seriously. If the student mentions specifics about how or when he or she will kill him- or herself or if he or she has made a previous attempt, consider the risk very serious and get help. Express your concern for the student and strongly encourage him or her to see a counselor immediately. Escort the student to Counseling Center or the Department of Public Safety who will facilitate an appropriate referral. **Do not** make light of suicide threats. **Do not** discount the significance of the student's feelings of depression and hopelessness.

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The following indicators may suggest a greater likelihood of self-destructive potential. Having a familiarity with these may help you to identify individuals who pose a greater risk for committing suicide:

- Has previously attempted suicide
- Has a history of self-destructive behavior
- Is talking or writing about suicide
- Has a specific plan
- Has access to a gun or other lethal means
- Is suffering from depression or other mental illness
- Evidences a sudden change in personality / behavior
- Has experienced a prior tragedy (e.g., suicide of family member)
- Is involved with alcohol and / or other substance
- Describes his situation as “hopeless”
- Has sleep and / or eating disturbances
- Is talking about “not being around...”, saying good-bye
- Gives away possessions, etc.

Adapted from Unger, Karen. V. *Handbook on Supported Education: Providing Services for Students with Psychiatric Disabilities*. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 1998.

Adapted from Lerner, Mark & Shelton, Raymond. *Acute Traumatic Stress Management: Addressing Emergent Psychological Needs During Traumatic Events*. New York, New York: The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, 2001.

### SHU EMERGENCY

ON THE ADRIAN CAMPUS 9-911 or 7800 (SHU PUBLIC SAFETY)

CELL 911 or 517-264-7800 (SHU PUBLIC SAFETY)

STATE LOCATION, NATURE OF EMERGENCY, YOUR NAME AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT