



**A GUIDE FOR FACULTY
AND STAFF
FOR RECOGNIZING AND
RESPONDING
TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS**

A GUIDE FOR SMU FACULTY AND STAFF

The SMU experience is a time of growth, challenge and excitement. Students open a new chapter in their lives when they leave home, develop new relationships, respond to academic demands, and explore various career and lifestyle opportunities. Such interpersonal and intellectual development generally brings a sense of accomplishment to students. However, at times, the challenges of college life can lead to excessive stress, anxiety, depression, interpersonal difficulties, or a lack of direction.

Faculty and staff members may identify students who require assistance in order to successfully meet the challenges of their college experience. Faculty and staff members may be instrumental in directing students to helpful resources. If a student in distress can be recognized and referred to appropriate sources of help, then the student will be better able to learn and grow.

SMU has identified staff trained to respond in a crisis situation; these staff members make up the Crisis Management Team. The Crisis Management Team will be used in cases such as student, spouse or dependent death, sexual assault, attempted suicide, or major trauma affecting students' lives. Team members represent the Counseling and Testing Center, Mental Health Center, University Chaplain's Office, the Department of Residence Life and Student Housing, Public Relations, General Counsel, Dedman Advising Center, Risk Management, SMU Police Department and Student Affairs. The Crisis Management Team is chaired by the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs/Dean of Student Life.

**OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF STUDENT LIFE
214-768-4564**

WWW.SMU.EDU/STUDENTLIFE

GOALS OF THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM:

1. To assist in the direction of a crisis while paying special attention to the safety and security needs of community members.
 2. To offer counseling, spiritual guidance, and any other type of support needed and feasible to members of the University community, including their families.
 3. To use the experience of crisis, when appropriate, as a teachable moment which may enhance the quality of life for all of those touched by the experience.
-

WHAT TO LOOK FOR...

PHYSICAL INDICATORS:

- ✓ Withdrawal from usual social interactions
- ✓ Decreased productivity
- ✓ Emotional outbursts and crying
- ✓ Loss of interest or apathy
- ✓ Exam time "jitters"
- ✓ Increased or decreased sleep
- ✓ Weight gain or loss
- ✓ Grooming changes (lack of personal hygiene)

ACADEMIC INDICATORS:

- ✓ Increased mistakes
- ✓ Noticeable absence from class
- ✓ Excessively blaming others
- ✓ Decline in grades and/or quality of work
- ✓ Repeated requests for special accommodations (deadline extensions, late homework, papers, etc.)
- ✓ Coursework overtly indicates personal problems (essays about suicide, hopelessness, rage, etc.)

OTHER INDICATORS:

- ✓ Expressions of concern from a peer
- ✓ Direct statements made by the student indicating distress, thoughts of suicide, hopelessness, etc.
- ✓ Highly emotional behavior

WHAT TO DO... RESPONSE AND PROCEDURE

If the situation represents an immediate threat to personal health and safety, the University Police Department should be notified immediately.

The SMU PD or other departments identified by the Emergency Management plan will assume control and direct the University's response to the emergency.

In the event of a crisis as defined in the introduction, the Dean of Student Life should be notified immediately. The Dean will notify the members of the Crisis Management Team and will coordinate their response.

In cases of student death or injury, the Dean of Student Life will identify a staff member who will serve as SMU's contact with the parents or other members of the family. This will typically be the Dean of Student Life. The Dean will have the responsibility of notifying the family of the student, assisting the family with collection of the student's effects, answering questions about withdrawal from the University, including processing appropriate paperwork, accompanying the family on campus, and responding to other needs. The Dean will also arrange for the family to meet with the University Chaplain's office and other University officials as appropriate.

SMU Police Department....214-768-3388
Dean of Student Life.....214-768-4564
Counseling and Psychiatric
Services (CAPS).....214-768-2277
Mental Health214-768-2860
Chaplain's Office214-768-4502
Residence Life & Student
Housing (RLSH)214-768-2407

FACULTY AND STAFF INTERVENTIONS

1. EMERGENCY SITUATION – IMMINENT THREAT OF HARM

If a faculty or staff member has knowledge of or observes very unusual behavior, including, but not limited to:

- Student talks about harming self or others;
- Student engages in any type of self-destructive behavior; or
- Student exhibits overdose, tissue damage, vomiting and/or fluctuating levels of consciousness due to severe intoxication.

1) Call 911 and ask for paramedics who will determine the appropriate response;

2) Stay with the student until he/she is evaluated by paramedics or a mental health professional;

3) Notify the Dean of Student Life.

When the student is medically stable, Counseling and Testing/Mental Health staff will meet with the student, request the student to authorize a release of information and arrange transport to the hospital or determine a plan of transport. Prior to returning to the Residence Hall, the student must meet with a staff member from Mental Health to determine his/her suitability to return to the Residence Hall. The Dean of Student Life, in consultation with the Counseling and Testing/Mental Health staff, will make other notifications as appropriate. Counseling and Testing/Mental Health staff will conduct a follow-up with the person(s) who reported the student.

FACULTY /STAFF INTERVENTIONS (CONT.)

2. EMERGENCY SITUATION – RECENT THREAT OF HARM

If a faculty or staff member learns that a student has been talking about harming him/herself or others and/or engages in any type of self-destructive or psychotic behavior, he/she should consult with Counseling and Testing/Mental Health about mandating a referral to counseling. If necessary, the Dean of Student Life can assist in this process. The Counseling and Testing/Mental Health staff will request the student sign a release of information authorization, conduct an assessment, and arrange transportation to the hospital if necessary.

3. NON-EMERGENCY – NO IMMINENT THREAT OF HARM

If a faculty or staff member has knowledge of or observes the following behavior by a student:

- bizarre behavior;
- sleeping in excess;
- evidence of an eating disorder or depression; or
- drug use, including serious alcohol use

Such behavior should be reported to the Dean of Student Life. The Dean of Student Life will meet with the student and may require the student to meet with the Counseling and Testing/Mental Health staff or the Center for Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention as appropriate. If the student refuses to make such an appointment and the situation is serious enough to warrant it, the Dean may initiate disciplinary action and removal from the University.