

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO CRISIS AT EAST CENTRAL UNIVERSITY



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

These guidelines are intended to assist faculty, staff, administration and other ECU employees to address campus related crises. While some campus officials play more active roles in responding to crises, it is important for all ECU employees to have a working knowledge of these guidelines.

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Part I

Introduction

In any setting, a crisis requires both quick thinking and coordinated, efficient response. At East Central University (ECU), we may be presented with a number of such challenges, including student or employee deaths; suicide attempts; the impact of major stressors, such as the loss of friends or family members; disruptive behavior in classrooms, residence halls, and other parts of the ECU campus; and other crises.

When an individual in the university community is facing a crisis, the entire university may be affected. Therefore, it is critical that a basic framework exist to enhance coordinated efforts that protect the safety and well-being of the individual in crisis and each member of the campus community. The primary goals of these crisis response guidelines are:

- 1) To provide support and assistance to the individual in crisis and to ensure their safety and the safety of others.
- 2) To respond, as confidentiality regulations permit, to persons or groups such as:
 - a. The individual's parents, legal guardians, and/or significant others;
 - b. The student's friends, roommates, suitemates, and/or hall residents or the employee's colleagues and students;
 - c. Various ECU offices that may provide services and support to the individual and other affected members of the campus.
- 3) To address system-wide issues surrounding the crisis.
- 4) To work toward the prevention of similar crises in the future.

Please keep in mind that the **strategies listed in Part II are not all-inclusive**. As additional needs for specific intervention strategies arise, these additions/modifications will be addressed by ECU.

Confidentiality

ECU faculty and staff members who respond to crises must remain aware individuals have a right to privacy and, in some instances, they may not wish to have information shared with others. At the same time, there are situations in which it is necessary and legally permissible for information to be released. For example, information should be disclosed to appropriate individuals in connection with an emergency when the knowledge of such information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the individual or others. In other situations, the need to release information without the permission of the individual is less clear and, in such cases, the Office of Student Affairs or ECU administration should be consulted. In any situation, it is best to attempt to obtain the individual's permission to release information.

Different university records are subject to varying standards of confidentiality. For example, the ECU Student Counseling Center records are subject to stricter standards of confidentiality under state law than many other kinds of records. The general principle is that such records should not be released without the written permission of the individual to whom the record pertains. There

are a few exceptions to this principle, most notably, as mentioned above, records may be released to appropriate persons and entities when necessary to prevent serious harm to the client or another person.

Judgment

Any employee involved in a crisis at ECU must use his/her own best judgment regarding how to respond. Questions which should be addressed include:

- Which issues require immediate action?
- What else should be done for the person in crisis?
- Who else may be affected, and what support is available for them?
- Who should be notified?

These questions must be answered quickly in an emergency. When in doubt, consult with a supervisor or other professionals.

Coordination

Crisis prevention, intervention, and postvention involve a number of different ECU departments that typically communicate with each other and share responsibility for intervening and deciding who else to involve. In general, the Office of Student Affairs, the Office of Academic Affairs, the Office of the President, or the Department of Communications and Marketing will coordinate notification and crisis intervention services but, in some specific cases, other offices might be more appropriate for coordination.

Coordination of services involve a number of steps which include:

1. Assessing the situation, with particular attention to the nature and extent of the crisis.
2. Identifying person(s) who may need support.
3. Determining who will provide direct and indirect services.
4. Informing appropriate individuals or offices of the situation.
5. Following up with individuals and offices about what action they will take.
6. Following up to assess the impact of interventions.
7. Determining whether or not future action is necessary.

At the discretion of ECU Administration, a post-intervention review committee may be convened. If this is the case, persons who were involved in responding to the crisis, including all back-up and support services, may be involved in the review. In addition, persons affected by the crisis may be invited to provide feedback regarding the response.

Support & Resources

Support may be provided to a person in crisis through various methods. Persons who are in crisis may benefit from personal, academic and/or other forms of support. Providing support is a responsibility which can be shared among staff members, family, friends, and other persons. As

part of a broad-based umbrella of support, a person can be referred to such services as the ECU Student Counseling Center, ECU Health Services, Office of Academic Affairs, Housing and Residence Life, Financial Aid, off-campus resources, and other resources as appropriate.

Listed below are possible methods of response to *students* in distress that can be made by ECU employees. When appropriate, academic chairpersons and/or deans should be consulted.

1. Recommending and connecting student(s) to counseling or crisis support services (see Section II).
2. Submitting a Tiger Alert on the ECU Tiger Reporting page of the website.
3. Facilitating student contact with the Office of Academic Affairs to document or request accommodations for extended absences.
4. Connecting the student to other appropriate campus resources and supports, such as the Student Resource Coordinator, Housing and Residence Life, Office of Student Affairs, Athletics, etc.

Possible methods of response to *employees* in distress that can be made include:

1. Recommending and connecting the employee to counseling or crisis support services (see Section II).
2. Connecting the employee to the ECU Employment Services Office or individuals in the employee's line of administration.
3. Connecting the employee to other appropriate campus or local resources and supports.

PART II

Response Strategies for Specific Cases

- General Crisis Intervention
- Suicide Crisis
- Additional Crises & Response Strategies

General Crisis Intervention

Crisis intervention is immediate. If the person is in immediate danger, please dial 911 or contact ECU Campus Police (580) 559-5555. If you are unsure what constitutes being in immediate danger, review the list below and/or contact the ECU Student Counseling Center or Campus Police. During Counseling Center hours, call 580-559-5714 or go immediately to Room 137B, Memorial Student Union Building. **MAKE IT CLEAR THAT SOMEONE IS IN CRISIS.** Every effort will be made to respond immediately.

A person who is experiencing a psychological or emotional crisis often needs immediate help and intervention. Examples of serious crises are:

- Suicidal or homicidal thoughts or impulses
- Sexual or physical assault
- Hearing voices

- Overwhelming loss, such as a death
- Has not eaten in a few days (not due to illness)
- Has not slept in a few days (not due to illness)
- Talking about threatening behavior
- Highly erratic or unusual behavior

Tips for Recognizing an Individual in Distress

Individuals in distress may seek out persons who they view are caring and trustworthy. An important factor in helping others may be your expression of interest and concern. To help identify a person in distress, look for the following signs.

Change in Academic Performance

- Poor Performance
- Excessive absences
- Erratic attendance
- Avoiding participation
- Dominating discussions
- Disruptive behavior
- Repeated requests for special consideration
- Lack of interest in school or stated intention to withdraw
- Negative interactions with peers
- Significant change in attitude or performance
- Exaggerated emotional responses
- Excessively anxious

Unusual Behavior or Appearance

- Depressed or lethargic
- Hyperactive/rapid speech
- Deterioration in hygiene
- Observable signs of injury
- Strange/bizarre behavior

References to Stressors

- Relationship problems
- Death of significant person
- Legal difficulties
- Physical or sexual assault
- Experiencing discrimination

References to Suicide, Death, Homicide

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Verbal or written references to suicide
- Verbal or written references to homicide
- Isolation from friends or family

What Can You Do for the Distressed Person?

If an individual reaches out to you for help or if you decide to approach the individual, consider the following:

1. If the person is in immediate danger, dial 911 or contact ECU Campus Police (580) 559-5555 or the ECU Student Counseling Center (580) 559-5299. If you are unsure what constitutes being in immediate danger, please contact the ECU Student Counseling Center or Campus Police regarding the above issues you have noticed.
2. Talk to the individual in private. Choose a time when neither of you will be rushed for time. Give the person your undivided attention. If you initiated the contact, express your concern in a caring, non-judgmental manner.
3. Listen to the individual's thoughts/feelings. Be sensitive and non-threatening. Show the individual that you are listening by repeating the content and feelings back to them. Let the person talk.
4. Give hope. Sometimes a person just needs to hear that things are going to get better. If possible, suggest resources such as the ECU Student Resource Coordinator, Student Counseling Center, family, friends, or clergy. Also, assist the individual in accessing other services offered by ECU, such as Health Services, the Writing Center, a student's academic advisor, Housing and Residence Life, or the Office of Student Affairs. It is not your purpose to solve the person's problems, but to give hope that there are options available.
5. Avoid judging. Judgment and criticism may only push the individual away. Respect the individual even if you do not agree with them.
6. Maintain boundaries. Maintain a professional relationship. A person in distress may not understand professional boundaries and may attempt to blur those boundaries.
7. Refer. Let the individual know that help is available at the ECU Student Counseling Center and through other local resources. The Student Counseling Center is located in Room 137B, Memorial Student Union Building (next door to the Nurse's Office), 580-559-5714. The hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Counseling services are free to all ECU students.
8. If a student appears to be in distress or consistently disruptive, but does NOT pose a threat, employees may submit a Tiger Alert on the ECU Tiger Reporting page of the website.
9. Follow up with individuals and offices to ensure help was received and to determine whether or not future action is necessary.

Suicide Intervention

If an individual has reasons to believe, either by direct knowledge or a report from another person, that someone is in any danger, report the situation immediately. The following procedures should be followed. Individuals should also take steps to ensure and maintain their own safety when helping others.

1. If an individual has threatened or displayed a cluster of alarming warning signs, appears to have a plan, or is in imminent danger and requires intervention, do not leave the

individual alone and dial 911 or contact the Campus Police at 580-559-5555. If it feels unsafe to remain in the situation, remove yourself to a safe location and immediately contact 911 or the Campus Police.

2. After the immediate crisis has been resolved, ECU administration or other appropriate personnel shall meet to evaluate the situation and decide on an appropriate role for the university to take in assisting the individual.
3. Confidentiality shall be maintained throughout these procedures.

Additional Crises & Response Strategies

ECU Campus Police have additional procedures for the following potential emergencies. These procedures can be found online at <https://www.ecok.edu/about-east-central-university/emergency-procedures/index.php> or by calling ECU Campus Police at 580-559-5555.

- Acts of Aggression
- Accident/Serious Injury/Illness
- Asbestos/Blood-Borne Pathogens
- Bomb Threat/Explosives
- Earthquake Procedures
- Fire Evacuation
- Tornado or High Wind Emergency
- Unwanted Intruder

PART III

Postvention Plan

Introduction

The postvention plan is intended for the use of ECU students and employees in the event of campus crises and/or deaths. Suicide postvention efforts address the need for predetermined strategies to effectively and sensitively respond to campus crises and deaths after they occur.

Crisis Response

Factual Information

- ECU will confirm as much factual information as possible before communicating with the campus community.
- ECU will consult the university attorney if needed and applicable.
- ECU will make every attempt to respect the family's wishes and not disclose any information until the family has been consulted or good faith attempts have been made. In some instances, a family may not respond; yet, for example, the university may still wish to offer counseling services and acknowledge the death of a student.

Dissemination within the ECU Community

- An identified ECU spokesperson, in collaboration with the Office of Communications & Marketing, will use care when sharing the information internally and externally about the crisis or death.
- ECU may notify its employees separately from the student population if necessary to better equip staff and faculty to respond to student needs.
- ECU will focus on safe messaging guidelines when providing any communications regarding the crisis or death.

Cultural Diversity

- ECU's postvention efforts will take into consideration the cultural diversity of everyone affected by a suicide or other causes of death, including the family, school, and community. This diversity may include differences in race, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability. ECU acknowledges that culture may significantly affect the way people view and respond to suicide and death.

Helping Students, Staff, and Faculty

Key Considerations

- ECU may provide different levels of support depending on the individual's needs when coping with a loss by suicide. ECU will attempt to provide students and employees with appropriate opportunities to express their emotions.
- ECU acknowledges the diversity of experiences and the wide range of feelings and reactions to a crisis students and employees may have, and will emphasize the importance of being respectful of others.
- The ECU Student Counseling Center will be available for students in need and/or referrals may be made for those affected by the crisis or death.
- ECU will also promote crisis hotline numbers, including the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988.

Debriefing Guidelines

- ECU will attempt to convene the crisis response team for debriefing as soon as possible. The suggested timeline for debriefing is within 1-14 days. This debriefing may include discussion of successes and problems; as well as things to do differently next time if applicable.
- ECU will identify a **debriefing coordinator** for each incident. The debriefing coordinator, in collaboration with campus administration, will ensure defusing and debriefing is conducted in an appropriate manner.
- The suggested debriefing model includes the following stages for defusing and debriefing:
 - Defusing

- Stage I: Introductions – Introduction of crisis response team staff to all individuals of concern, and review defusing process.
- Stage II: Reactions – Crisis response team will listen to reactions, normalize reactions, and review likely symptoms experienced after traumatic event.
- Stage III: Coping – Crisis response team will discuss coping strategies, how to reach out to support system(s), stress management, relaxation, and recognizing when coping strategies are not enough.
- Stage IV: Resources – Crisis response team will review available services including daytime and after hours crisis services.
- Stage V: Termination – Crisis response team will remain until group has dissipated; locate consultee to inform them of departure and availability for debriefing.
- Stage VI: Follow Up – Crisis response team will contact ECU the next day to assess current status of individuals of concern and offer debriefing services.
- Debriefing
 - Stage I: Introductions – Introductions of crisis response team staff to all individuals of concern, and review debriefing process.
 - Stage II: Disclosure of Events – Crisis response team will invite individuals of concern to disclose the details of the event from their own perspective.
 - Stage III: Feelings & Reactions – Crisis response team will discuss feelings and emotional responses of individuals of concern.
 - Stage IV: Coping Strategies – Crisis response team will normalize reactions, review coping strategies, and discuss when to seek further services.
 - Stage V: Termination – Crisis response team will review available services including daytime and after hours crisis services and additional resources and availability for further services.
- Furthermore, evaluation of the crisis response will be conducted. Suggestions for evaluation of the crisis response include the following:
 - If applicable, what classroom interventions were the most successful and why?
 - Which assessment and referral strategies were the most successful and why?
 - Which recovery strategies or policies would you change and why?
 - Do other professionals need to be tapped to help with future crises?
 - What additional training may be necessary?
 - What additional equipment is needed?
 - What other planning actions will facilitate future recovery efforts?

Anniversary of the Death

- When appropriate, ECU may acknowledge the anniversary date, particularly with individuals who were especially close to the deceased or those affected by the crisis.

ECU may provide additional support to these individuals since mourning can be a long-term process, and an anniversary of a loss can trigger the grief and trauma they experienced at the time of the death.

Memorialization

ECU acknowledges there are many key considerations to take into account in regards to memorials. The following are important recommendations:

- All deaths should be treated in the same way so no prejudice is associated with the cause of death.
- Memorializing is an important part of grief, but should not glamorize or romanticize either the individual or the death. Instead, it should focus on how the individual lived, rather than how they died.
- Meet with the individual's friends and coordinate memorialization with the family in the interest of identifying a meaningful, safe approach to acknowledging the loss.
- Be sensitive to the cultural needs of the individual and the family.
- If spontaneous memorials are created, monitor these for messages that may be inappropriate (hostile or inflammatory) or that indicate individuals who may themselves be at risk.
- Memorials may be left in place until after the funeral (or for up to approximately five days), after which the tribute objects may be offered to the family. The university may release a public statement to let individuals know that the memorial items will be removed and who the intended recipients of the items will be, i.e., inform the community that the items were not disrespectfully removed.
- Discourage requests to create and distribute images of the deceased, such as on T-shirts or buttons.
- If online memorial pages are created, encourage the creator to promote safe messaging guidelines, local resources, and accurate information. Monitor the page for students or employees who may be at a greater risk.
- Encourage students and employees to channel their energy and passion (and greater community) in a positive direction, balancing the community's need to grieve with the impact that the proposed activity will likely have on others in the community, particularly on those who might be vulnerable to contagion.
- Support appropriate student led memorials by offering resources to students and employees who are in attendance.

ECU faculty, staff, or students seeking to raise funds for the family or in memory of the deceased, must work with the ECU Office of Advancement and/or the ECU Foundation to coordinate their efforts.

Working with the Community

Key Considerations

- ECU will encourage appropriate, open, and constructive dialogue about the crisis,

however, at times, employees may be instructed to be cautious of legal or confidentiality considerations.

- ECU and the ECU Police Department will maintain communication with local law enforcement to ensure any communications from the university do not interfere with any ongoing investigation.
- ECU will also collaborate with local law enforcement as needed to ensure student and employee safety during postvention efforts.

Guidelines for the Media Spokesperson & Working with the Media

ECU will utilize an **identified media spokesperson**, in collaboration with the Office of Communications & Marketing, to ensure news is released to the media in a deliberate and consistent manner. The following are recommendations when working with the media. These recommendations may also apply to others, who may be working with individuals affected by the crisis.

- Do not glamorize or romanticize the victim or the suicide.
- Do not oversimplify the causes of suicide.
- Do not describe the details of the method.
- Do not include photographs of the death scene or of devastated mourners, which can draw in vulnerable youth who may be desperate for attention and recognition.
- Use preferred language, such as “died by suicide” or “killed himself or herself” rather than a “successful” suicide or “unsuccessful” attempt.
- Include messages of hope and recovery.
- Consult suicide prevention experts.
- Include a list of warning signs, since most (but not all) people who die by suicide show warning signs.
- List the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number (988) and include information on other local and national resources.

Social Media

The Office of Communications and Marketing maintains the official university social media pages. All official university social media communications will be developed, regulated and posted by said office.

Key Considerations

- Following a suicide death, individuals may immediately turn to social media for answers. ECU may use social media to appropriately disseminate information, share prevention-oriented messaging, and offer support to campus individuals who may be struggling.
- All social media posts regarding a crisis or death will be created and approved by appropriate spokespersons and/or administration.

Disseminating Information & Responding on Social Media

- ECU may use their website and social media outlets to share any of the following information when appropriate and approved by ECU administration.
 - The funeral or memorial service (schools should check with the individual's family before sharing information about the funeral)
 - Where individuals can go for help or to meet with counselors
 - Facts related to mental illness and the warning signs of suicide
 - Local mental health resources
 - The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 or www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org for live chat
 - Other national suicide prevention organizations or resources
 - Information that emphasizes help-seeking and suicide prevention.
- ECU aims to respond to social media in a way that emphasizes safe messaging and promotes resources available to the campus community.

Suicide Contagion

Key Considerations

- Contagion is the process by which one suicide death may contribute to another.
- Contagions are relatively rare, but should be addressed in an appropriate manner. It is also important to recognize the impact of highly publicized suicide deaths, such as those of celebrities, which may contribute to contagion.
- If there appears to be contagion, the university will consider taking additional steps beyond the basic crisis response outlined to avoid suicidal behavior and deaths. ECU will attempt to identify other individuals who may be at heightened risk of suicide and actively collaborate with community partners in a coordinated suicide prevention effort.

Identifying Others at Possible Risk for Suicide

- ECU will encourage suicide prevention training programs and information to aid campus individuals in identifying students who may be at heightened risk for suicide due to underlying mental disorders or behavioral problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, conduct disorder, and/or substance abuse) or who have been exposed to the prior suicide either directly (by witnessing the suicide or by close identification or relationship with the deceased) or indirectly (by extensive media coverage).
 - Special concern are the students who:
 - Have a history of suicide attempts
 - Have a history of depression, trauma, or loss
 - Are dealing with stressful life events, such as a death or divorce in the family
 - Were eyewitnesses to the death
 - Are family members or close friends of the deceased

- Had classes with the deceased, were teammates, lived in the same dorm or housing, were in the same university clubs, etc.

Suicide Clusters

- The possibility of contagion resulting in multiple suicides in a community (also known as a suicide cluster) is rare.
- However, if a possible cluster is suspected, ECU, along with trained mental health professionals, will be available to meet with distraught students or employees to offer counseling services and other necessary resources.

ECU Campus Resource Guide



This resource guide focuses on behavioral health & related services and was compiled by the ECU Campus Suicide Prevention Grant Program for ECU students and employees. [Click Here](#) for additional community and national resources.

EMERGENCY OR CRISIS

- **In the case of an emergency**
 - Call 911
 - Call 580-332-3875 (ECU Police Department)
- **Suicide Crisis**
 - Call or Text 988 (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline)
- **Nonemergent/nonsuicide-related crisis**
 - Call 211 (United Way)
- **Poison Control Center**
 - 1-800-222-1222
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline**
 - 1-800-522-SAFE (7233)
 - 1-800-787-3224 TTY for the Deaf
 - 1-855-812-1001 (Video Phone)
- **National Child Abuse Hotline**
 - 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)
- **Family Crisis Center Domestic Violence 24 Hotline**
 - 1-580-436-3504
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline/Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)**
 - 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
 - www.rainn.org
- **Trevor Project (LGBTQIA+ Support)**
 - Call or Text 1-866-488-7386

CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

- **ECU Counseling Center**

- Free and confidential counseling for students
 - Phone: (580) 559-5714
 - Email: ccenter@ecok.edu
 - Location: Memorial Student Union Building, Room 137B

- **Brandon Whitten Institute**

- Mental health, substance use, and suicide prevention and training office (For counseling, please visit the ECU Counseling Center.)
 - Phone: (580) 559-5815
 - Email: bwainstitute@ecok.edu
 - Location: 831 East Main Street Ada, OK 74820

- **Addiction and Behavioral Health Center**

- Up to 6 free and confidential counseling sessions for students and employees
 - Phone: (580) 332-3001
 - Email: bsmith@addictionbhc.org
 - Location: 230 E. 12th St, Ada, Oklahoma 74820 (off-campus)

- **Food Bank**

- Available to all currently enrolled ECU Students. No income requirements.
 - (580) 559-5208
 - Email: doubcar@ecok.edu
 - Application Link: https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?EastCentralUniv&layout_id=10

- **Tribal Resources**

- Resources designed to help Indigenous students succeed
 - (405) 652-5372 (The Chickasaw Nation Recruitment and Retention Program)
 - Email: kale.lampkin@chickasaw.net
 - Follow the link for more information and additional resources: <https://www.ecok.edu/current-students/student-services/tribal-resources.php>

- **ECU's Veterans and Military Resource Center**

- Resources designed to help Veteran and Military students succeed
 - (580) 559-5541
 - Email: veteransupwardbound@ecok.edu
 - Location: 808 E. Main St. Ada, OK 74820

- **Career Center**

- Resources designed for students and alumni to identify, develop, and implement their career goals
 - Phone: (580) 559-5890
 - Email career@ecok.edu
 - Location: ECU Charles F. Spencer Administration Building, Room 163

- **Academic Success Center**

- Resources designed to help students succeed academically
 - Phone: (580) 559-5696
 - Email: asc@ecok.edu
 - Location: ECU Charles F. Spencer Administration Building, Room 262

- **Office of Testing and Accessibility**

- Resources designed to help students with disabilities succeed
 - Phone: (580) 559-5297
 - Email: tas@ecok.edu
 - Location: ECU Fentem Hall, Room 302

- **Tommy Hewett, M.D. Wellness Center**

- Provides quality fitness programs and facilities for ECU students, faculty, staff, and the community
 - Phone: (580) 559-5744
 - Email: bwilliams@ecok.edu
 - Location: Bill S. Cole University Center, Second Floor