

NUMBER: STAF 1.07

SECTION: Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support

SUBJECT: Student Suicide Attempts, Threats, or Gestures

DATE: June 1, 1992

REVISED: October 18, 2016

Policy for: Columbia Campus  
Procedure for: Columbia Campus  
Authorized by: Vice President for Student Affairs  
Issued by: Student Health Services

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## I. Policy

Suicide is known to be a leading cause of death for college and university students. In addition, suicide, attempted suicide, and suicidal gestures have a significant detrimental effect, not only on the involved student, but on others in the campus community. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance that outlines an appropriate medical and psychological response to suicide attempts, threats or gestures by students currently enrolled at the Columbia Campus, University of South Carolina.

This policy is to enhance the safety and well-being of both individual students who may be at risk and other members of the campus community. When the university believes that there is a direct threat to the safety of a student, or any other person, is at risk, the university may contact appropriate family members, individuals a student has identified as emergency contacts, or others as the university deems necessary or appropriate under the circumstances.

The policy outlines a two-fold approach: 1) to educate and promote discussion about self-abuse and violence, and 2) to provide crisis intervention and prevention services.

For the purpose of this policy, suicide is the purposeful act of causing one's own death; attempted suicide is any act, threat, or gesture in which a person engages in life threatening behavior(s) with the intent of jeopardizing his/her life; and threatened suicide (gesture) is any expression of intent to seriously harm oneself or take one's life. The Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) is a group of qualified and dedicated USC professionals whose mission is to:

- Balance the individual needs of the student and those of the greater campus community
- Provide a structured positive method for addressing student behaviors that impact the university community and may involve mental health and/or safety issues

- Manage each case individually
  - Initiate appropriate intervention without resorting to punitive measures
  - Enhance quality of care
- A. The relationship of the university to its students is one which has, as one of its basic purposes, the creation of an environment conducive to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. Since a portion of this relationship involves the interaction between the student's personal welfare and his/her academic achievement, the mental and emotional stability of students is a primary concern for the university.
- B. Students experiencing mental or emotional instability or distress are encouraged to obtain professional assistance from one of the medical or counseling facilities on campus (Counseling and Psychiatry or Student Health Center).
- C. In order to provide for the safety and security of students, and maintain an atmosphere conducive to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, suicide attempts, threats or gestures by students are prohibited.
- D. It is the responsibility of all members of the campus community to support actions and efforts to enhance the mental and emotional stability of students.
- E. Educational programming will be offered by various units in the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support designed to promote the awareness and understanding of the complex dynamics of suicide and to recognize behaviors that may signal suicidal intent. Periodic programming will address issues of depression, general principles of mental health, stress, and other topics related to student concerns. These collaborative educational efforts will involve staff from University Housing, Campus Wellness, Counseling and Psychiatry, and other staff who work with students from across campus.
- II. Procedure
- A. The goal of educational programming and resources offered by various departments within the University of South Carolina is to promote understanding concerning the dynamics of suicide and to help members of the campus community recognize behaviors that may signal suicidal intent.
- B. When a university official becomes aware of a situation suggesting that either a suicide attempt may occur or that a suicide attempt, threat, or gesture by a student has occurred, then the following crisis intervention procedures should be implemented:
1. Staff at Counseling and Psychiatry will follow professional ethical guidelines when dealing with suicidal or potentially suicidal students. The general requirement that counselors keep information confidential may not apply when a counselor believes that disclosure is required to prevent harm to the student or others.

2. If concerned over either the mental or emotional well-being of a student or the possibility of a suicide attempt, or if the student has made a suicide threat, the university official should contact the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT, 803 777-4333) and request assistance. If the situation occurs after normal operating hours and immediate assistance is needed, contact 911.
3. If a suicide attempt or gesture has occurred, the university official should initiate an appropriate medical response:
  - a. Render first aid or other immediate assistance to the student as possible and as needed.
  - b. If a medical emergency exists, call 911 from your mobile phone or 9-911 from a campus land line. You may also request through USC's 9-911 system that Counseling and Psychiatry be notified.
  - c. A follow up BIT referral should also be completed.
  - d. If no medical emergency exists, immediate physical and psychiatric evaluation is needed. Initial evaluation is provided on campus by Counseling and Psychiatry during normal business hours. To initiate this process during normal operating hours, contact the University Police at (803) 777-4215. Advise them of the situation and request assistance. Counseling and Psychiatry can be reached at 803-777-5223 during normal business hours. Contact the BIT (803) 777-4333 and advise them of the situation. After normal operating hours, contact the University Police and request assistance.
  - e. Transportation should be provided by Richland County Emergency Medical Services ambulance (for medical emergencies) or by University Police for non-medical emergencies. The University Official should stay with the student until transport or other assistance arrives.
- C. Following the incident, the student may be required to spend at least one night in a hospital for observation and/or treatment when recommended by the University Psychiatrist or attending physician.
- D. If the student's behavior warrants it, involuntary or voluntary hospitalization at an appropriate medical or mental health facility may be ordered by the University Psychiatrist, or other appropriate attending physician, in accordance with South Carolina State Law.
- E. The student must have a follow up evaluation by a member of the Counseling and Psychiatry staff or designee regardless of a student's decision to be treated by another provider. This evaluation must occur within five days of the incident or within five days

of the student's return to campus if treated off-campus. This time period may be adjusted at the university's discretion.

- F. Notification of the student's parents/guardian by BIT, University Official or attending Physician may occur when deemed necessary. Both FERPA (34 CFR 99.36) and HIPAA (Public Law 104-191) provides for the release of normally protected data when it is believed that the individuals' health or safety to self or others is jeopardized.

A decision regarding the student's continuation at the university will be made using procedures contained in STAF Policy 6.29, Student Mental Health Disturbances and the BIT protocol. BIT protocol can be found at [www.sc.edu/BIT](http://www.sc.edu/BIT).

Questions should be directed to Counseling and Psychiatry 803-777-5223, the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) 803-777-4333 or Student Health Services at 803-777-3957.

Resources: Student Health Services at <http://www.sa.sc.edu/shs/>, Counseling and Psychiatry, <https://www.sa.sc.edu/shs/cp/>, Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255.

### III. Related Policies

STAF 6.29 Student Health Condition Disturbances  
<http://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/staf629.pdf>

### IV. Reason for Policy Revision

Policy reviewed for accuracy; no substantive changes required.