

## **Threatened, Attempted or Completed Suicide**

The University will endeavour to do all that can be reasonably expected to prevent a student from ending his or her life. However, the primary responsibility for this lies with the student concerned. Students who are very distressed are obliged to seek psychological or psychiatric treatment. The Counselling Centre is available to assist students who are contemplating suicide in order to prevent them from carrying out any attempts to end their life and to counsel other students affected by those who have threatened or completed suicide.

The Counselling Centre will operate an after-hours psychological emergencies number during the academic terms so that students are able to reach a psychologist if necessary when the Counselling Centre is closed.

### **Attempted Suicide**

- If a student has attempted suicide resulting in injury or has swallowed any potentially harmful substances (e. g. medication over and above what has been prescribed), this should be treated as a medical emergency and the student should be immediately transported to Settlers Hospital, preferably by ambulance.
- If the student has a private doctor, the doctor should be called to attend to the student at the casualty department.
- The doctor on duty at the hospital will decide on whether or not to admit the student. If the student is admitted, it is helpful for the Warden, Psychologist or person who arranged for the hospital admission to stay with the student until he or she is settled in a ward.
- If the suicide attempt occurs during office hours, the Head of the Counselling Centre should be contacted and informed. If the attempt occurs after hours, the on-call Psychologist should be contacted. The Counselling Centre can assist with the admission process if necessary.
- A Psychologist from the Counselling Centre will visit the student in hospital and attempt to do a clinical assessment; however, students are not obliged to cooperate and those with a Medical Aid scheme that covers the services of Psychologists may prefer to see a Psychologist in private practice.
- Admissions are a matter of public record and as this is a life-threatening situation the student's parents or family must be informed as soon as possible by the Warden, Dean of Students or Counselling Centre (preferably with the permission of the student concerned, but without permission if the student is unwilling or unable to give this permission).
- The Dean of Students should be informed as soon as possible during office hours by the relevant Warden or the Head of the Counselling Centre.

### **Threatened Suicide**

- If a student threatens suicide, the Counselling Centre or on-call Psychologist should be contacted immediately.
- A Psychologist from the centre will attempt to arrange to meet the student to complete a thorough clinical assessment. Ideally this should be done at the Counselling Centre, the Sanatorium or a University Residence. Psychologists are not expected to make house calls to private residences.
- The services of the CPU can be utilised when Psychologists are called to assess clients. A Campus Security Officer should be available to escort the Psychologist and wait while the Psychologist completes the assessment / crisis care if this is necessary.
- It is not always possible to visit the suicidal student. If the student has used the psychological emergencies number and the Psychologist is unable to visit the student because this is unsafe, impractical or because the suicidal student will not reveal where he or she is, the Psychologist will attempt to do an assessment by telephone and will attempt to locate the student.
- If it becomes necessary to search for a student on Campus or in the surrounding areas, the assistance of the CPU should be utilised. It may also be necessary to contact the SAPS.
- If, after doing a psychological assessment, the Psychologist is of the opinion that the student continues to pose a significant suicidal risk, the student should be admitted to Settlers Hospital. In this event the Psychologist should accompany the student to the hospital to facilitate this admission. Should the student not agree to an assisted or voluntary admission, they should be involuntarily admitted. In exceptional cases, the CPU or SAPS may need to detain and transfer acutely suicidal students, but only after other options are exhausted.
- The University Residences and the Sanatorium cannot provide adequate supervision for acutely suicidal students. Students who are acutely suicidal should be admitted into hospital and not discharged until they have been adequately assessed, regardless of whether they have actually harmed themselves or not.
- Alternatively, if appropriate, the students may be released into the care of their family / parents.
- In some cases, after a thorough clinical assessment, it may be possible for the Psychologist to resolve the crisis and the student should be allowed to continue with his or her studies and place in residence (where applicable) without interruption. In these cases it is preferable to arrange follow-up care at the Counselling Centre or with the student's Private Psychologist.

#### Return to Campus

- Any student who has been admitted to hospital because they have made a suicide attempt or have been considered at serious risk for making an attempt, should be discharged into the care of his or her family and should not return to residence or campus until they have permission to do so from the Registrar.

- Any suicidal student who is admitted to hospital voluntarily or involuntarily should be assessed by an Independent Psychologist or Psychiatrist to determine whether the student continues to pose a serious risk of suicide. A report based on this assessment should be sent to the Head of the Counselling Centre. The Head of the Counselling Centre will then make a recommendation to the Registrar based on the report. The University may set conditions for the student's return. For example it may be required that the student agrees to comply with their medical treatment and / or sees a psychologist for psychotherapy on a regular basis for a set period or until the psychologist can confirm that a further crisis is unlikely.
- Students who are distressed but not actively suicidal may leave the University to seek therapy / treatment and return without having an independent assessment.
- The usual arrangements regarding leave of absence can be made, with medical certification. The student can apply for an Aegrotat examination or extended DP if they qualify for this.

#### Suicidal Ideation

- Some students, particularly when depressed, may have thoughts about suicide without any suicidal intent. While these cases are not necessarily psychological emergencies, they do warrant careful clinical management.
- In cases when the student is undergoing psychological therapy at the Counselling Centre or the Psychology Clinic, the therapist must assess, in consultation with a supervisor or colleague if necessary, the severity of the ideation, and, where there is significant risk, consider the possibility of breaking confidentiality in order to either inform appropriate people in the student's immediate environment (Warden, parent or guardian) about being alert to the possibility of future problems or to institute crisis procedures.
- When suicidal ideation is expressed in a report submitted by the student for a class assignment or practical, the relevant staff member should show the material to the Head of the Counselling Centre or another psychologist working at the Counselling Centre in order to assess the degree of risk. The student should be invited for an informal interview by the Counselling Centre in order to ascertain his/her psychological status.

#### Completed Suicide

- In the case when a student ends his or her life, the SAPS / Emergency Services should be contacted immediately via the CPU, as should the Dean of Students.
- The student's parents / family should be contacted immediately.
- The Counselling Centre / on-call Psychologist should be informed.
- The Counselling Centre will be available to offer counselling to students affected by the death.