

DEALING WITH A CRISIS

The following six-stage model can provide with a guideline for handling crisis situations:

1. **Define problem:** Clarify in concrete terms what is going on with the student. What precipitated the crisis? Use active listening to help make this determination. Try to listen to the student without being judgmental. Ask open-ended question instead of close-ended questions. Close ended questions usually begin with verbs like do, did, does, can, will and doesn't. These kind of questions usually elicit one word answers like "yup" and "nope." Open-minded questions encourage people to respond with full statement and at deeper levels of meaning. Here are some examples:

"Please tell me..."

"How will that help you to..."

"Please tell me about..."

"Tell me specifically what happened..."

"What will you do about..."

2. **Ensure student safety:** Assess risk and lethality and provide for safety of student
3. **Provide support:** Listen empathically to the student and let them know that you care and are there to help them.
4. **Examine alternatives:** Help the student look at options such as getting help at the Counseling Center, calling people in their support system etc. Always seek consultation with the House Dean. Remember that the person involved in emotional crisis is not thinking clearly; encourage him or her to refrain from making any serious, irreversible decisions while he or she is in crisis. Talk about the positive alternatives that may establish hope for the future. If the student is suicidal or homicidal, help them see that they do not have to take the action now; there will always be that option later and it can be postponed.

You do not have to feel that you have to work out the students' long-standing problems for them. You are simply looking at immediate steps that they can take to help the situation.

If the student is suicidal, you will need to follow the protocol of the dorms. Let House Dean know of situation. You will probably need the assistance of campus police and the Counseling Center. Do not leave the student unattended while making the necessary calls. Solicit the help of others in the dorms to be with the student while you are making necessary plans.

Although you want to help, do not take full responsibility by trying to be the sole counsel. Let the troubled student know you are concerned – so concerned that you are willing to arrange help beyond that which you can offer.

5. ***Develop a plan:*** Work with the student to firm up how they will take the actions discussed in #4 above. Help them formulate a step-by-step plan for the alternatives described. Remember, that in extreme crises, people tend to not think straight and they may need help with basic tasks such as how to get to the counseling center, hospital etc.
6. ***Obtain commitment:*** Obtain agreement as to specific time, duration and number of activities required to carry out plan.

Here are some general “don’ts” of suicide/crisis intervention management that may help:

- Don’t lecture, blame or preach to students
- Don’t take lightly any suicidal or homicidal threat, gesture, or attempt
- Don’t criticize students or their choices or behaviors
- Don’t debate the pro’s and con’s of suicide
- Don’t deny the student’s feelings about suicide
- Don’t try to challenge for shock effects
- Don’t leave student isolated, unobserved or disconnected
- Don’t be passive
- Don’t overact – try to remain calm
- Don’t keep the student’s suicidal or homicidal risk a secret
- Don’t glamorize, glorify suicidal or homicidal behaviors in others past or present
- Don’t try to handle these situations on your own – ask for help
- Don’t forget to follow up