

Fordham University

Division of Student Affairs

A Jesuit University should distinguish itself by offering a human, social, spiritual, and moral formation, and for pastoral attention to its students and to the different groups of people who work in it or are related to it.
- 34th General Congregation, 1995

Suicide Prevention: Initiatives *and* Response Strategies

✧ *Our Primary Responsibility:* Above all else, to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of our students and community.

The Administrative Support Initiatives within Student Affairs

✧ **Administrative Staff**

The Deans of Students and Directors and Assistant Directors of Residential Life on all three campuses work closely with the Resident Assistants (RA's), Resident Directors (RD's), Security, Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS), Faculty and other staff to identify, track and report on students with psychological and emotional concerns including suicidality. Students who are observed to be suicidal may be mandated to work with CPS or outside counselors. Acute cases may be asked to leave housing and/or the University until psychological professionals and/or CPS document the student's fitness to return.

✧ **Staff Training**

In-service staff development training is sponsored by the Division for all full and part time staff, including administrators, secretaries and athletic coaches; a one day session on suicide prevention training was just completed on April 8, 2005. Annually, the Directors and Assistant Directors of Residential Life on all three campuses partner with CPS to train Resident Assistant and Resident Director staff on recognizing signs and symptoms of suicidality. This training from the psychological perspective is augmented by training during August on protocols for emergencies and reporting. Resident Assistants and Resident Directors receive refresher training on counseling and on reporting standards throughout the year, as information about students in psychological or emotional crisis must flow to administrative staff without delay.

✧ **Emergency Contact**

During all hours that our Offices of Residential Life are not open, Resident Assistants and Resident Directors are on-duty, including holiday breaks and over the summer. RA contact numbers are posted along with Security's on every floor. RDs are present in the hall and are paged by RAs or Security. The Assistant Directors of Residential Life on each campus live in the residence halls and respond to serious emergencies, and either a Director or Dean of Students is on-call for each campus. Contact numbers for Security, CPS and other Student Affairs staff are published in the Student Handbook, the Campus Assault and Relationship Education brochure, Security publications, in the student newspaper at the start of the year and via posters during new student orientation.

Parents are contacted by administrative staff in situations in which a student is transported to a local hospital for treatment and emergency care.

✧ **Emergency Response**

Working closely with Security and Counseling and Psychological Services, the Deans of Students, Directors or Assistant Directors of Residential Life and/or the Resident Directors may transport a

student to one of the local hospitals for psychological evaluation. **Parents are contacted in these cases, and the hospital, CPS and/or another outside caregiver must certify that the student is not a threat to themselves or others before they are permitted to return to housing and/or the University.**

≈ **Counseling Database**

A database is hosted on a dedicated server in the Student Affairs office and contains compiled information from any Student Affairs administrator working with any student on psychological or emotional issues. Access to the database has several levels of security, including password protection and fire wall protection, but allows all privileged staff to quickly access information on any student case. This information reservoir is being piloted at one of our campuses, with the possibility of expansion to the other campuses in the near future.

≈ **New Student Orientation**

The Deans of Students and Counseling and Psychological Services staff co-present to parents at Summer Orientation programs on “What to Expect in Your Freshman Year,” a program which includes emergency contact information and advice for parents if students are experiencing psychological or emotional difficulties.

≈ **Staff Work with Faculty**

The Deans of Students, and members of the Residential Life and CPS staff meet with Faculty Advisors each year before the start of classes to explain services and contact points should they encounter students with psychological or emotional difficulties. A similar program is conducted for the different College Council by the Deans of Students or the CPS staff at the start of each year.

≈ **The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**

As a Jesuit institution concerned for the well-being of its students, Fordham maintains the philosophy that parents under most circumstances should not be considered third parties in the context of FERPA. Therefore, as long as the student is determined to be a dependent or waives the right to nondisclosure to parents, our administrative staff will involve the parents in the educational process as may be appropriate and necessary, including notifications in situations that involve behavioral infractions of the Code of Conduct and University regulations, as well as counseling and medical emergencies. Students are confirmed as independent and emancipated through the registration process, and the University recognizes the legal responsibility to take affirmative steps to ascertain the status of the student. It must be noted that the Division makes an important distinction between our administrative staff, and our clinical staff in Counseling and Health Services areas. The staff in the latter areas must adhere to certain professional and ethical standards of clinical confidentiality, unless a situation arises in which they, in their professional judgment, determine that a student poses a serious physical threat to oneself or others. In these situations, we hold that they have a professional responsibility to provide the appropriate notifications to the administrative colleagues with whom they work, and to parents. Administrative staff outside of these two clinical areas may not be bound by the same clinical or professional standards with regard to parental notification.

The Clinical Support Initiatives within Counseling and Psychological Services

≈ **Counseling and Psychological Services: Basic Structure and Services**

The Counseling & Psychological Services at Fordham are available to all students at the Rose Hill, Lincoln Center and Marymount campuses, offered to students without charge, and are confidential in nature (i.e. files and tests are not a part of the student's educational record). The CPS office is staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of devoted mental health professionals all of whom are licensed psychologists, and doctoral trainees in psychology; services are augmented by a licensed

psychiatrist who provides extensive weekly hours under a collaborative physician's agreement. The office is open weekdays from 9AM to 7PM, and staff are on-call for emergency situations at night and on the weekends. The office provides a full range of support services, including thorough evaluation, individual and group counseling and psychotherapy, pharmacotherapy, career counseling and career testing, consultations about friends and roommates, workshops, outreach and presentations. In addition Fordham CPS provides frequent collaborative consultation to other departments within the Division including, among others, University Health Services and Disability Services.

Fordham University CPS has a long standing and popular psychology externship training program with an annual class of approximately fifteen externs. Under intensive supervision by licensed psychologists, externs provide counseling and psychotherapy for many Fordham students. In recent years, the training program has expanded to include a post doctoral fellowship in university mental health. Most students receive ten weekly sessions per year at CPS. Exceptions to the session limit are based on clinical and financial exigency. Students in crisis are seen as often as needed (including multiple weekly contacts) to resolve the crisis.

Fordham CPS maintains affiliations with a wide range of off-campus clinics, hospitals, and private practitioners. These referral options are a crucial link in the *continuity of care* available to our students. They include clinics and practitioners specialized in the treatment of particular psychiatric disorders and issues confronting students. These off-campus services are available at affordable rates. Where possible, depending on clinical realities and mindful of confidentiality concerns, Fordham CPS maintains follow-up communication with off-campus providers to ensure smooth transitions to and from off-campus care.

≈ Psychiatry Residency

Through its affiliation with Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, fourth year psychiatry residents can choose a four month *Elective in University Mental Health* at CPS. This enables CPS to extend our scope of service to include some of the more troubled and clinically complex students, by pairing these students with psychiatry residents who can treat them with a combination of psychotherapeutic and psychopharmacological interventions. CPS is discussing potential affiliations with Montefiore Hospital and Roosevelt Hospital to increase the numbers of psychiatry residents pursuing the *Elective in University Mental Health* at Fordham.

≈ Web Site

Counseling and Psychological Services supports an active and engaging Website, which includes information about staff, hours of operation, and frequently asked questions and answers on counseling and psychotherapy. The Website includes links offering free and anonymous self-screenings for suicidality, depression, alcohol abuse, anxiety, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as suicide prevention and other hotlines.

≈ Jed Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Through its affiliation with The Jed Foundation, Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) utilizes the internet to offer students a wealth of information and resources related to suicide prevention. Students visiting the CPS home page can screen themselves for depression and suicidality. In addition faculty and/or friends can use the site to screen a student they are concerned about.

≈ Partnering With Faculty Initiative

Through this alliance with faculty, CPS continues to expand the numbers of Fordham faculty knowledgeable about suicide prevention and the importance of the early identification and referral to CPS of potentially suicidal (or otherwise troubled) students. This initiative features outreach to

academic deans and faculty advisors, and, in a recently expanded phase of this initiative, features outreach to professors via their departmental faculty meetings. CPS has developed *A Guide to Suicide Prevention for Fordham Faculty* and also offers consultation to any professor concerned about a student.

☞ **The Gatekeeper Program**

This program increases the *Circle of Concern* for our most fragile students to the entire Fordham Community. Suicide Prevention Gatekeepers receive training in the early identification and referral of our most troubled students to CPS. More importantly, using a *train the trainer* paradigm Gatekeepers are trained to, in turn, train colleagues from their own departments throughout Fordham on how to recognize signs of suicidality and refer students in need to care. Recognizing the explosion in psychiatric difficulty nationwide, and the need for a community-wide intervention, The Gatekeeper Program makes suicide prevention at Fordham a truly institutional concern.

☞ **At Risk Meetings**

Senior staff from Residential Life and CPS meet regularly to review concerns about students who may be at risk for a range of serious mental health difficulties including severe eating disorders and suicidality. These meetings aim to flag for additional assessment any student whose ongoing and chronic suicidality appears to be peaking, or is otherwise in a state of elevated risk. **Parents are contacted by administrative staff in situations in which a student is deemed to be a threat to themselves.**

The University Response to Specific Tragedies

- ☞ All pertinent student affairs, campus ministry, public affairs and security staff respond to the scene immediately, and set up an emergency response station at a pre-determined designated location; staff then work from this location around the clock for as long as the situation requires;
- ☞ Prayer Services are offered to the community @ designated times and locations the day of or the following day;
- ☞ Counselors are available throughout the evening in question and throughout the days immediately following a tragedy, and into the weekend if necessary;
- ☞ Masses of Remembrance are offered at an appropriate time in the days after; counselors and campus ministry staff are available during and after these masses;
- ☞ Student Affairs staff are made available throughout the weekends; they are assigned to walk the halls and keep an eye on our students; in cooperation with Security, they are responsible for contacting counseling staff if there was a need during a down time;
- ☞ A student lounge in a designated location is set up with refreshments for students who want to gather somewhere other than their rooms, suites and hallways; dining service staff are available throughout the evenings and days for assistance;
- ☞ Campus ministers are available throughout the nights and weekends;
- ☞ Internal and external releases are issued; broadcast voice mail and e-mail messages are used to communicate to the entire University community; Trustees, Vice Presidents and Academic Deans are notified immediately following any incident;
- ☞ Transportation to funeral services is arranged for the community through the various student affairs offices.