

# Rendering Assistance to Students Who Have Attempted Suicide or Who Exhibit Other Life-Threatening Behaviors

Policy 403.2

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose

1.1.1 The purpose of this policy is to establish the conditions and procedures for responding to students who have attempted suicide or other life-threatening behaviors, to insure medical response when an attempted suicide occurs and to establish procedures for their reinstatement to the University.

## 2 Scope

## 3 Definitions

### 3.1 Administrative Health Officer

The person designated by the University to perform the duties specified in this policy.

### 3.2 Administrative Withdrawal

An administrative action which involuntarily removes a student from the University with the stipulation that reinstatement is conditioned on the student meeting stated criteria.

### 3.3 Attempted Suicide

The act of attempting to take one's own life.

### 3.4 Life-Threatening Behaviors

A clinical diagnosis of a behavior pattern that, if continued, is likely to result in death (e.g., anorexia nervosa).

### 3.5 Threat of Harm

A condition which would lead the Administrative Health Officer to conclude that a person's behavior or a predisposition to act out behavior is likely to cause harm to the person or others.

## 4 Policy and Procedure Statements

### 4.1 General Policy

4.1.1 The stress of the college experience and the normal developmental issues of young adulthood place some students under emotional pressure that occasionally manifests itself in an attempt by the student to take his or her own life. It is the philosophy and practice of the University to assist students with the stress and developmental issues of college and to render assistance to students by helping them resolve these issues. Among other offices, the University staffs and maintains the Counseling and Psychological Services Center. It is charged with the responsibility for assisting students in need of counseling and psychotherapy.

4.1.2 It is the policy of the University to treat all attempted suicides as serious regardless of the degree of lethality involved in the attempt. The University is not prepared to judge the degree of sincerity in the attempt but will view the attempt as an indication that the student has on-going problems which are likely to interfere with the student's ability to make positive, self-directed choices and to perform academically.

4.1.3 In instances where a student attempts suicide or exhibits life-threatening behavior, the University is concerned first for the student's safety and well-being. At the time a student attempts suicide, the University will take steps necessary to remove the student from the University to an appropriate setting (i.e., supervision of parents, supervision of psychiatric hospital).

4.1.4 The University is also aware that, when a student attempts suicide, other people in the University community are affected by this act. In a residence hall this would include those students who live in the same living unit with the student who attempted suicide. Significant others, roommates, teammates, and instructors are also affected by the attempted suicide of a student. The University has an interest in protecting others in the University community from the emotional stress and crisis atmosphere that accompanies attempted suicides.

4.1.5 A student's decision to take his or her own life is so serious that the University cannot ignore this act. In most circumstances, this decision shows that a student has emotional or mental health problems beyond the student's immediate psychological resources. It often indicates that the student is not prepared to continue at the University in the semester in which he or she attempted suicide. Unless there is clear and convincing evidence that the student is no longer at risk to himself or herself and strong evidence that the student's continuation at the University is in the student's best interest, it is the policy of the University to administratively withdraw a student who has attempted suicide or who exhibits life-threatening behavior.

## **4.2 Operating Guidelines**

4.2.1 The following are guidelines for the implementation of this policy. It is recognized that special circumstances may arise which require deviation from these guidelines, and that administrative discretion must be exercised in these circumstances.

1. Upon learning that a student is attempting suicide, the Appalachian State University Office of Public Safety and Security should be contacted.
2. Staff in the Office of Public Safety and Security will notify:
  1. Medical emergency personnel
  2. The on-call mental health professional from the Counseling and Psychological Services Center
3. Medical emergency personnel will transport a suicide attempter to the hospital.
4. A mental health professional from the Counseling and Psychological Services Center will go to the location of the attempted suicide and render assistance as needed. This person will contact the family of the student who attempted suicide, when appropriate, and will render support to family members and significant others at the hospital as needed. In the event the student resides off campus or the attempted suicide occurs off campus, the mental health professional from the Counseling Center will coordinate his or her activities and involvement with mental health professionals from New River Mental Health under these existing agreements with this agency.
5. Following an attempted suicide, the Office of Public Safety and Security will report the details of the incident to the Administrative Health Officer in a timely manner.
6. The mental health professional involved will report all relevant information regarding the attempted suicide, including contacts with significant others, to the Director of the Counseling and Psychological Services Center.
7. The Director of the Counseling and Psychological Services Center will provide the Administrative Health Officer with information regarding the attempted suicide and the Director will make a recommendation to the Administrative Health Officer.
8. The Administrative Health Officer will make a decision based on the recommendation of the Director of the Counseling and Psychological Services Center and other relevant information as to whether the student should be allowed to continue at the University for that semester.
9. If it is decided that the student should not be allowed to remain, the Administrative Health Officer shall administratively withdraw the student from the University using the procedure and policies established in AdmPol25? .
10. If the decision is to let the student remain in the University, it shall be contingent on the outcome of a psychological evaluation. If the student is allowed to remain beyond that time, it usually will require that the student be engaged in psychotherapy.
11. In cases where a student is allowed to continue at the University, members of the Counseling and Psychological Services Center will work with other University departments to reintegrate the student into the campus environment and to develop with the student appropriate support mechanisms.

## **5 Additional References**

## **6 Authority**

## **7 Contact Information**

## **8 Original Effective Date**

## **9 Revision Dates**