

Critical Incident/ Disaster Response Protocol

It is expected that once in a great while the School community will experience crisis events that are either Acts of God such as earthquakes or acts of people such as suicides, murders, or physical assault. In accordance with University policy regarding responses to crises, the School has developed the critical incident protocol.

I. DEFINITION – CRITICAL INCIDENT

The clinical definition of a “critical incident” is an event which causes individuals to experience a strong emotional reaction that interferes with usual coping skills. The event has a level of trauma which is beyond the normal “living” experiences of those affected.

The resulting stress reaction may include emotional, physical, behavioral and cognitive changes evident either at the time of the incident or later. The impact of a critical incident may affect any member of the University, not only those most directly involved.

Examples of a critical incident may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Sudden death or serious injury which could affect members of the University community, e.g. accidents, suicide.
- Any incident which is considered to be a serious physical or psychological threat to members of the University community, e.g. robbery, extortion, fire, explosion, hazardous material and damage to property which is violent, unexpected or unnatural.
- Extraordinary events which cause injury, death or threats to individuals who are members of the University community, e.g. rape, assault.

A critical incident is also part of a disaster or event involving major damage and/or multiple victims which requires a full emergency measures response, e.g. fires, storms, major accident.

II. GOALS OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE

1. To respond to the personal needs of any persons affected by the critical incident.
2. To ensure the safety of persons and secure the interests of the University.
3. To disseminate appropriate information to interested parties (e.g. faculty, staff, students, community, etc.)
4. To advise the administrative head of the unit (s) affected of required actions.

III. EMERGENCY CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

The Dean will designate an Emergency Crisis Response Team comprised of key administrators with responsibilities related to the crisis. At minimum, the Emergency Crisis Response Team will include the Assistant Dean for Administration, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, the Associate Dean for Student Services, the Personnel Coordinator, the Director of Professional Development and Communication, and the Director of the Staff/Faculty Counseling Center. The Emergency Crisis Team is charged with the responsibility of responding in the event of a disaster or event involving major damage and multiple victims, or in other situations as so designated. The Team will be convened immediately in the event of a critical incident.

Three Day Survival Kits have been distributed throughout the two buildings of the School and are available for us in an emergency. The Assistant Dean for Administration is responsible for monitoring that the kits are available and accessible. The Emergency Crisis Response Team will be responsible for insuring that the kits are distributed and used in the event of a crisis.

IV. CRITICAL INCIDENT/ DIASTER RESPONSE PROTOCOL

A. Reporting a Critical Incident

In the event of witnessing a critical incident, all persons are directed to **call 911**.

B. Confirmation and/or Obtaining Information regarding Disasters/Critical Incidents:

1. In the event of a disaster or general emergency all persons are directed to tune to **KUSC radio 91.5 F.M.**
2. Information regarding conditions on and surrounding the campus will be posted on the USC website at <http://www.usc.edu>

For information during normal business hours, call **213-740-242**

For information after hours, call Public Safety **213-740-6000**

3. For emergencies affecting only the School of Social Work, information regarding conditions will be posted on the School's website at www.usc.edu/dept/socialwork/ . In addition, information will be available on the School's main telephone line 213-740-2711.

4. The School has a phone tree that goes into effect in the case of crisis to inform all faculty and staff. The Assistant Dean for Administration updates the phone tree every

semester to include all members of the School staff and faculty. Faculty and staff are asked to keep copies of the phone tree at both home and work in order to be able to access their phone calls at either location.

C. School Response to Disasters and Other Critical Incidents

When crisis occurs, it is the responsibility of administration, faculty and staff to act with organizational compassion designed to alleviate immediate suffering, enable people to recover more quickly, and increase attachment to colleagues and the organization. The School's response is designed to secure the immediate safety of members of the School community, respond to the short term psychological needs of persons, and establish a referral system to respond to the long term needs of affected individuals.

1. Faculty and Staff Responsibilities:

When a crisis occurs, faculty and staff are asked to observe the following guidelines:

- a. Recognize that in the face of crisis, normal business practice cannot be expected to continue. Faculty and staff are asked to be present, visible, and empathetic about the crisis event and students' reactions to it.
- b. Remain calm and try to help others regain their composure.
- c. Let students express their concerns and feelings rather than share information about the crisis.
- d. If known, give information about the resources that will be available to students to cope with their worries and grief. If the information is not yet available, students and others should be referred to the University and/or School website and emergency telephone numbers so that they can learn about the School's response.
- e. Do not try to provide therapy to students; rather guide them to resources where help is available. Staff and faculty should be referred to the Staff/Faculty Counseling and Consultation Center (telephone number 213- 740-0800). Students should be referred to the USC Student Health and Counseling Services (telephone number 213- 740-7711). Persons may suffer long term effects of crisis and consequently referrals may need to occur well after the crisis has ended.

2. Responsibilities of the Emergency Crisis Response Team:

In the event of a crisis, the Dean or her designee will immediately convene the School's Emergency Crisis Response Team to determine an organizational response to the crisis. The response will include contact with the University, including the Division of Student Affairs, and a plan for making grief counseling available to students and staff on a short-term basis. As soon as possible, the Dean will convene the School community (faculty, students, and staff) to address the trauma and inform them of the plan for action.

After an crisis event and responses have occurred, the Dean will call together the Emergency Crisis Response Team to conduct an audit of the critical incident to determine that procedures were followed, document any deviations from the plan, and provide feedback as to any necessary revisions to the critical incident protocol.

D. Responses to Critical Incidents Related to Individual Student Crises

1. FERPA guidelines:

Universities cannot divulge student records to parents and/or other relatives of Post secondary education students unless explicitly approved in writing by the student. Upon admissions, students will be notified of FERPA rules and informed that they may sign a written waiver to release records to a relative. These waivers will be kept with the School Registrar.

According to the University, “If non-directory information is needed to resolve a crisis or emergency situation, an educational institution may release that information if the institution determines that the information is ‘necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals.’ Factors considered in making this assessment are: the severity of the threat to the health or safety of those involved; the need for the information; the time required to deal with the emergency; and the ability of the parties to who the information is to be given to deal with the emergency. ”

2. Faculty/Staff Responsibilities in reporting Student Crises

In faculty-student relations, faculty are not bound by rules of client confidentiality. Rather, faculty have a responsibility to report important information about a student’s situation so that a plan of action may be devised.

3. Protocol for handling Individual Student Crises

If a student divulges intent to commit harm to themselves or others to a faculty member or if the faculty member has a reason to suspect that such harm may be committed, the **Associate Dean for Student Services must be immediately informed.** In cases in which the faculty member has heard the information from another student, he/she should immediately address the concern with the student in question, and report to the Associate Dean for Student Services. The Associate Dean will keep records of all reported incidents.

In the event of student crises, the Associate Dean will immediately request information from the student’s advisors, teachers, or others who may have knowledge about the student’s situation. The Associate Dean for Student Services will then meet with the student. If a FERPA waiver form is on file at the School, the Associate Dean for Student Services will inform the appropriate family members. If there is no FERPA waiver form on file, FERPA guidelines apply and no one other than the student can be contacted.

The Associate Dean for Student Affairs will then convene a team of persons with responsibilities related to the particular student’s well-being. This group will include, at minimum, the student’s advisor/ field liaison, and a representative from the University’s

Division of Student Affairs. The team will devise a plan for response to the student crisis, including whether the situation constitutes an emergency such that information must be released to authorities and/ or others. The Associate Dean for Student Affairs will also communicate with the Dean or her designee to consider whether the Emergency Crisis Response Team should be convened.

Once a plan has been developed, the Associate Dean for Student Services and the student's advisor will discuss with the student a plan for action detailing the responsibilities the student has for action, and what responsibilities the advisor has for regular contact with the student and with the field agency. That plan will be put in writing, given to the student, and kept in a confidential file by the Registrar.

4. Student Return to School after a Hospitalization

Students who take time away from school with the intent to return must complete a leave of absence form with their advisor. If no leave of absence form is on file, a student must be readmitted to the school through the school's readmission process.

If a student is hospitalized for either medical or psychiatric treatment, the student will be required to submit to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs a note from the physician giving medical and psychiatric permission to return to School, and detailing any necessary limitations or accommodations for the student's return. A new contract will be developed indicating responsibilities of the advisor and the student, including a plan for regularity of contact.