

Critical Incident Response Support by Student Health & Wellness

A critical incident is any sudden or distressing event that significantly impacts the emotional well-being of our college community—this could include a student group, classroom, or the broader campus. The SHW Critical Incident Response provides coordinated emotional and mental health support following such events. Our goal is to help students and staff process what happened, feel supported, and access resources that promote healing and resilience.

Why Mental Health Support Matters

- **Mental Health Outcomes:** Immediate mental health support after a critical incident helps decrease the likelihood of long-term mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and academic decline.

Source: National Center for PTSD, American Psychological Association (APA)

- **Risk Reduction:** Without support, students may engage in risky coping behaviors (substance use, isolation, academic withdrawal). Prompt outreach helps stabilize those at risk.

Source: Jed Foundation, CDC reports on crisis prevention

- **Mitigates Academic Disruption:** When students receive early mental health support, they are more likely to stay engaged in their studies and persist through the semester

Source: Healthy Minds Study, Active Minds research on campus mental health

What May Require a Response:

Examples of an incident requiring a supportive response: death (by suicide or other means), significant loss, community violence, natural disaster, severe accident, political outcomes, threats to public health, significant data breaches, etc.

How to Coordinate a Response:

If a critical incident affects your students or campus community, please contact the Dean of Health & Wellness or Director of Mental Health directly—via Teams message or phone—to initiate a response.

How We Respond:

The response is coordinated and supported by the college SHWC team, and may include SHW MH Clinician Supervisor, MH Advocate, MH Interns, MH Contractors, potentially College Nurses, Dean, MH Director and other identified college staff.



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Steps for Coordination:

Before Response:

1. Verify facts of incident
2. In the case of a death, respect the family's wishes and confirm if information is public
3. SHW will hold a meeting with the college point of contact to determine strategy/plan to support those impacted by the critical incident
4. In coordination with college PIO, prepare and share messaging to staff and/or students

During Response:

1. Determine the best way to communicate support available
2. Decide how and where to offer support (classroom, drop-in space, etc.)
3. SHW team will support by providing 1:1 or group support, psychoeducation, normalizing thoughts/feelings, discussing self-care and providing resources
4. Clarify with staff/students what information can be shared

Post-Critical Incident Response

1. SHW team will provide update to college leadership/point of contact on outcome of support
2. Assess whether additional days of support are needed (typically responses last 1–2 days)
3. Help transition individuals back to natural campus supports

