



POSTVENTION GUIDANCE: RESOURCES

Responding to a suspected student suicide: support for security staff

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Security staff are the first responders when a death occurs on campus in or out of business hours. They are also often the first to get a report of a death especially out of hours.

They need clear guidelines on:

- 1 Who to notify (both in and out of hours – eg ambulance/ emergency service, police, Chair of Postvention Team/Postvention Coordinator).
- 2 How to preserve the scene of the death/incident.
- 3 How to deal with those present. This may include students, staff and or members of the public, some of who may be distressed. The area needs to be cleared / witnesses need to be kept nearby, names and contact details ascertained, the police will require these and may wish to interview witnesses, including staff, students and or members of the public.
- 4 Who to call eg counselling or Head of Student Services to get assistance managing the distress of those present.
- 5 How to record the incident.

At the scene of the incident

It may help for security staff to have counsellors or other designated and trained first responders adjacent to the scene to take care of distressed students, staff, and public and to be available to security staff too for psychological first aid.

Support before end of day/night

Security staff should be offered support such as; one to one psychological first aid and/or a group debrief. Additionally, security need to be given written details of where they may seek follow up or additional support, either at the higher education institution Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or the College Student Counselling Services.

Follow up support

Following up with security staff at intervals post-incident is recommended, ie not assuming that one group debrief is all that's needed, or that post-trauma response won't change over time. Support should also be offered at the time of the inquest where their attendance is required.

It is important to remember that in responding to an immediate completed or attempted suicide security staff will be impacted emotionally, physically and cognitively. Additionally they may have to enter into a very traumatic scene and witnesses a body or body parts which are highly mutilated and may be unrecognizable – due to injuries sustained in a suicide eg gunshots/ falling from a height/ murder-suicide. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may be an outcome and the Higher Education Institution (HEI) owed a duty of care to its security staff to mitigate the impact in so far as possible.

The security staff also need to be kept informed as to the outcome of an attempted suicide. If a student is taken to hospital. While respecting confidentiality they should be told the outcome as soon as possible. They have invested a professional and personal effort in their response and carry a concern for the young person the family and the other students as well as their own part in trying to save a life.