

Student Mental Health
Crisis Intervention Procedure

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Section 1 Introduction

These procedures have been developed to offer clear, concise guidance to all members of staff, irrespective of your day-to-day role, on how to make an effective initial response if you become aware of a student whom you believe may be experiencing a mental health crisis. The approach taken is consistent with the NUS 'Think Positive' campaign (http://www.nus.org.uk/en/nus-scotland/student-mental-health/) which promotes good mental health and tackles the negative attitudes that exist about mental ill health.

This guidance is intended to ensure that a student is promptly referred on to the appropriate specialist services. You are not expected to be an 'expert' in mental health, you are simply asked to make a common sense judgement about onward referral.

Having a mental health crisis can mean different things to different people, but can include[1]:

- thinking about suicide or acting on suicidal thoughts
- having an episode of psychosis (where you are out of touch with your normal reality)
- doing something that could put yourself or other people at risk.

(A brief guide to mental health is available in Appendix 1)

A distinction is made between apparently 'urgent' or emergency situations, and those that are termed 'non-urgent'. The guidance is applicable to situations arising both within and outwith the working hours of the Conservatoire.

Urgent situations require immediate attention so that the student is referred on to the NHS and/or other specialist services, if appropriate. Urgent situations happen rarely in practice, but responding to them can be challenging. They require decisive action, and may stretch many of us beyond the usual activities associated with our individual roles.

Non-urgent situations are not uncommon, and many of us will already have experience of dealing with such situations on a regular basis. They do not require immediate attention but nevertheless require some form of prompt response. This usually involves checking with the student as to whether they are already accessing support, and if not, signposting them to appropriate services e.g. the Conservatoire Counsellor and Disability Advisor, usually within the Conservatoire.

In all cases, early intervention not only supports student mental wellbeing but also ensures that any relative issues regarding a student's academic progress and retention are addressed as soon as possible.

If you have any questions about this Policy, please do not hesitate to raise them with the Academic Registrar.

This policy is non-contractual and may be varied or withdrawn by the Conservatoire.

Confidentiality

When responding to a crisis situation, it is important to respect confidentiality. Reassure the student that any information they give will be treated with respect, but do not make promises about confidentiality that then make it difficult to act reasonably in dealing with the crisis situation. Information about the student should only be shared with RCS staff and external personnel who need to be directly involved in responding to the situation.

The RCS will comply with relevant legislation such as the Data Protection Act, the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act, the Human Rights Act, the Equality Act and the obligation of confidence. This includes the confidentiality of information provided in counselling (with the exception of what is excluded by law). Staff should treat all information disclosed to them by students with respect; however, when they feel concerned about a student, disclosing this information to key members of staff allows support to be offered. Staff should consider the appropriateness of promising confidentiality to students when an onward referral would be of greater benefit to the student; promising confidentiality may also make it difficult to act if an emergency arises and the promise may have to be breached if sharing the information is considered by the Conservatoire to be necessary.

Section 2 Responding to Urgent Situations

The situation is urgent if you believe the student is at serious risk of immediate harm to themselves or others. This may include for one or more of the following reasons:

- The student is at risk of serious self-harm (or has already self-harmed to the extent of requiring medical treatment).
- The student expresses suicidal thoughts or feelings, and you are concerned that they may act upon these.
- The student seems very disorientated or out of touch with reality.
- The student is threatening violence to people or property.

Urgent situations require immediate attention. The priorities are to address welfare and safety concerns and to ensure that the student receives appropriate specialist help, usually from the NHS, in relation to their mental health difficulties. The guidance given below is essentially that you assist the student by contacting an appropriate student support person in the AAS (Academic Administration and Support) office so that the emergency services can be called or other urgent action taken, as appropriate. If the situation (i) occurs out of office hours or (ii) is so urgent that contacting the AAS office would cause a delay that was likely to detrimentally impact the intervention to manage the student's health, you will need to contact Emergency Services yourself if

that is required. Following that please review the advice outlined on the website (https://www.rcs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Emergency-Contacts-20141.pdf).

Actions to be taken

2.1 Establishing Contact

In the majority of instances, it is likely that your concern for a student will arise when a student is actually with you. However, this may not always be the case.

If the student is located in the Conservatoire but not physically with you ask for their location and contact details (especially phone number). Provided that you judge it is safe for you to do so, arrange to go to their location as soon as possible. If possible, ask a colleague to accompany you to help assess how best to respond to the situation and take a mobile phone with you.

If the student is not located in the Conservatoire do not proceed to their location. Instead, ask for their location and contact details (especially phone number), and assess whether it is possible for them to meet you at the Conservatoire. If it is unrealistic or unsafe for the student to do so, advise them to stay in a safe place, and offer to stay in contact with them, preferably by phone. Follow the same steps below as you would for a student who was with you on campus, in order to arrange help from the appropriate emergency services. Ask if there is someone who could come and stay with them until the emergency or other services arrive.

2.2 Engaging with the student

In urgent situations, and especially where there is a risk of suicide, it can feel challenging to know what to say and how to say it. However, being able to engage with a very distressed student can help promote a sense of safety and control, and can also reduce the student's sense of isolation or hopelessness. Furthermore, simply staying with them and talking helps to 'hold' the situation until specialist help arrives.

Key Points:

- Where possible, ask a colleague to help you respond.
- Try to stay calm. Act proportionately.
- Don't leave the student alone. Engage with the student if possible, but put safety first.
- If the student confirms that they are very distressed, respond with concern and warmth to encourage them to keep talking to you. Be willing to listen without judgement, and avoid giving superficial responses.
- Be mindful that a minority of individuals in crisis may not appreciate the seriousness of the situation, or want to cooperate with those who are

trying to help. In these instances, it is particularly important to ask a colleague, and/or First Aider for assistance. You then have the back-up for explaining to the student the seriousness of the situation, and why it is important for you to take action.

- Suicide can sometimes be prevented by asking someone directly, where appropriate, whether they have suicidal thoughts or feelings. It is a common misconception that asking about suicide increases the risk. Ask now – don't wait if you have serious concerns.
- It is very common for someone who is feeling suicidal to state that they don't intend to make a suicide attempt. This will often be because they are all too aware of the impact of an attempt on significant others in their life. These are important 'protective factors' to look out for.
- If you judge the student to be at serious risk of immediate harm to themselves or others, e.g. if the student has a clear plan of how they intend to end their life, seek help straight away from the services listed in section 2.3.

2.3 Assistance from NHS services and police

Contact should be made as soon as possible with one or more of the following services, as appropriate:

Who	When	Number
Accident and Emergency	If you judge that the situation requires immediate medical assistance, and/or a student presents a possible danger to their own safety. Stay with the student, offering reassurance, until medical help arrives, unless you feel your own personal safety is compromised. There may be exceptional circumstances where a student requires to be transported to hospital rather than awaiting an ambulance.	999
Police	If you judge that the student presents a possible danger to their own safety or others.	999

	Stay with the student, offering reassurance, until the police arrive, unless you feel your own personal safety is compromised.	
GP or NHS24	If you judge that the situation does not immediately require an ambulance or police presence, and if the student is willing and able to cooperate, contact should be made with the student's GP or with NHS24 (out of hours).	GP – telephone Directory / website NHS24 - 111

2.4 Transport arrangements

In urgent situations, you should make such transportation arrangements as are reasonable to transport the student to receive emergency assistance if there are exceptional circumstances that mean the emergency or other specialist service will not come to the student.

Otherwise, in non-urgent situations, as a member of staff you are not expected to provide transport for the student. If you are in any doubt of the student's health and safety in getting to their GP, local A&E or mental health services unaccompanied, you should contact a member of AAS Student Support staff or Client Services to call a taxi and accompany the student.

2.5 Reporting

Report the incident to your line manager as soon as reasonably possible. They should then consider whether it is appropriate to forward information about the incident to any other members of staff. Consideration should also be given by your line manager as to whether it is appropriate for the student to be contacted by a member of staff after the immediate situation has been dealt with, and who that should be, e.g. the Conservatoire Counsellor.

You must also complete an 'Accident and Dangerous Occurrence Reporting Form', where relevant. Where possible, please name the student(s) involved in the incident. A copy of this form can be found on the intranet.

2.6 Support for you

Having dealt with the immediate situation, you are welcome to make contact with any of the services listed in Appendix 2. Taking a little time for debriefing

and reflection can help in various ways. It can provide reassurance that you took appropriate action and can address any outstanding issues. It can also help you 'stand down' after responding to an urgent situation so that you can get on with your everyday roles in work and at home.

Section 3 Responding to Non-Urgent Situations

This section should be read in conjunction with the Fitness to Study policy.

Many of us will have experience of being concerned about students who face adverse personal circumstances, or who are struggling academically. In these types of situations, it may be that there are grounds for believing that a student's mental wellbeing may be impaired. For example, they may feel stressed, have panic attacks, worry a lot, or feel depressed about their circumstances or suffer another mental ill health (see Appendix 1).

Sometimes it can be difficult to judge whether a situation like this is urgent or non-urgent. You might therefore find it useful to refer to the above section to see if it meets any of the criteria for urgent intervention.

If not, proceed with treating it as a non-urgent situation. This means that it does not require immediate attention, but nevertheless there will be prompt steps that you and others can take in order to ensure that a student receives appropriate support as soon as possible. Early intervention is crucial in tackling many mental health difficulties including stress, anxiety and depression. It can also reduce the impact of adverse personal circumstances on academic performance, and on progression and retention.

The priorities are to ensure that:

- The student receives any relevant support from you if you have an ongoing role with them, for example if you are their principal tutor, head of programme, level coordinator, and/or transitions tutor.
- The student is referred on to other appropriate sources of support, usually within the Conservatoire e.g. the Conservatoire Counsellor.
- Anyone else who has become concerned about the student (e.g. flatmate or other members of staff) and raised this with the Conservatoire has been reassured that the matter is being managed. Friends or flatmates of the student who attends the Conservatoire and who have expressed to the Conservatoire their concern may also find it helpful to be reminded that they can speak to the Conservatoire Counsellor if needed.

3.1 If a student seeks your assistance with a problem

Steps you can take:

3.1.1 Agree whether you are able to talk the situation through with them straight away, and how much time you have, or whether you need to

arrange a time in the near future. Find somewhere appropriate to meet, without interruptions, and with regard to privacy.

3.1.2 Try to respond in a concerned, non-judgemental, and empathic way to their situation and the distress it is causing them.

3.1.3 When talking, give them a bit of space to explain their situation. Ask questions that help clarify what is going on, how it is affecting them, and what are the immediate priorities and any longer-term needs.

3.1.4 Avoid acting in haste to 'fix' problems. If, however, in the course of the discussion, urgent issues emerge, please refer back to section 2.

3.1.5 Check if they are already receiving support from family, friends, AAS support staff, the Conservatoire Counsellor, or external services such as their GP. You should follow this up with AAS staff to see if they are already in touch with the student.

3.1.6 Agree whether there is support that you can reasonably offer, i.e. appropriate to your everyday role and relationship with the student.

3.1.7 For aspects of support that fall outwith your role and expertise, refer the student on to other appropriate sources of support, usually within the Conservatoire, e.g. the Counsellor and Disability Advisor. If you aren't sure which service is most appropriate, you must consult the Conservatoire Counsellor and Disability Advisor in the first instance and then inform the student of the next steps as soon as reasonably possible thereafter.

3.1.8 If it is appropriate to your everyday role, arrange to contact the student again soon to review the situation and take such further action and provide such further support as is appropriate. Arranging a follow-up discussion demonstrates your genuine concern for the student, and can be especially important if the situation could escalate or if it is likely to take a bit of time to resolve. If you are giving support to a student longer-term, remember to be clear with the student about what you can realistically help them with and when you need to refer them to additional sources of support.

3.2 If a student hasn't asked you for help but you are concerned about them

If you have noticed significant changes in a student's appearance, or in their mood or behaviour, this could be an indication that they are struggling to cope with performance, academic, or personal issues, and that their mental wellbeing is adversely affected. Alternatively, someone else (e.g. a friend or flatmate) may let you know that they are concerned about a student.

Personal changes to look out for include:

- Appearance - tired, rapidly losing or gaining weight, decline in personal hygiene
- Mood – sad, down, anxious, worried, angry
- Behaviour – unusually quiet or withdrawn, unable to focus/concentrate, irritable or argumentative, acting in an unpredictable or erratic way

Performance / Academic changes to look out for include:

- Fall in attendance levels
- Withdrawal from participation in class or group settings
- Failure to hand in coursework or turn up for assessments/performances/rehearsals
- Failing assessments

Steps you should take:

3.2.1 Sometimes it can be useful to consult with another member of staff who knows the student well, to see whether they also have concerns. Remember, however, to be mindful of confidentiality.

3.2.2 Share your concerns directly but sensitively with the student. Say that you are concerned about them. Ask if something is wrong and if so, how they are feeling. Ask if they are managing to cope with the situation.

3.2.3 If the student isn't coping well, and is willing to accept help, follow steps 3.2.1-3.2.5 in order to help the student manage the situation.

3.2.4 Occasionally, you may find that a student is unwilling to accept help, or is unwilling to acknowledge that they may be experiencing difficulties. In general, it is best to avoid trying to force the student to accept help, as they may just become defensive. Gently restate your concern for them and let them know that they can return to talk with you at any point in the future.

3.2.5 You might also want to consult any of these services for further advice about supporting the student, especially if you have been monitoring the situation and think it may be worsening over time.

3.3 Reporting

When you are dealing with a non-urgent situation you should consider whether or not it would be useful to pass on information to your line manager or to other staff in order to enhance the support available. (A student has the right to keep a disability confidential but, as set out in the Disability Policy, staff should strongly encourage a student to contact the Counsellor & Disability Adviser, as this is the most effective way

of arranging support.). In any event, if the student has disclosed a longstanding or potentially longstanding mental health illness or the Conservatoire is otherwise on reasonable notice of such an illness then by law (the Equality Act 2010) the institution is 'deemed to know' of the disability and certain support may require to be put in place. The student should be referred to the Conservatoire Counsellor and Disability Adviser, who should also be made aware of the student's illness.

Care should be exercised in relation to confidentiality: reassure the student that you will treat any information they give you with respect, and as stated above, avoid making promises about confidentiality that may then make it difficult to act. Information should only be shared by you with key RCS staff and with the purpose of supporting the student.

3.4 Support for you

Having dealt with the immediate situation, you are welcome to make contact with any of the services listed in Appendix 2. Taking a little time for debriefing and reflection can help in various ways. In cases where a student was willing to accept help it can provide reassurance that you took appropriate action and can address any outstanding issues. If the student was unwilling to accept help you may be left feeling concerned about them. In these instances, a debrief may help you realise that you have done all that can reasonably be expected at the present time.

Section 4 Suspension of a Student

Where a student has been causing serious concern because of a mental health problem and the Conservatoire's duty of care to others needs to be considered, it may be necessary to suspend a student from their studies for a period of time.

This step would only be taken if a student's behaviour is seriously disturbing others around them, and either support in dealing with this has been offered and declined, or support has been put in place but unacceptable behaviour has continued.

Where a student is living in Liberty House, and their behaviour is affecting other students' living and working conditions, Liberty staff, in consultation with the Academic Registrar, can require the student to move to alternative accommodation.

Where the student's next of kin/emergency contact is not able to assist in the practical arrangements, the AAS Welfare staff will endeavour to provide a reasonable level of support.

Section 5

Failure to comply with this Policy will be given careful consideration as it is appreciated that such health difficulties can be difficult to manage. You should be aware that failure to comply could, however, result in disciplinary action against you under the [Disciplinary Policy].

[1] www.rethink.org

Appendix 1

Brief guide to mental health and mental health difficulties

In recent years, there has been much effort at national and local policy level to de-stigmatise mental health issues, and in particular to promote an awareness that mental health and physical health are equally important to our overall wellbeing.

A key message is that many mental health difficulties are relatively common, and that in many cases recovery is eminently possible. Some mental health difficulties may endure but, with appropriate support and treatment, it is perfectly possible for someone to live a fulfilling life and succeed in their studies. The Mental Health Foundation offers a useful overview of current thinking (http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/an-introduction-to-mental-health/) .

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as:

'a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.'

By contrast, mental health difficulties can range from worries and grief we all experience as part of everyday life, to the most bleak, suicidal depression, or complete loss of touch with everyday reality. Some examples of mental health difficulties include, but this list is not exhaustive:-

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Easting Disorders
- Alcohol and mental health
- Drug use and mental health
- Stress
- Self-harm
- Schizophrenia
- Bi-polar Disorder

Appendix 2

Staff debriefing and support

Having assisted a student with a mental health crisis, you might appreciate the opportunity soon afterwards to have a short, confidential debrief with an appropriate person. This can be particularly useful if you found the incident stressful, if you had to take quick action to deal with an unfamiliar situation, or if you have leftover thoughts or feelings that you would like to reflect on.

You can seek support from the following:

- Your Line Manager
- The Conservatoire Counsellor

If you think you might benefit from one or more counselling sessions, rather than a short debrief, you can contact the Employee Assistance Programme (http://extranet.rcs.ac.uk/content/index.php?PAGEID=10160). Counselling is confidential and free of charge.

Appendix 3

Overview of Student Mental Health Crisis Intervention Procedures

