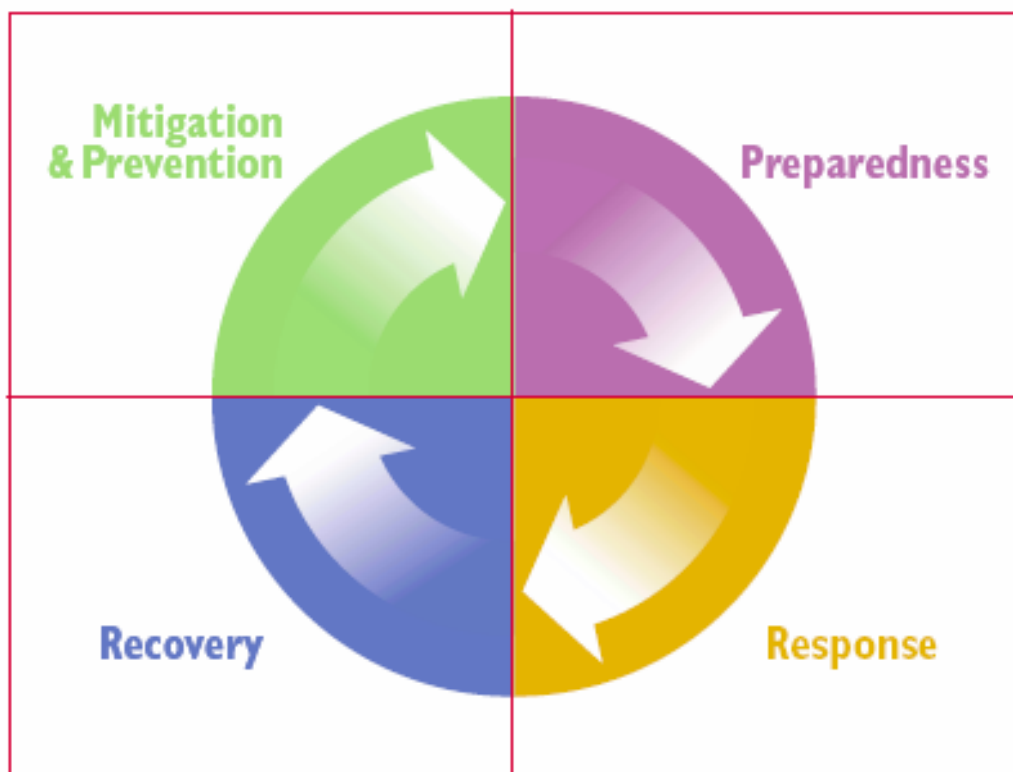


## Best Practices in Crisis Intervention



graphic from: [www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf)

### Crisis Response Paper

Crisis response is just one phase in a constantly evolving cycle in emergency management. Truly prepared campuses routinely assess their potential risks, mitigate the correctable issues and minimize foreseeable dangers, plan for imaginable crises, efficiently respond to, and recover from, actual emergencies, then reassess and re-plan for future crises based on new lessons learned. Most of the student crisis response plans that I reviewed for this paper built on existing campus emergency response procedures for situations that transitioned from an individual student's critical incident to an institutional crisis. The 'responding to a distressed student' plan on my campus is comparable to some plans, but weaker than the plans I

admired most. I believe that UCSB could strengthen its emergency planning and response efforts by incorporating elements from other institutions' strategies and by better educating the whole campus about the crisis preparation cycle. The College of Engineering, if not the whole campus at UCSB, needs a more comprehensive and more accessible crisis management plan.

The Division of Student Affairs oversees all aspects of campus-life at UCSB, including: recreation, housing, counseling and health services, disabled students program, EOP, international students and scholars, the visitors center, campus preschool and nursery program, financial aid and the registrar's office. The Division's Student Crisis Response Plan is dependant on immediate communication between the first staff responder and the campus Social Worker's Office. The Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs (with the authority to act on the behalf of the institution), Dean of Students (with access to student records), Emergency Personnel (Police, Paramedics, Firefighters, Psychologists and Physicians) are then deployed as necessary per the Social Workers discretion. The inclusion of a university Public Relations spokesperson was not mentioned in the campus student crisis plan. Some staff members have no crisis training at all, most staff members are briefly trained in distressed student response protocol and Residential and Student Life staff members are very well trained in dealing with distressed or distressing students. This system was designed to have highly trained responders intervene during crises, relieving the less-trained staff from responsibilities beyond their purview. Perhaps much of the disparity between the crisis response plans I compared was in the scope of their applicability. UCSB seems better prepared to handle a plane crash (the Santa Barbara Airport is immediately north of campus) than a student crisis. Personal experience and the literature show that crises can unfold at the micro and macro scale. My belief is that an individual student crisis deserves the same quality response as a campus wide emergency. Although there are multiple

fire drills per year and emergency response coordinators from each department are trained quarterly in building evacuations and earthquake hazards, and there are numerous maps posted around our seaside campus with evacuation routes for *tsunamis*, we never practice responding to student centered emergencies and under-utilize the learning opportunities provided by the post crisis environment.

UCSB's "Distressed Student Response Protocol" fits on a two-sided, laminated handout. This concise list of campus resource phone numbers was helpful to me during a recent student emergency, but it was my familiarity with distressed student protocol and the roles of selected campus offices that guided me while responding to an unpredictable student's accusation of sexual harassment and subsequent threat of suicide. In part due to discussions in this class last June, I had reviewed the resources listed on this guide in detail. The guide suggests that anyone observing a list of student behaviors should urge the student to seek counseling help. These referral identifies included (but are not limited to): excessive or inappropriate anger, behavioral or emotional change, withdrawal, change in hygiene or appearance, alcohol or drug abuse, expressing unusual thoughts or behaviors or a marked decline in academic performance. The student I am referencing exhibited many of those behaviors during and after her incident. Although our prior mitigation measures (a minimum course load and counseling), preparation by planning (Resource Card), and responding promptly and appropriately, the recovery process is being hampered by language and cultural differences (she is an international student from Japan), and constraints on the amount of information the counseling center and disabled students office can/will share.

The following is the all too brief instructions for responding to a student crisis.

1. Call 9-911 if there is **immediate danger** to the student or to others.

2. Contact the appropriate department directly if you know who to call and do not need assistance from multiple departments.
3. Contact the Social Worker at extension 4321 if it is unclear who to contact or the situation is complex and you need coordinated services.
4. If the Social Worker is not available and the problem is time-sensitive, call 9876 for assistance, otherwise leave a message.

Please refer students to the following campus departments for assistance:

- Student Health (social work services, primary care medical, urgent care, health education)
- Counseling Services (crisis intervention, counseling services, stress management, consultation)
- Office of Student Life (student support services)
- Office of Judicial Affairs (student conduct issues, hate incident response coordinator)

The bottom of the card also lists phone numbers for the local hospital emergency room, hospital psychiatric services and the alcohol, drug and mental health hotline. All of this is great information BUT only if you have taken the time to become familiar with the range of services each reference provides.

The campus social worker was busy with another emergency and unavailable during our recent student suicide threat, and I chose to call the counseling center rather than the police department when offered those two options by the Social Work Office. (So my first suggestion is that a campus with a population of 20,000 should have more than one person on-call, prepared to coordinate an immediate response for a distressed student.) My call to the Counseling Center was routed to the psychologist of the day and after relaying the best possible information to the psychologist, I contacted the Ombud's Office to report the claim of sexual harassment that lead

to the suicide threat. I also called the student's counselor at International Students and Scholars because I knew he had been contacted by the student's landlady who expressed concern about the student's changing behavior. I then called the Counseling Center back, but since they only publish ONE phone line (unbelievable!), was delayed in speaking to the counselor with more information about the student. Because the Social Worker was not initially involved, no one contacted the Office of Student Life, so the student's professors were not informed that the student would likely miss a few classes and need assistance getting information about missed course work. Lastly, due to the psychological nature of the crisis, neither the Disabled Students Program nor the counseling center will share any information about the current status of the student, severely hampering The College's ability to assist the student academically. As her academic advisor, I hope to assist in the 'recovery' stage of the crisis by helping the student with any academic issues that precipitated, exacerbated or still complicate her ability to remain a student. The College obviously needs a more extensive and more accessible plan to meet the needs of our population.

The best resources that I collected for this assignment were from California Institute of Technology, Ohio State University, the Federal Office of Education and the Crisis Management, the National Institute for Mental Health and the "Crisis Management - Responding from the Heart" text. UCSB needs to supplement its current 'responding to distressed students' training to include something like Ohio State's General Guidelines for Assisting Students in Distress. This document explains how to observe, listen to, reach out and offer assistance to distressed students and how important it is to instill hope during crises. It urges to 'trust your gut', if something seems wrong, something probably is wrong. College personnel need to understand when to consult with colleagues and when to refer students who need help beyond what can be provided

by a single staff member or by one office. The publication includes information on understanding and helping the suicidal person and how to deal with the post traumatic stresses that follow emergencies. The Department of Education's Practical Information on Crisis Planning handbook includes planning for 'recovery' which includes seizing the learning opportunities available after a crisis; not just the rebuilding of infrastructure, but the personal growth opportunities that both the distressed student and the responders can learn from. Both CalTech and Ohio State's Counseling Centers include tips on how to respond to a variety of student situations, warning signs to look for, suggestions on active listening, reminders to avoid criticism or false promises, to always instill hope, how to defuse volatile behavior, and guidelines on setting realistic limits. All of these components need to be included in a comprehensive student crisis management plan.

Education is the key to a safer education. In an effort to better serve the Engineering students at UCSB, I will disseminate much of the material I have reviewed for this paper, meet with my Associate Dean with suggestions for training the staff and faculty who are the most likely to encounter or observe students exhibiting distressed behavior. I want to empower my colleagues to better respond to student needs, to turn unexpected events into learning experiences and to better serve the holistic needs of our complex and diverse student population. Crisis response is part of a continuing cycle that minimizes dangers and risks, prepares for the unexpected, protects and cares for the whole campus population and learns from each new experience. Crisis management is being prepared to do the right thing, while doing things right.

Resources:

Harper, K.S., Paterson, B.G., and Zdziarski, E.L. (2006). *Crisis Management: Responding from the heart*. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Pruett, Harold L. and Vivian B. Brown. *Crisis intervention and prevention as a campus-as-community mental health model*. *New Directions for Student Services*, 49, Spring 1990.

Web Resources:

Counseling Center at UCSB, including “Responding to Distressed Students Handout:

<http://www.counseling.ucsb.edu>

Detailed information on handling a student crisis was at the CalTech counseling site:

<http://www.counseling.caltech.edu/guide/crisis.html>

Excellent Campus Emergency Planning Handbook:

<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf>

Physical and Mental Health Information at UCSB:

<http://www.sa.ucsb.edu/studenthealth/>

The National Institute for Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>