

St Patrick's College Drumcondra

Student Mental Health Policy and Guidelines

Acknowledgements

Working with Students in Distress- A Guidelines Document
DCU Counselling and Personal Development Service (2010)

Guidelines for Dealing with Student Psychological and/or Medical Emergencies
DCU Counselling and Personal Development Service (2010)

TCD Student Mental Health Policy and Guidelines (2008)

St Patrick's Mental Health Policy and Guidelines
was devised and compiled by a sub-committee of the College
Student Services' Committee

September, 2011

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Section 1 Introduction

Background

This document was produced to help staff to follow good practice in supporting students with mental health difficulties.

The core values of the College are central to these guidelines. In its mission statement, St. Patrick's College expresses its commitment to the centrality of the student and to the fostering of excellence in all its work. In pursuit of this mission, the College aspires to providing quality student experiences within a caring educational environment, which holds the student at its centre.

1.1 Policy statement

St Patrick's College is committed to an inclusive education for all, which welcomes diversity and promotes equal opportunities for students to develop to their full potential. As a learning and caring community, the College seeks to promote tolerance, understanding and mutual respect. To this end, the St Patrick's College mental health policy:

- enables the College to fulfill its caring, educational and legal responsibilities to students;
- heightens awareness and increases understanding across the College community about mental health issues;
- promotes informed and constructive attitudes to mental health issues;
- encourages a collaborative approach between the College, its staff, the student body and individual students with respect to dealing with mental health issues;
- follows international best practice guidelines in the area of student mental health, including the provision of appropriate and timely support for students.

- provides guidance to ensure that College staff know the appropriate emergency procedures.
- facilitates communication and cooperation as appropriate between the relevant College departments and services on matters relating to mental health;
- respects the rights of each individual student and of the student body as a whole;
- defines the right to confidentiality within specified guidelines.

By articulating a written policy and providing guidelines on student mental health, the College aims to promote student well-being, provide a safe and healthy work environment for all students and staff, ensure that appropriate intervention is taken where needed and encourage students with mental health difficulties to disclose them so that appropriate arrangements can be made to support them.

It is recommended that a review and update of this policy occur on a regular basis and, in particular, following implementation of the emergency procedures. This review process should be conducted with the staff involved and, where appropriate, with relevant students to assess the effectiveness of the outlined procedures.

1.2 Relationship to other College policies

St Patrick's College has a number of other policies and procedures (including but not limited to the list below) that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

1. Student Charter

http://www.spd.dcu.ie/main/policies/Student_Charter_Final_June2008.rtf

2. Code of Discipline

http://www.spd.dcu.ie/main/policies/Code_of_Discipline_Revised_July07.rtf

3. Equality Policy

http://www.spd.dcu.ie/main/policies/documents/policy_equality.pdf

4. Code of Conduct for the Use of IT Resources

http://www.spd.dcu.ie/main/policies/documents/Code_of_Conduct_Web.doc

5. Alcohol Policy

<http://www.spd.dcu.ie/main/policies/documents/CollegeAlcoholPolicy.doc>

6. Policy and Procedures to promote respect and dignity at work and to prevent and deal with harassment and bullying.

http://www.spd.dcu.ie/main/policies/documents/policy_respect&dignity.pdf

1.3 Scope of document

Section 2 briefly outlines the meaning of the term 'mental health', and explains the distinction between mental health difficulties and mental illness. Relevant legislation is also listed. Section 3 covers College academic and administrative procedures that may be relevant to students experiencing mental health problems. Section 4 aims to give guidance to members of College staff and students on how and where to seek help for students experiencing mental health problems. The important issue of confidentiality is also addressed in this section. This short document is supported by a *Staff Handbook: Responding to Students in Distress*.

Section 2 Mental Health

2.1 What is mental health?

Mental health, mental health difficulties and mental illness lie on a continuous spectrum and, as such, there may be occasions when a student's mental health shifts to different points on this spectrum.

Mental Health

The term 'mental health' refers to how a person thinks, feels and acts when faced with life's situations. It describes a sense of well-being and it implies the capacity to live in a resourceful and fulfilling manner, having the resilience to deal with the challenges and obstacles that life and studying present.

Mental Health Difficulties

Mental health difficulties are problems that affect a person's thoughts, body, feelings, behaviour and ability to function. These may occur as a reaction to a painful event or external pressure. They may resolve of their own accord. A student experiencing mental health difficulties that interfere with his/her capacity to function, or which are persistent, may benefit from accessing College Support Services: Senior Tutor, Disability Service, Student Counsellor, Chaplains or the College Medical Services. If severe, mental health difficulties may signal the onset of mental illness.

Mental Illness

Mental illness is the term used to refer to severe mental health difficulties. Mental illness includes conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder,

depression, anxiety/panic disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders, eating disorders and attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder. Students who experience mental illness will require treatment and support from a health professional such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, counsellor or general practitioner.

Further information on common mental health illnesses affecting young people is contained in Appendix A, page 10.

2.2 Legislation relating to mental health

There are several Acts relevant to mental health, including:

- Mental Health Acts 2001, 2008
- Equal Status Acts 2000–2008
- Disability Act 2005

College and its staff will always use their best endeavours in dealing with students with mental health difficulties or mental illness.

For further information on the Mental Health Acts, 2001, 2008 see Appendix E & section 2 on <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2001/en/act/pub/0025/index.html>

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2008/en/act/pub/0019/index.html>

Section 3 ACADEMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

3.1 Disclosure

It is important that any disability, including a mental health condition, is disclosed prior to admission to enable the College to consider the necessary supports that it may need to put in place to provide the student with full access to education. Duties under the Equal Status Act require the College to make reasonable accommodation for a person with a disability, provided that the cost is within the resources available.

If a student requires particular support or arrangements in College, it is important that the student contacts the Access/Disability Service well in advance of his/her application to discuss his/her needs. Applicants will then be in a better position to make an informed decision as to whether or not St Patrick's College can provide the support and environment they require.

3.2 Fitness to practise issues

Disclosure of mental health difficulties or mental illness will not adversely affect a person's application to College or legal rights in any way. However, certain physical and mental health conditions may preclude the safe practice of a chosen profession. In particular, students intending to study for a B.Ed. or Grad.Dip.Ed. should seek appropriate advice from the College.

The College reserves the right to require any applicant or student to undergo a medical examination in the interests of the health or safety of members of the College. Such examination may be in a medical centre or by a medical practitioner specified by the College. Failure to undergo such an examination, or to achieve a satisfactory report, can result in exclusion from College lectures, examinations and other academic exercises and/or exclusion from campus/College.

Students attending a course in St Patrick's College should:

- familiarise themselves with the course requirements;

- have the ability to cope with the demands and workloads of a third-level course as special arrangements and accommodations do not remove all difficulties;
- be aware of the demands of the course. They are advised to discuss the demands of each year of their course with the programme director or other appropriate member of staff;
- not be a risk to themselves or to other students or staff.

3.3 Disciplinary procedures

All students are bound by the College Code of Discipline and this includes students with mental health difficulties. If it becomes apparent during disciplinary procedures for major offences that the student may have a mental health difficulty then the following procedures should be adhered to:

Procedures for students with mental health issues

In such circumstances, consideration of the support needs of the student should be ascertained before taking further action. In addition to the normal disciplinary route, procedures should include the use of case conferencing. A case conference should involve the Registrar/Assistant Registrar Secretary Bursar, Student Counsellor, Chaplain, Disability Officer, Senior Tutor, the College Medical Services, relevant academic staff and relevant others). The intention would be: a) to ensure a consistent approach among the different people involved and b) to arrive at a recommendation. If, as a result of the case conference, a recommendation is made to temporarily remove/suspend a student, then the student's right to appeal the recommendation will apply (see Appeals Procedure in Code of Discipline).

3.4 Procedures for removal/suspension on mental health grounds

In the exceptional case, where it emerges that a student's behaviour constitutes a clear and reasonably imminent danger to himself or herself or to others, the President may suspend such a student from the College, without prejudice to the student's rights. Where possible, the President will consult with the Student Counsellor and/or a GP from the College Medical Services before suspending a student. A case conference with relevant staff will be called within a week of the decision to suspend a student on mental health grounds to review the decision.

3.5 Withdrawing, deferral and re-admission

Students who are unable to continue their studies, or who need to interrupt them on medical grounds (including mental health) may be given permission by the Registrar to defer their place or to withdraw from their course. Students should discuss their needs with their medical advisor or with a member of Student Services before taking the decision to seek to defer or withdraw from their course. Students apply to the Registrar's office for a deferral or withdrawal, the application for a deferral on medical grounds should be accompanied by a medical certificate.

Students wishing to return to College after obtaining a deferral on medical grounds will need to submit a medical certificate of fitness. The College reserves the right to require a student to undergo a medical examination in the interests of the health or safety of members of the College. Such examination may be in a medical centre or by a medical practitioner specified by the College. Failure to undergo such an examination, or to achieve a satisfactory report, can result in exclusion from College lectures, examinations, and other academic exercises and/or exclusion from campus/College.

3.6 Examination arrangements

Alternative arrangements for examinations or assessments may be made for students with mental health difficulties that may affect their ability to undertake the examination or assessment as usually conducted. If the student is registered with the Disability Service, the Service is responsible for making these

arrangements in conjunction with the Registrar's Office. Students who do not disclose their disability should be aware that this may impact on their ability to access examination accommodation and other support. For further details please contact the Disability Service, Vivienne Byrne (8842169).

3.7 University Careers Service

Students who have experienced mental health difficulties, particularly where academic achievements have been adversely affected or have led to withdrawal, are advised to consult the Careers Office. The Careers Officer can help students to be realistic and to market themselves effectively, and enable them to decide on positive and constructive disclosure strategies.

Section 4

RESPONDING TO STUDENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

The aim of this section is to provide the College community (staff: section 4.1; students: section 4.2) with information and advice on how to support students who are experiencing mental health difficulties and, in particular, on how and where to seek professional help. Issues surrounding confidentiality are discussed in Section 4.3.

4.1 Guidelines for staff

Staff play an invaluable role in supporting students with difficulties; however, in serious cases, it is vital that they are aware of their own limitations and that they refer the matter on rather than seeking to deal with issues themselves. Guidelines on how to respond to a student experiencing mental health difficulties is given in Figure 1, Appendix B, page 11.

4.1.1 How urgent is the situation?

When dealing with a student who is experiencing mental health difficulties, the first concern is to establish how urgent and serious the situation is using the following criteria:

- Is the student at risk of hurting her/himself or others?
- Is there a risk of suicide?
- Does the student appear to be out of touch with reality?
- Is the student behaving bizarrely?
- Does the student appear to be confused, drowsy or ill (possibly an overdose)?
- Has the student's behaviour, mood or personality changed noticeably?

If you are concerned about any of the above, please follow the appropriate emergency guidelines in either Section 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.4, see also Figure 1, Appendix B page 11.

4.1.2 Emergency guidelines: life threatening situation

If the situation is life threatening, contact Security (8842299). Security will contact emergency services as necessary on 999 or 112. If security does not respond immediately, contact emergency services directly on 999 or 112. If the incident occurs within office hours, also contact the Student Counsellor (8842281) and/or one of the College Medical Services (8377315/8600275) to seek advice/help until the ambulance arrives.

4.1.3 Emergency guidelines: daytime

- If you are presented with a potential emergency situation, immediate action may be necessary. Try **not** to deal with an emergency alone, contact one of the designated staff members listed below:
 - The Secretary Bursar (8842234)
 - The Registrar (8842134)
 - The Assistant Registrar (8842070)
 - The Student Counsellor (8842281)
 - The College Medical Services: Drumcondra (8377315), Glasnevin – (8600275)
 - The College Chaplaincy (8842224/8842082)

If with the student, ask one of the designated staff members above to attend to the student.

Protocol for designated staff

Clarify whether the student is already seeing a professional within the College (Student Counsellor or GP).

If yes, contact this professional, explain your concerns and the level of the student's distress and arrange an urgent appointment.

If no, seek the student's consent to arrange an emergency appointment for them with the College Medical Services or the Student Counsellor. Contact either service and explain the seriousness of your concerns. Accompany the student to the Counsellor's Office or the College Medical Services (physical force of any kind must not be used when accompanying a student to the

Counsellor's Office or the Medical Service).

If the student is not prepared to attend the Medical or Counselling Service, explain to them gently that, as you have concerns for their welfare, or that of others, you will have to consult with the Student Counsellor or College Medical Services and/ or talk to their family or next of kin. Give the student a choice as to who they would prefer you to contact in the first instance. For further advice and suggestions, see page 6, *Staff Handbook: Responding to Students in Distress*. Bear in mind, it is a matter for the student to choose whether to accept a referral, and to avail of the supports offered. In exceptional circumstances, the College disciplinary procedures (and/or the provisions of the Mental Health Act 2001/2008) regarding involuntary detentions may need to be implemented (see Appendix A).

Follow up your actions by liaising with the service as to the outcome of the assessment. Arrange to see the student again if appropriate.

4.1.4 Emergency Guidelines (out of hours)

In an emergency if the student is distressed:

- Contact College Security Staff (8842299) or the Residential Advisors if the student is in residence. They will contact emergency services (an ambulance and/or the Gardaí) to arrange transfer of the student to a place of safety. If the student is unwilling to go to hospital or another place of safety, the College Security Staff will ask the Gardaí to make an assessment of the situation, in the interests of safety of everybody involved.
- Establish with the student if they wish you to contact their family/ other next of kin.
- Security inform the Secretary Bursar or other designated staff member.

Other places to get help outside of College hours include: Samaritans (24 hours) 1850 609090 email: jo@samaritans.org

- Aware's Depression Line (10a.m.- 10.00 p.m.) loCall 1890 303302. Emergency Services 999 or 112.
- North Doc 1850 22 44 77
- www.pleasetalk.ie

4.1.5 Guidelines for intervention and referral for non-urgent concerns

As with an emergency situation, if you are concerned about a student you should consult the Student Counsellor or other designated staff and advise the student to seek appropriate support.

- If appropriate, give the student handouts on College support services and out of hours support.
- If the student is reluctant to accept a referral, see page 4, *Staff Handbook: Responding to Students in Distress*.

4.2 Guidelines for students

Students concerned about the wellbeing of a friend should talk to a member of the College staff such as a lecturer or a head of department or any of the Student Services staff (Chaplains (8842224/8842082), Student Counsellor (896 2281). Students may also choose to contact the Students' Union Welfare Officer (8842231), who will then contact the appropriate Student Services staff or other services.

It is important that students share and discuss their worries and concerns with a staff member (see above) it is not advisable for students to take on too much responsibility for dealing with such concerns themselves.

4.3 Confidentiality

The purpose of this section is to inform students and staff of the principles guiding the flow of information about a student's mental health. Confidentiality is considered under the following subheadings:

- General principles regarding confidentiality
- Professional codes of ethics (Medical Service, Student Counsellor, Chaplain, Disability Officer).

4.3.1 General principles regarding confidentiality

The important principles are that: the College is committed to respecting the right to confidentiality of all students and all information disclosed by students relating to a person's mental health will be treated as confidential. Confidential information will only be disclosed with the person's consent. It will only be accessed and/or made available to others on a need-to-know basis for the purpose of the provision of, or access to, services, with the student's consent.

The principle that no confidential information will be passed on to third parties without the express permission of the student concerned applies unless:

- (a) there is a serious concern that there may be a threat to the safety or life of the student or of others or
- (b) it involves the investigation of a crime or is otherwise required by operation of law.

Information held by College complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act and relevant College policies. In order to comply with the above principles, College staff must take all necessary precautions to ensure the safe-keeping and accuracy of all records containing personal information about students. Where information is recorded or shared, the terminology used must be respectful of the student and should focus on his or her needs rather than on labelling.

4.3.2 Professional Codes of Ethics

In addition to the above general College principles regarding confidentiality, Student Services staff (including doctors, Student Counsellor, Chaplains and Disability Officer) are bound by their respective professional codes of ethics.

4.3.3 Basic principles on sharing information

Information is shared with other services or third parties only with the student's consent (see exceptions in 4.3.1 above) and for a defined purpose, such as accessing additional supports and services for the student. Information is shared on a need-to-know basis; the level and nature of the information shared will vary according to who needs it and for what purpose. In obtaining the student's

consent for information to be shared, it is important that staff clarify with the student what the purpose is, and who will be given particular information, so that the student can give his/her informed consent.

4.3.4 When consent is not given

Students are entitled to refuse consent and such a decision should be respected. In such cases, they should be made aware of the implications of their choice in terms of accessing supports. Students may review their decision at any stage during their time in College. Once a person is over the age of sixteen, s/he may give an effective consent to surgical, medical or dental treatment and it is not necessary to obtain any consent from her/his parent or guardian. In some very exceptional circumstances (risk to someone's life or safety or criminal investigations), information may be given to the appropriate third parties without the student's consent. In such circumstances, members of staff should consult the Secretary Bursar (8842234), the Student Counsellor (8842281), or other designated staff (see Appendix C, page 12), their line manager or their Head of Department, who, in turn, should inform the Registrar/Assistant Registrar. Where possible, staff should inform the student of their intended actions; however, protecting the student's safety or the safety of others takes precedence.

4.4 Case Conferencing

When there are concerns for the safety, wellbeing and recovery of a student or the safety of others, a Case Conference may be called for all staff involved (e.g. Registrar/Assistant Registrar, Secretary Bursar, Student Counsellor, Chaplain, Disability Officer, Senior Tutor, and the College Medical Services, relevant academic staff and relevant others) to identify the most appropriate way of assisting all concerned and ensuring their safety.

4.5 How to respond to requests for information from third parties

The College does not disclose any information to third parties (including parents) unless explicit permission to do so has been given by the student or there is a serious concern that there may be a threat to the safety or life of the student or of others, or if it involves the investigation of a crime or is otherwise required by

operation of law. Occasionally, staff may receive calls from worried and concerned parents, friends or landlords. While it is entirely appropriate to listen to their concerns and to act on them if there is an at-risk issue, it is not generally appropriate to divulge any information. If unsure of what to do, staff should immediately consult their line manager, Registrar, or Head of Department, or the Student Counsellor (8842281).

4.6 Freedom of Information Acts

The College is a prescribed 'public body' subject to the terms of the Freedom of Information Acts, which provide: (a) a right for each person to access records held by public bodies; (b) a right for each person to have official information relating to himself or herself amended where it is incomplete, incorrect or misleading; (c) a right to obtain reasons for decisions affecting oneself made by a public body. There are also a number of exemptions from the right of access to information, such as the exemption applying to the personal information of other individuals. Decisions on the exercise of one's rights under the FOI Acts are made by appointed decision-makers in the College, with provision for review by more senior College staff. In relation to a record of a medical or psychiatric nature relating to a requester, the FOI decision-maker is permitted to refuse access where disclosure to the requester might be prejudicial to his or her physical or mental health, well-being or emotional condition but in such a case the requester must be advised that, if he or she wishes, access will be offered to a relevant health professional specified by the requester. It should be noted that College is not the final arbiter regarding access to information and requesters have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner and to the Courts.

Appendix A

MENTAL HEALTH ACTS 2001, 2008: INVOLUNTARY ADMISSIONS PROCEDURES FOR ST. PATRICK'S COLLEGE

Included in the matters addressed in the Mental Health Acts 2001 & 2008 is the involuntary detention of persons to psychiatric centres. In cases of severe mental illness, a person may be admitted to a psychiatric hospital (an "approved centre" within the meaning of the Act) either on a voluntary or involuntary basis. The majority of people who are so admitted, do so by choice, and are therefore voluntary patients. However, in some cases, a person may be admitted for mental health treatment on an involuntary basis. The Act sets out regulations for the involuntary detention of persons to psychiatric hospitals.

Under the Mental Health Acts 2001, 2008, a person who is suffering from a "mental disorder" may be, pursuant to the procedures set on in the Acts, involuntarily admitted to an approved psychiatric centre.

Section 3 (1) of the Act defines "mental disorder" to be mental illness where:

- a.** because of the illness, there is a serious likelihood of the person concerned causing immediate and serious harm to himself or herself or to other persons; or
- b.** because of the severity of the illness the judgement of the person concerned is so impaired that failure to admit the person to an approved centre would be likely to lead to a serious deterioration in his or her condition or would prevent the administration of appropriate treatment that could be given only by such admission, and the reception, detention and treatment of the person concerned in an approved centre would be likely to benefit or alleviate the condition of that person to a material extent.

Mental illness is described in the Act as a state of mind of a person which affects the person's thinking, perceiving, emotion or judgement and which seriously impairs the mental function of the person to the extent that he or she requires care or medical treatment in his or her own interest or in the interest of other persons.

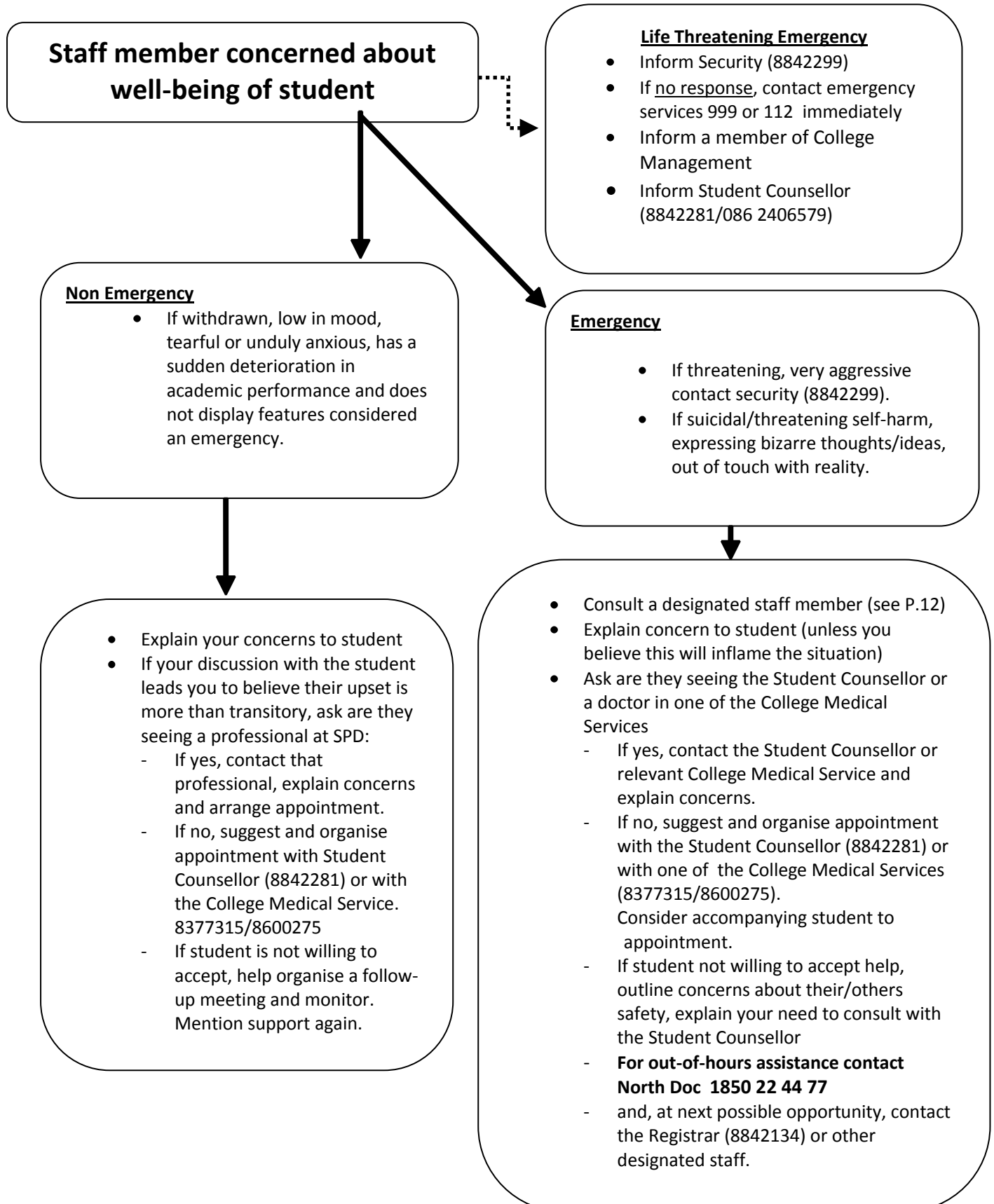
Where a student of the College develops a mental illness (as defined in Section 3 of the Mental Health Acts 2001, 2008), he/she will be encouraged to accept treatment in a Psychiatric Unit/Hospital (an 'approved centre'). The College's professional staff involved with the student will facilitate a voluntary admission for such treatment. Where a student of the College develops a mental illness (as defined in Section 3 of the Mental Health Acts 2001, 2008) and where the student is deemed by a Registered Medical Practitioner (GP) to require treatment for this mental illness but is unwilling to accept voluntary hospitalisation, the procedures of the Mental Health Acts 2001, 2008 will be followed:

- Step 1: An application will be made on one of the statutory forms 1 or 4 (available from the College). The application will be made either by a spouse /relative or by one of the following designated College Officers: The President, Registrar, Assistant Registrar or Secretary Bursar.
- Step 2: A Registered Medical Practitioner (GP) will assess the person within 24 hours of the receipt of the application.
- Step 3: If the GP makes a recommendation that the person should be admitted to a Psychiatric Unit/Hospital under the Mental Health Acts, 2001, 2008 arrangements will be made to transfer the person to an appropriate hospital.

Note: it is not lawful to detain a person as an involuntary patient in an approved centre solely because that person is: a) suffering from a personality disorder, b) socially deviant or c) addicted to drugs or intoxicants.

Appendix B Figure 1

HOW TO RESPOND TO A STUDENT IN A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND/OR MEDICAL CRISIS



Appendix C Designated Staff List

Staff	Telephone
Secretary Bursar:	8842234
Registrar	8842134
Assistant Registrar	8842070
Student Counsellor	8842281
College Chaplains	8842224, 8842082
College Medical Services	Drumcondra 8377315, Glasnevin 8600275