Calvin College
Off-Campus Programs Office
Risk Management Protocols

SITUATION: STUDENT(S) EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

PROTOCOLS:

Prior to departing on your semester or interim experience, please prepare by completing the following:

- Require students who are taking prescribed medications to arrange with their physician for an adequate supply to last throughout the trip. Any changes to prescribed medications are to be made as a result of doctor’s orders.

- Openly discuss with students the emotional experiences of culture shock and reverse culture shock

- Ask students how they are doing and what they are feeling as they prepare for the trip—encourage open communication within the group

Responding to Students Experiencing Mental Health Issues

- Watch for signs of mental health issues, and address them as early as possible—examples include:
  - chronic sadness, anxiety, or irritability/anger
  - significant changes in eating or sleeping habits
  - impaired concentration
  - withdrawal
  - agitation
  - impulsivity
  - compulsive behavior
  - frequent unexplained physical ailments (ex. stomach aches/headaches)
  - bizarre behavior or speech
  - disordered eating (binge eating, purging, or food restriction)
  - substance abuse

- Talk directly with the student (in private, unless otherwise requested) about what they are feeling and experiencing.
• Do not promise to maintain confidentiality before you know what the student has to say.
• Let the student know that you will work with them supportively to resolve the situation.

• Discuss with the student what has helped them feel better in the past, and support them in implementing similar techniques.

• Consider whether the student can reduce stress load or needs more support in managing responsibilities in order to function at a healthy level.

• Encourage the student to establish healthy behaviors, including sleeping times (with 7-10 hours of sleep per night), three meals per day, and participating in scheduled activities.

• Encourage the student to make contact with their support system at home, such as parents, counselors, friends, or others who have helped them through mental health difficulties in the past.

• Consult with mental health professionals (either locally or at the Broene Counseling Center) and/or with colleagues regarding the situation.

• If the student is verbalizing thoughts of self-harm, ask whether they have a plan to do so and an intention to follow through.
  • If the answer is yes and the student cannot commit to safety, seek help in maintaining safety for the student—ex. ensure that an adult is with the student at all times.
  • If the answer is no, but you are concerned about safety, carefully monitor the student on a regular basis until the student is able to commit to keeping him/herself safe.

• Arrange for immediate, accompanied transportation home if the student is:
  • not able to commit to safety
  • psychotic (i.e. voicing delusional thoughts, seeing or hearing things that are not there, nonresponsive to stimuli)
  • no longer able to provide basic self-care (ex. not eating, not getting out of bed, not maintaining basic hygiene)

• If other students have been involved (either by talking with the student or witnessing upsetting behavior), take time to talk with them about their own emotional reactions and needs—provide reassurance that the situation is being effectively handled without sharing private information about the struggling student.
• Share information about the student’s mental health only on a “need to know” basis.

• In writing, document all significant conversations held with the student as well as steps taken in response to the situation.

**Follow Up Protocols upon Return from a Semester or Interim Experience**

• Refer the student for follow-up mental health care upon return to the States, either to the Broene Counseling Center or to another counselor.

---

**SPECIFIC RESOURCES**

Important phone numbers:

- Don DeGraaf, Off-Campus Programs Director – 616-526-6225 (office) – 616-558-7245 (cell) – ddegraaf@calvin.edu
- Broene Counseling Center – 616-526-6123
- Calvin Campus Safety (24/7 line) – 616-526-6452
- Calvin Health Services – 616-526-7076
- Student Academic Services – 616-526-6113

- Incident Report Form

Created: 7/2010