

ST. TERESA'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), ERNAKULAM
COMPREHENSIVE INSTITUTIONAL POLICY FOR MENTAL HEALTH,
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY, AND WELLNESS

The College is committed to fostering a learning and working environment that promotes psychological well-being, early identification of mental health concerns, and access to appropriate support services. The institution recognizes mental health as a vital component of overall health, academic performance, professional functioning, and community well-being. The Policy shall come into force with effect from the date of approval.

PURPOSE

- To provide a safe, supportive, and stigma-free environment for students and staff.
- To establish mechanisms for prevention, early identification, intervention, and referral.
- To ensure that all institutional practices remain sensitive to the mental health needs of the campus community.
- To integrate mental health promotion into curricular and co-curricular activities.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all members of the college community, including students across all academic programs, teaching and non-teaching staff, administrative personnel, and contracted employees. It also extends to individuals participating in college-sponsored activities, programs, and events on or off campus. The policy aims to guide practices, services, and interactions that influence the mental health and well-being of everyone associated with the institution.

GOALS

1. *To Promote a Mentally Healthy and Supportive Campus Environment:* The institution aims to create an atmosphere where students and staff feel emotionally safe, supported, and encouraged to seek help without fear of stigma or judgment.
2. *To Ensure Accessible and High-Quality Mental Health Support Services:* The college seeks to provide timely, confidential, and affordable access to counselling, psychological support, and referral services for all members of the campus community.
3. *To Strengthen Early Identification and Intervention for Mental Health Concerns:* The goal is to equip faculty, staff, and student leaders to recognize early warning signs of distress and ensure that individuals receive appropriate help at the earliest possible stage.

4. *To Foster a Campus Culture that Values Wellness, Inclusivity, and Psychological Safety:* The policy seeks to promote respectful interactions, reduce stressors related to academic and social pressures, and ensure that all community members feel included and supported.
5. *To Reduce Psychological Distress and Strengthen Emotional Resilience Among Students and Staff:* The institution aims to minimize factors that contribute to stress, anxiety, and emotional difficulties by providing timely support systems, preventive programs, and skill-building opportunities that help individuals manage challenges effectively and enhance their overall well-being.

OBJECTIVES

1. *To Conduct Regular Mental Health Awareness and Wellness Programs:* The objective is to organize workshops, seminars, campaigns, and training sessions throughout the year to improve mental health literacy and encourage healthy coping practices.
2. *To Establish Clear, Accessible Procedures for Counselling and Crisis Support:* The institution will develop well-defined protocols for booking appointments, receiving emergency support, and accessing external mental health services when necessary.
3. *To Train Faculty and Staff in Identifying Psychological Distress and Making Appropriate Referrals:* The objective is to ensure that staff members can recognize behavioral, emotional, and academic indicators of distress and guide individuals to appropriate services.
4. *To Create Systems that Reduce Academic Stress and Promote Balanced Workloads:* The college will review academic schedules, assessment practices, and student workload patterns to minimize unnecessary stress and promote academic–life balance.
5. *To Develop a Supportive Framework for High-Risk or Vulnerable Individuals:* The objective is to provide additional support to individuals experiencing severe stress, trauma, disability-related challenges, or socio-cultural barriers that affect their mental health.
6. *To Establish Mechanisms for Feedback, Monitoring, and Continuous Improvement:* The institution will collect feedback from students and staff, evaluate the effectiveness of mental health initiatives, and revise programs annually to meet emerging needs.
7. *To Promote Workplace Mental Health for Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff:* The objective is to provide access to stress management programs, supportive HR policies, and wellness initiatives that enhance staff morale and psychological well-being.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

College Administration

The College Administration, consisting of the Manager, Directors, Principal, Vice Principal, and IQAC holds primary responsibility for implementing the Mental Health Policy across the institution. The administration must allocate adequate financial, infrastructural, and human resources to ensure effective delivery of mental health services. It is also responsible for reviewing the policy periodically to ensure it remains relevant, aligns with institutional priorities, and reflects current mental health needs. The administration oversees adherence to statutory, accreditation, and quality assurance requirements, ensuring that the policy is fully integrated into institutional governance.

Mental Health Committee

The Mental Health Committee, constituted by the college, will include psychologist, two faculty representatives, department student and faculty representatives nominated by the Principal. This committee is responsible for coordinating and overseeing all mental health initiatives on campus. It will organise awareness drives, workshops, and capacity-building programs that promote mental health literacy. The committee must monitor the functioning of counselling services and reporting mechanisms to ensure effective support for students and staff. It is also accountable for maintaining documentation and preparing annual reports.

Counselling Cell

The College Counselling Centre, led by qualified counsellors or psychologists and faculty representatives appointed by the institution, is responsible for providing confidential, one-to-one counselling to students and staff. Counsellors will conduct group sessions, workshops, psychoeducation programs, and preventive mental health activities as required. They are responsible for maintaining confidential case records in accordance with professional ethics and institutional guidelines. Where necessary, counsellors will refer individuals to external mental health professionals, such as psychiatrists or clinical psychologists. In situations involving risk of harm, counsellors must report serious concerns to designated authorities while ensuring that ethical guidelines and safety protocols are followed.

Faculty and Staff

Faculty members and non-teaching staff share responsibility for fostering a supportive and psychologically safe academic environment. They are expected to identify early signs of distress, behavioural changes, or significant decline in academic performance among students and provide first-level support. Faculty and staff must guide students towards appropriate counselling or support services when needed. Additionally, they are required to participate in mental health sensitisation programs, awareness workshops, and training sessions organised by the institution to enhance their ability to respond effectively to student concerns.

Students

Students are responsible for utilising the counselling and mental health support services made available by the institution in an appropriate and responsible manner. They are expected to show respect towards peers' emotional needs and contribute to a supportive campus culture. Students should participate in awareness programs, well-being initiatives, and capacity-building activities that aim to enhance mental health literacy. They must also follow institutional guidelines on confidentiality and responsible reporting to promote a safe and inclusive environment for all members of the college community.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Counselling and Psychological Support

The institution will provide counselling and psychological support through qualified on-campus professional counsellor(s) appointed by the College Administration. Counsellors will offer scheduled counselling hours, dedicated time slots for emergency or high-risk cases, and in-person consultation. The Counselling Centre is responsible for delivering these services, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring that students and staff receive timely emotional and psychological support. The service is constituted by the counsellors and faculty representatives who coordinate appointments and outreach activities.

Mandatory Training and Awareness Programs

The institution will implement a comprehensive mental health capacity-building framework that integrates both mandatory training and ongoing awareness initiatives. Mandatory training shall be conducted at least twice a year for all faculty, administrative staff, and student support teams. These sessions, led by certified mental health professionals, will focus on psychological first-aid, early identification of warning signs, appropriate responses to self-harm or emotional crises, and clear

procedures for referral to internal and external support services. Equal importance will be given to continuous awareness and prevention programs coordinated by the Mental Health Committee in collaboration with the Counselling Centre. These programs will include workshops on stress management, emotional regulation, self-care, resilience-building, and life skills, as well as targeted campaigns on suicide prevention, substance misuse, bullying, and digital well-being. The college will also observe an annual Mental Health Day to promote mental health literacy across the campus. Both training and awareness activities will be delivered by faculty resource persons, counsellors, student volunteers, and external experts, ensuring a well-rounded and inclusive approach to strengthening mental health support within the institution.

Academic Support Measures

Academic support measures will be implemented by the respective Departments, Faculty Advisors, and the Examination Cell under the guidance of the College Administration. These measures include flexibility in academic deadlines for students with serious mental health concerns, the operation of a mentor–mentee support system, and initiatives to help students manage exam-related stress. These academic accommodations are constituted by department heads, faculty mentors, counsellors, and administrative staff responsible for academic scheduling and assessments.

Crisis Intervention

Crisis intervention services will be managed jointly by the Counselling Centre, Mental Health Committee, and College Administration. A clear protocol will be followed for handling students experiencing severe distress, self-harm risk, or suicidal ideation, ensuring immediate and safe action. When necessary, individuals will be referred without delay to external psychiatric or emergency medical services. The crisis management team is constituted by counsellors, designated faculty responders, administrative authorities, and external mental health professionals who will activate emergency contact procedures involving parents or guardians only when essential and in accordance with safety protocols.

Support for Staff

The college will provide mental health support for teaching and non-teaching staff through wellness initiatives coordinated by Counselling Centre. Staff members will have access to counselling services and stress management workshops. These initiatives are constituted by IQAC

representatives, counsellors, and faculty coordinators who ensure regular participation and follow-through.

IMMEDIATE REFERRAL PROTOCOLS

The college will establish structured and time-sensitive protocols for the immediate referral of individuals experiencing acute psychological distress, suicidal ideation, severe behavioural changes, or any situation that poses a risk to their safety or the safety of others. When a high-risk case is identified by faculty, staff, counsellors, or peers, the individual must be promptly directed to the College Counselling Centre for initial assessment. If the counsellor determines that urgent intervention is required, the institution will activate its emergency referral pathway, which includes contacting local mental health professionals, partnering hospitals, and crisis care facilities for immediate evaluation and treatment. In situations indicating suicidal intent or imminent harm, the college will facilitate direct access to suicide prevention helplines and ensure that emergency medical services are contacted without delay. The protocol also includes notifying parents or guardians when essential, while adhering to ethical guidelines and safety requirements. In the event that the designated counsellor is unavailable, the case shall be immediately referred to the Department of Psychology, which will assume responsibility for preliminary assessment, inform the college authorities without delay, coordinate communication with the parents or guardians, and ensure that the student is safely escorted to the nearest government hospital with a recognized mental health wing or to an officially partnered mental health facility for urgent care. These referral procedures will be monitored by the Mental Health Committee to ensure consistency, preparedness, and timely response in all critical situations.

DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA WELL-BEING

The college promotes responsible and safe digital behaviour by educating students and staff on appropriate social media conduct and online engagement. Programs will be conducted to raise awareness about cyberbullying, misinformation, online harassment, academic pressure caused by digital overload, and the psychological risks associated with excessive screen time. The institution encourages balanced and mindful use of digital tools, ensuring that online platforms enhance learning and communication rather than create stress, conflict, or emotional harm. Students and staff are urged to maintain digital etiquette, verify information before sharing, and refrain from activities that violate privacy, harm others, or damage the institution's reputation.

ANTI-STIGMA AND INCLUSION MEASURES

The college adopts a strict zero-tolerance policy towards any form of discrimination, harassment, or negative behaviour directed at individuals based on mental health conditions or psychological vulnerabilities. All students and staff are expected to uphold principles of empathy, confidentiality, and respect when interacting with others, especially with individuals who may be experiencing mental health challenges. Sensitization programs, peer support initiatives, and training sessions will be conducted regularly to reduce stigma and promote understanding of mental health issues. The institution will also create safe, non-judgmental spaces where individuals can freely express concerns, seek help, and engage in dialogue without fear of ridicule or disclosure. These measures are overseen by the IQAC, Departments, Mental Health Committee and Counselling Centre to ensure that the campus remains inclusive, supportive, and aligned with principles of psychological safety and equity.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

The college is committed to maintaining strict confidentiality in all counselling and mental health related interactions. All counselling records, case notes, and personal information will be securely stored and accessed only by authorized counsellors. Information will be disclosed solely in situations where there is a risk to the safety of the individual or others, or when required by law or institutional protocols. The institution will ensure secure documentation practices through protected files, restricted access, and ethical data handling in accordance with professional standards.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Mental Health Committee will carry out annual reviews to assess the effectiveness of the college's mental health services, programs, and protocols. Feedback will be collected from students, faculty, and staff through surveys, reports, or consultations to identify emerging needs and areas for improvement. Based on these findings, consolidated reports will be submitted to the Principal and IQAC, and recommendations will be implemented to ensure continuous enhancement of the mental health framework.

POLICY REVIEW

This Mental Health Policy will undergo a formal review every year to ensure continued relevance and alignment with institutional goals, regulatory updates, and accreditation requirements. The review may be conducted earlier if required due to changes in legislation, NAAC/NIRF guidelines, or significant institutional developments. Revisions will be approved by the College

Administration following consultation with the Mental Health Committee and relevant stakeholders.

ANNEXURES

Annexure A1: Help-Seeking & Appointment SOP

1. Access Points:

- • Online appointment portal / institutional email.
- • Walk-in hours (clearly notified each semester).
- • Faculty/mentor referral.
- • Emergency contact during crisis situations.

2. Appointment Protocol:

- • Initial response within 24–48 working hours.
- • Emergency cases prioritised same day.
- • Consent form signed prior to first session.

3. Confidentiality Briefing:

- • Client informed of confidentiality limits (imminent risk exception).
- • Records stored securely with restricted access.

Annexure A2: Risk Assessment & Triage Protocol

Cases shall be categorised as:

1. Low Risk:

- • Mild stress/anxiety without self-harm ideation.
- • Scheduled counselling sessions and follow-up.

2. Moderate Risk:

- • Persistent distress, passive ideation, or functional impairment.
- • Increased session frequency; possible psychiatric referral.

3. High Risk:

- • Active suicidal ideation, plan, or attempt.
- • Immediate supervision; escorted referral to hospital.
- • Parent/guardian notification where legally appropriate.
- • Incident documentation mandatory.

Annexure A3: Suicide/Self-Harm Crisis Response SOP

1. Ensure immediate safety of the student.
2. Do not leave the student unattended.
3. Inform designated authority (Principal/Chairperson MHWBC).
4. Escort to nearest Government/District Mental Health facility.
5. Inform parent/guardian as per consent/legal protocol.
6. Complete Incident Report within 24 hours.
7. Plan structured reintegration with academic accommodations.

Annexure A4: Post-Crisis Reintegration & Follow-Up Plan

- Minimum three structured follow-up sessions.
- Academic flexibility recommendation (attendance/exam support).
- Mentor assigned for monitoring.
- Periodic review by Mental Health Committee.
- Confidential case closure summary.

Annexure A5: Incident Documentation Template

Case ID: _____

Date & Time of Incident: _____

Location: _____

Nature of Concern (brief description):

Risk Level (Low/Moderate/High): _____

Immediate Actions Taken:

Referral Details (if any): _____

Parent/Guardian Informed: Yes / No

Reporting Officer Signature: _____

Date: _____

Annexure A6: Annual Mental Health Reporting Dashboard (Anonymised)

Total Students Enrolled: _____

Number of Counselling Sessions Conducted: _____

Number of Individual Clients Served: _____

Number of Crisis Interventions: _____

Number of Referrals to External Agencies: _____

Number of Training/Sensitisation Programmes Conducted: _____

Parent Sensitisation Sessions Conducted: _____

Key Preventive Initiatives Undertaken: _____

Recommendations for Next Academic Year: _____