

Tips for Documenting Incidents on campus

Know what to document



If you are not clear about what types of incidents require documentation, check your policies and procedures, or ask your supervisor. Make sure you know which situations require a full incident report and which require only “charting” or logging of some kind.

Avoid delays



Incident reports should always be written as soon as possible after an incident occurs. Time quickly dims our memories. If you wait days—or even hours—before writing your report, you will begin to forget information that may be important.

In addition, the accounts of others who were involved or who witnessed the incident can easily color your memory. After hearing such accounts, it becomes difficult to distinguish your own recollections from those of others. Without being aware of it, honest people will begin to change their stories, fill in gaps, and add extra bits of “post-incident information.”

Although it is important to provide emotional support to those who have been involved in a confrontational or violent event, try to minimize their conversations with others who were involved until all parties have been interviewed or have written an incident report.

List the basic facts of the incident chronologically



Answer the questions who, when, where, what, how, and why. Include events that led up to an incident. Describe all attempts to intervene—verbally or physically.

Be objective



Stick to the facts. Avoid commentary or subjective opinions. Make distinction between personal knowledge and what you have learned from others. Do not try to blame or protect other people.

Avoid labeling a person’s mental or emotional state. For example, if you believe that an individual involved in an incident was intoxicated, describe the behavior or other signs that led you to that conclusion, rather than simply labeling the person as “drunk.”

Be accurate, concise, and clear



Be as brief as possible, but include necessary information. Double-check names, addresses, dates, and times. Check your grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Always review your copy for your final report because it will be used to determine the specific action to be taken for discipline.

