

FERPA + Mental Health Parent Toolkit

PART 1 OF 3

Parent-to-Dean Emergency Email Templates + FERPA vs. HIPAA
Quick Reference Card

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Fill out Template A when you're concerned but it is not an immediate emergency. Fill out Template B when you believe your student is in imminent danger. The FERPA vs. HIPAA Quick Reference Card is on page 3 -- screenshot it and send it to your co-parent or family therapist before a difficult conversation. These templates are for informational purposes and do not constitute legal advice.

TEMPLATE A

Welfare Check Request

Use when concerned but no immediate danger indicated

SUBJECT LINE (COPY EXACTLY)

Welfare concern for [Student First + Last Name], [Student ID] --
Requesting follow-up

ADDRESSED TO

Dear Dean [Last Name] / Dean of Students Office,

I'm writing as the parent of [Student Name], a [year] student in [college or program]. I want to share specific observations I'm concerned about and request that someone from your office make direct contact with them.

SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS -- BE CONCRETE, USE DATES (NOT FEELINGS)

Over the past [X weeks], I have observed: [specific behaviors with dates -- e.g., 'told me they haven't attended Tuesday/Thursday classes in 6 weeks,']

I am not asking you to share any information about my student's records or treatment -- I understand FERPA and HIPAA and respect those limits. I am asking that someone from student affairs or the counseling center make direct contact with my student this week, and that this communication is documented in your office.

If you believe this rises to the level of a safety concern, I am available at [your phone number] at any hour.

CLOSING

Sincerely,

Your name, Parent of [Student Name]

FOLLOW-UP IF NO RESPONSE IN 24 HOURS

Subject: Follow-up: Welfare concern for [Student Name] -- sent [date].
Body: I wrote to your office on [date] regarding my student [Name]. I have not received confirmation of receipt. Please confirm this communication has been logged and that student affairs will make direct contact by [specific date, 48 hrs out]. I will follow up with the Provost's office if I do not hear back by that date.

Template B (Imminent Danger -- FERPA Emergency Exception) continues on the next page.

Template B: Imminent Danger Escalation

PART 2 OF 3

Cites FERPA Emergency Exception (34 CFR 99.36) and HIPAA Emergency Exception (45 CFR 164.512(j))

WHEN TO USE TEMPLATE B

Use this template when your student has made a specific statement about harming themselves, has been unreachable across all channels for 24+ hours with known location, or you have concrete reason to believe they are in immediate physical danger. This template cites the FERPA emergency exception by regulation number. If you believe the situation is a true emergency, call campus police (welfare check) first, then send this email.

TEMPLATE B

Imminent Danger -- FERPA Emergency Exception

Requires documented response within 24 hours

SUBJECT LINE

URGENT: Imminent safety concern -- [Student Name], [Student ID] --
Response required

ADDRESSED TO

Dear Dean [Last Name] and Dean of Students Office,

I am writing to invoke the FERPA emergency exception under 34 CFR 99.36 and the HIPAA emergency exception under 45 CFR 164.512(j) regarding my student, [Student Name], [Student ID], a [year] student in [program].

SPECIFIC THREAT -- BE PRECISE: WHAT WAS SAID, DATE, METHOD (CALL/TEXT/IN PERSON)

I have specific reason to believe my student is in imminent danger based on the following: [e.g., 'On [date], my student told me by phone that they

Under 34 CFR 99.36, educational institutions may disclose information from student records without consent when there is an articulable and significant threat to health or safety. Under 45 CFR 164.512(j), covered health entities may disclose protected health information to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat. Both standards are met based on the information above.

I am requesting: (1) immediate physical welfare check by campus police or student affairs staff; (2) written confirmation within 24 hours that this communication was received and acted upon; (3) if my student is found to be safe, confirmation that they have been connected with campus mental health resources. I am available at [phone] at any hour.

COPY TO (ADD AS APPROPRIATE)

VP of Student Affairs, Residence Hall Director, Campus Counseling

Sincerely,

Your name, relationship to student, date sent

CAMPUS POLICE WELFARE CHECK SCRIPT (CALL, DON'T TEXT)

"I'm requesting a welfare check for my student, [Name], room [number], [building], [campus]. I have specific reason to believe they may be unsafe. I have not been able to reach them since [time/date]. My name is [name] and I can be reached at [phone]."

FERPA vs. HIPAA Quick Reference Card

PART 3 OF 3

Screenshot this and share it with your co-parent or family therapist before a difficult conversation

TOPIC	FERPA (20 U.S.C. 1232G)	HIPAA (45 CFR PARTS 160, 164)
WHAT IT COVERS	Educational records: grades, transcripts, enrollment status, academic probation, financial aid records, degree progress	Protected health information at covered entities: campus health and counseling records, prescriptions, treatment notes, mental health records
WHO CONTROLS IT AFTER AGE 18	Student only. Rights transfer completely at 18 (or upon college enrollment). Parent loses automatic access.	Patient (student) only. You have no right to access health/counseling records regardless of insurance status or tuition payment.
WHAT PARENTS CAN ALWAYS DO	Request a FERPA release form from the registrar. Student must sign it to grant you access. Ask what types of records it covers -- grades, financial aid, and academic standing are separate.	Share information IN to a provider at any time without consent. Call and say "I want to share some things I've observed." They cannot confirm your student is a patient but they can listen.
EMERGENCY EXCEPTION STANDARD	34 CFR 99.36: "Articulable and significant threat to health or safety of the student or other individuals." School has discretion; must document decision. <i>Cite this regulation by number when escalating in writing.</i>	45 CFR 164.512(j): Provider may disclose to "prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat." Requires provider's good-faith belief that disclosure is necessary. <i>Provider's professional judgment is the gating factor, not your consent.</i>

TOPIC	FERPA (20 U.S.C. 1232G)	HIPAA (45 CFR PARTS 160, 164)
WHAT MEETS THE STANDARD	Specific, stated plan for self-harm with means. Documented pattern of behavior + concrete threat. "I'm worried" alone does not meet the standard.	Provider has information indicating imminent, not hypothetical, danger. Your calling in with specific behaviors can inform the provider's clinical judgment.
VOLUNTARY DISCLOSURE OPTION	Colleges may share information with parents of dependent students (IRS definition) without student consent. Most schools choose not to without a release. Ask about the institution's voluntary disclosure policy.	Student can sign a HIPAA authorization allowing the campus health center to communicate with you. This is a separate document from any FERPA release. Most students don't sign it unless asked.
MENTAL HEALTH RECORDS SPECIFICALLY	Mental health records at a campus counseling center operating under HIPAA are NOT FERPA records. Colleges frequently blur this distinction. Clarify which law applies to which office before escalating.	Mental health records have additional state-law protections in many states beyond HIPAA. Colorado adds a consent layer for psychotherapy notes. Emergency exception still applies for imminent danger.

COLORADO-SPECIFIC: M-1 HOLD (EMERGENCY MENTAL HEALTH EVALUATION)

Under Colorado Revised Statutes 27-65-101 et seq., any person who appears to have a mental health disorder and presents an imminent danger to themselves or others may be placed on a 72-hour emergency evaluation hold (M-1 Hold). Campus police or local law enforcement can initiate. Does not require parental consent. The holding facility must make a good-faith effort to notify family unless the patient explicitly objects and has decision-making capacity.

A welfare check by campus police can lead to a hold recommendation but is a separate process -- it does not automatically trigger an M-1. Call the campus police non-emergency line, not 911, for non-life-threatening welfare checks.

CU Boulder: (303) 492-6666	CUPD non-emergency line
CSU Fort Collins: (970) 491-6425	CSUPD non-emergency line
DU Denver: (303) 871-2334	DU Campus Safety
Colorado Mines: (303) 273-3333	Mines Police non-emergency

Note: Verify current numbers directly with each institution before an emergency. All numbers current as of June 2026.

This reference card is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Laws and institutional policies change. Consult a licensed attorney in your state for advice specific to your situation. Sources: U.S. Department of Education (studentprivacy.ed.gov), HHS HIPAA guidance (hhs.gov/hipaa), Colorado Revised Statutes 27-65-101 through 27-65-116, universityparent.com