

Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel (HREAP-C)

Managing Participant Wellbeing

Each year, there are a tiny number of participants who become distressed. It can occur for reasons unrelated to the study. For example, there has been a participant who fainted, possibly due to overheating. The guidelines should be used with discretion and within the researchers' competence. If additional assistance is needed, it should be sought promptly. Students should definitely contact their supervisor.

In the event that any participant becomes distressed during or following an experimental session, the following steps should be considered and taken as appropriate:

- The experiment should be terminated immediately. The experimenter should discuss the participant's reactions with them, normalize their distress, and debrief them about the experiment, as appropriate. The experimenter should assess the participant's state and ensure that they have settled before they leave the session. As an additional measure of caution, the supervisor must be notified at this point, first, by voice communication, and, failing that, by a text-based communication. It may be appropriate for the supervisor to speak with the participant before they leave the testing session.
 - Both the experimenter and the supervisor should obtain the participant's contact details, so that the participant can be contacted the following day (or a few days later, as appropriate – and as agreed with the participant). The supervisor should also arrange a time with the participant to meet with them over the course of the following week in order to conduct a follow-up. The participant should also be provided with the contact details of both the experimenter and the supervisor, and encouraged to contact them in the event that they have any ongoing difficulties or are still experiencing distress prior to the arranged follow-up session.
 - At the follow-up session, the supervisor should review the participant's mood and assess any ongoing reactions following the experiment (e.g., intrusive images of an upsetting film-clip). As appropriate, the supervisor should make every effort to normalize these reactions, but should also thoroughly assess their severity. The appropriate course of action will depend on the participant's presentation, whether they are still experiencing any difficulties, and their level of distress. Options that could be considered vary from no further contact, additional follow-up by phone, an additional meeting/s in person, through to the supervisor making a referral to a relevant clinical service. If no further contact with the participant is considered necessary, the supervisor should ensure that the participant has their contact details, and be reminded that they can contact them in the future in the event of any ongoing or later difficulties.
 - Finally, both the researcher and supervisor should notify the ethics committee or panel that approved the application in a timely manner and provide a detailed account of the incident, along with the course of action that has been taken to provide follow-up of the participant. Both the supervisor and researcher should take detailed notes about the event, and should provide this to the ethics committee or panel.
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