

Suicide

(5 page section)

INTRODUCTION

Hinting, writing, or talking about suicide is a call for help and must be taken seriously. When confronted with a situation in which life-threatening behavior is present, immediate mobilization of all appropriate resources is paramount. Under such conditions, commitment to student confidentiality is superseded by the need to initiate life saving intervention(s).

The following classifications offer three (3) levels of suicide risk with students:

- 1) **Suicidal Threat or Ideation**
- 2) **Suicide Attempt**
- 3) **Suicide Completed**

Do's and Don'ts Regarding Suicidal Ideation

- **DO LISTEN** to what the student is saying and take the suicidal threat seriously.
 - **DO GET HELP** by contacting a school counselor, psychologist, principal or other appropriate resource. Never attempt to handle a potential suicide by yourself.
 - **DO OBSERVE** the student's nonverbal behavior. Facial expressions, body language, and other overt signs often are often telling than what the student says.
 - **DO ASK** whether the student is thinking about suicide. If the indication is "yes," ask how she/he plans to do it and what steps have already been taken.
 - **DO ASSURE** the person that you care and you will find help that will keep her/him safe.
 - **DO STAY** with the student, and if possible, assist with transfer to appropriate mental health professional. The student has placed trust in you, so you must help transfer that trust to another person.
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- **DON'T LEAVE** the student alone for even a minute.
 - **DON'T ACT** shocked, don't allow yourself to be sworn to secrecy, or don't ignore the threat.
 - **DON'T LET** the student convince you that the crisis is over. Often the most dangerous time is precisely when the person seems to be feeling better. Sometimes the student may appear happy and relaxed simply because they have come to a decision (even if that decision is suicide).
 - **DON'T TAKE** too much upon yourself. Your responsibility to the student in this situation is limited to listening, being supportive and getting her/him to a trained mental health professional/therapist (immediately.)

Suicidal Threat or Ideation

In the event a staff member has reason to believe that a student is a suicide risk or has made a suicidal threat they should:

❑ Staff Actions:

- Keep the student under continuous adult supervision
- Notify the principal, counselor, social worker or school psychologist, but do not leave the student alone

❑ Principal, Counselor or Team:

After meeting with the student, as advised by the principal, the counselor or other mental health professional shall:

- Immediately contact the student's parents/guardians and make appropriate recommendations for treatment
- Recommend that parents make an immediate contact with a mental health professional. If requested, provide the parents/guardians the names and phone numbers of mental health resources (agencies, therapists, hospitals, etc.) If the parent/guardian is unavailable or uncooperative regarding emergency services, contact the Community-Based Services to intervene on behalf of the student (potentially a medical neglect referral)
- It is recommended that a follow-up call to the family be made expressing the school's concern and willingness to cooperate with the appropriate medical agencies as requested
- In collaboration with a specific treatment plan formulated for the student by the treating agency, meet with the student's teachers to alert them of the identified risk(s) and to request that they assist in monitoring the student's behavior
- Document all actions taken on behalf of the student (i.e., referrals, phone contacts, follow-up activities, etc.)

❑ Additional steps for our school/facility (if any):

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Suicide Attempt

In the event of an actual suicide attempt:

Staff Actions:

- Notify principal
- Ensure the short-term physical safety of the student

Principal, Counselor or Team:

- Call 911, District Support Team, Central Office
- School nurse, counselor or other staff shall administer first aid until emergency responders arrive
- The student will be kept under constant observation at all times
- The school principal, (or other designated professional) will communicate with the appropriate school personnel, parents/guardians and counselors to establish an immediate plan of action
- The school counselor, social worker or school psychologist will refer the parents/guardian to seek immediate health care intervention
- Follow-up should be made by counselor with parent/guardian to determine that treatment services were obtained
- Document all actions taken on behalf of the student (i.e., referrals, phone contacts, follow-up activities, etc.)

Additional steps for our school/facility (if any):

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Suicide Completed

(off campus)

School staff should exercise caution when discussing an “apparent suicide” with students. Often there will be ongoing investigations by the police department, and parents or other relatives may be reluctant to accept the terrible nature of the death. When the cause of death is clear, it is best to request permission from the parents to talk about the suicide with other students.

If news of death by suicide is received, the principal or designee shall initiate efforts to address emotional reactions within the school community.

❑ **Staff Actions:**

- Notify principal
- Avoid spreading rumors
- Watch for warning signs in other students (such as “copycat” actions)

❑ **Principal, Counselor and Team:**

- Once the death has been confirmed notify District Support Team
- Identify any family member(s) that may be at school and provide crisis counseling
- Do not release the names of other family members who attend the school
- If the media requests information, refrain from discussing any details relating to the deceased student; school staff may wish to describe assistance being offered on behalf of students
- Consider calling a faculty meeting to disclose all relevant facts
- Have school counselor or other appropriate professional describe how students may react to the news and suggest how teachers can address questions and reactions
- Allow time for school staff to ask questions and express their feelings; some staff may be particularly upset and may request and/or require support
- Outline procedures for the remainder of the school day
- Provide support meetings for school personnel if the need exists; refer employees to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as indicated
- Compile a list of other students deemed to be at risk; consider immediate counseling opportunities as part of the school and district’s commitment to responsible follow-up and recovery
- Allow students to leave class during the day to receive support offered from school personnel, the District Support Team or other designated volunteer resources or community faith-based persons who have received this specific training
- If the school based Emergency Response Team (ERT) and the District Support Team (DST) deem it appropriate, consider avoiding any large group meetings or assembly of students (in an effort to maintain order and control)
- Consider an after school faculty meeting; the following points may be covered:
 1. Debrief the events of the day
 2. Provide emotional support for all staff

3. Review the characteristics of high-risk students and compile an additional list based on staff observations of student reactions during the day
4. Announce the plans made by the family for services
5. To the extent possible, make efforts to ensure that regular routine is followed
6. In general, recognize a tragic loss of life, without emphasizing the means of death

Activities to be avoided include:

- Special memorial services within the school building
- Flying the school flag at half staff
- Special yearbook notices
- Large student assemblies

Suicide should not be ignored nor should it be romanticized or sensationalized; it should be dealt with thoughtfully, carefully and compassionately

☐ Additional steps for our school/facility (if any):

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