

R 5350 PUPIL STUDENT SUICIDE

Introductory Guidelines

School personnel must take seriously all suggestions, demonstrations, or communications of suicide. School personnel also must increase their sensitivity to and awareness of the subtle signs of suicidal ideation and/or self-destructive behavior. When confronted with life-threatening behavior or when suicide ideation is present, an immediate mobilization of appropriate resources is essential. In any such situation a commitment to **student pupil confidentiality** must be superseded by lifesaving intervention steps:

Some Suicide Warning Signs in Teenagers

1. A change in eating and sleeping habits.
2. An increased isolation from friends and family.
3. A tendency to become more active and aggressive than usual (unlike suicidal adults, who tend to become apathetic when depressed).
4. A drop in academic achievement.
5. A decision to give away a valued possession.
6. An increased interest in talking about suicide.
7. A sudden and intense interest in religious beliefs and the afterlife.
8. A recent trauma or loss (for example, divorce, family death, a friend's death, moving away).
9. An increased interest in getting his/her "life in order". Loss of interest in hobbies and things he/she used to enjoy.

Immediate Threat of Suicide

Determine the risk involved. If the **student pupil** is in no immediate danger of harming himself or others, proceed to the section entitled "Response to a Suicide Attempt". If it appears that the **student pupil** is in immediate danger and may or does have a dangerous instrument that is readily accessible to cause him harm, attempt to do the following:



1. Request help immediately through the Counseling Office and inform Building Administration so that appropriate personnel may be notified.
2. Try to calm the **student** pupil by talking to him/her in a reassuring manner until professional help arrives.
3. The staff member(s) present should take steps to make sure that they and other **students** pupils who may be present are protected from possible harm. This should be accomplished by attempting to remove any **students** pupils who may be present from the area and placing them into the supervision of another staff member. Although a suicidal person should not be left alone, a staff member confronted with an immediately threatening situation should remember to protect himself/herself from potential harm while trying to resolve the situation.
4. To the extent possible try to have the suicidal **student** pupil relinquish any means of self harm.

Once the immediate threat of suicide has been negated, the rest of the suicide guidelines should be followed:

Response to a Suicidal Ideation/Threat

A professional staff member who has reason to believe a **student** pupil has self-destructive tendencies shall notify the director of guidance, an administrator, SAC, and/or counselor. If the **student** pupil is classified, the school psychologist or school social worker shall be notified immediately. In determining the seriousness of the situation, at least two of the following people shall be present for the assessment: SAC, counselor, school psychologist, school social worker and/or administrator. After the initial meeting with the **student** pupil, if the intervention team member deems the situation to be serious (for example, if the **student** pupil says, "I sometimes think about killing myself", or "I am going to kill myself") the team member shall:

1. When confronted with a pupil who appears to be contemplating suicide, it should first be determined if the **student's** pupil's distress is the result of abuse, neglect, or exploitation by a parent or guardian. If so, the Principal/designee shall first call the appropriate child protection agency, such as DCP&P, give them the facts as to why there is a possibility that the child's distress may be caused by the parent or guardian, and ask them how to proceed. The District Superintendent shall be notified so that he or she may contact the School Board solicitor. Keep the **student** pupil under



complete and continuous adult supervision in a safe and secure environment such as the counselor's, administrator's, nurse's, CST, or student assistance coordinator's (SAC's) office. If it is determined that the **student's** pupil's distress is not the result of abuse, neglect, or exploitation by a parent or guardian, contact the **student's** pupil's parent(s)/guardian(s), or other responsible adult and ask them to come to school immediately. If parent(s)/guardian(s), or other responsible adult, cannot be reached immediately, the **student** pupil shall be kept under constant supervision until contact is made. If contact is not made by the end of the school day, the police or the Division of Child Protection and Permanency shall be called and asked to implement their procedures.

2. Keep the student under complete and continuous adult supervision in a safe and secure environment such as the counselor's, administrator's, nurse's, CST, or SAC's office.
3. Immediately contact the appropriate Vice Principal.
4. Report of Suicide Behavior and Parent School Suicide Intervention Plan shall be completed by one of the two staff members who are involved in the **student's** pupil's assessment.
5.
 - a. The student must leave the building in the custody of his/her parent(s), guardian(s) or other responsible adult, to be evaluated by a recommended outside mental health agency or professional.
 - b. The parent(s)/guardian(s) or other responsible adult will be required to sign the Parent School Suicide Intervention Plan and take this form along with the Report of Suicide Behaviors with them.
 - c. Before the **student** pupil may return to school, the Parent school Suicide Intervention Plan must be signed by the mental health professional or discharge papers from the mental health agency must be submitted to the SAC or the student's school counselor.
6. The Vice Principal shall notify the Building Principal and apprise him/her of the situation and what has occurred to that point. The Building Principal will notify the Superintendent by telephone and send copies of the Parent School Suicide Intervention plan and Report of Suicide Behaviors will be sent to his/her attention.



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7. ~~The Parent School Suicide Intervention Plan and Report of Suicide Behaviors shall be given to the Director of School Counseling to be placed in a confidential Crisis file and kept in a secure location. It is not to be kept with the school counselor's records.~~

~~Response to a Suicide Attempt~~

~~In addition to the procedures listed under Suicidal Ideation/Threat, the following list of procedures will be implemented in the case of a suicide attempt:~~

~~If a suicide attempt is made on school premises, a school nurse, school resource officer and the Principal/designee shall ensure that emergency medical treatment is provided, either through the use of first aid techniques or by telephoning the local rescue squad or paramedics. The **student** pupil shall be kept under close adult supervision at all times. After completion of these immediate steps, the following shall be implemented:~~

1. ~~The Principal/designee shall notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) or another adult family member as soon as possible. If it is determined that the **student's** pupil's distress is, or may be the result of abuse, neglect or exploitation by a parent or guardian, or if none of the aforementioned is available or cooperative, the Principal/designee shall contact the DCP&P to intervene on behalf of the **student** pupil. The District Superintendent shall be notified so that he/she may contact the School Board Solicitor.~~

2. ~~If a **student** pupil is in the process of attempting suicide or has already made an attempt, the Building Principal or a Vice Principal shall contact the police and other emergency personnel as needed. Once the **student** pupil has been provided with emergency medical attention, the Principal shall notify the Superintendent.~~

3. ~~When appropriate, the Principal will call a faculty meeting to inform teachers of the event, offer them an opportunity to address their feelings and concerns and to work with the intervention team to plan appropriate procedures for subsequent school days.~~

4. ~~The guidance director, or other Principal's designee, will monitor progress by keeping in communication with **student** pupil, parents, mental health agencies and any other parties involved in the process.~~

~~Procedures In The Event of a Completed Suicide~~



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PUPIL STUDENT SUICIDE PREVENTION

1. If news of death by suicide is received, the Principal or designee shall verify the information with the police and notify the school Superintendent immediately. Any sibling or other family members of the deceased should be escorted to the Principal's Office by a member of the crisis intervention team or member of the guidance staff, where said family member will be sent home with responsible adult supervision. All contacts with the news media should be referred to the school Superintendent, who will handle them in a manner intended to discourage sensational coverage of the tragedy.
2. The Principal shall immediately notify the Vice Principals, school psychologist, social worker, school nurse, guidance director, SAC, District Superintendent, School Board Solicitor, the **student's** pupil's guidance counselor and other appropriate personnel. Acting as a crisis intervention team, this group will implement an agreed upon action plan and issue an information statement to staff.
3. The **student's** pupil's teachers will be informed as quietly as possible and counseled by the crisis intervention team as to discretion regarding disclosure of information to **students** pupils and other faculty members. This is in order to prevent the release of premature information until such time as a written statement is prepared in accordance with this policy.
4. If the **student** pupil who committed suicide had any siblings within the school district, the teachers of the siblings will be notified and subject to the same provision here as outlined in the foregoing paragraph. If it is determined that the **student** pupil had siblings within another school district, the Superintendent of the other district will be notified, so that the sibling's school district can take proper steps toward crisis management.
5. Provision for crisis counseling centers in the school will be made as well as preliminary adjustments in examination and activity schedules.
6. An emergency faculty meeting will be called by the Principal at the end of the day, or if the event occurs late in the day, by the end of the next school day; to disclose all relevant facts pertaining to the tragic news, and to outline procedures to be followed during the subsequent days and weeks. If news of the suicide is received over the weekend or vacation, an emergency meeting will be called before the **student** pupils arrive on the first school day. The Principal may choose to utilize the Emergency School Closing Phone List if circumstances warrant.



During the emergency faculty meeting, the following steps should be considered:

a. A list of any **students** pupils who were especially close to the deceased should be compiled to offer those **students** pupils an opportunity to gather in specially designated “survivors” group counseling sessions. Trained mental health workers should conduct these sessions.

b. Special survivor group meetings should also be offered to teachers of the deceased, as well as to any other school personnel who felt especially close to the deceased.

c. The director of guidance should compile a list of all other **students** pupils considered by school personnel to be “at risk of suicide”. The list should be reviewed to insure that such persons are given sufficient opportunity during the subsequent days to take advantage of all counseling programs offered within the school as part of its commitment to responsible post intervention follow up.

7. A written statement will be prepared by the Principal for the purpose of assisting all teachers to maintain consistency in reporting the facts surrounding the suicide to **student** pupils.

8. The behavior of all **students** pupils should be monitored by teachers and other district personnel for indications of stress. Referrals should be made to the crisis counseling team as needed.

9. Community resources (e.g. community mental health personnel, members of the clergy, and other appropriate individuals) will be mobilized to assist school personnel in counseling **students** pupils, family members, and any other concerned community members.

10. **Students** Pupils should be allowed to leave class during the following day to obtain support offered by the SAC, school counselors, child study team, on-site mental health professionals and other designated volunteer resources. Trained personnel should give special attention to all **student** pupils considered to be “at risk of suicide”. School personnel and/or mental health workers should be available to meet with parents.



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~~11. To the extent possible, efforts should be made to ensure regular school routine is followed.~~

~~Additional Guidelines~~

~~1. Any support staff member, custodian, secretary, aide, cafeteria worker or technician, who has reason to believe that a **student** pupil has self-destructive tendencies, shall notify the Principal or designee.~~

~~2. Schools servicing students from the district requiring out of district placements will notify students' in district school counselor, or CST Case Manager in instances involving students with disabilities, of cases of suicide ideation or attempt to facilitate implementation of this policy/regulation.~~

~~3. A listing of available child and family counseling services, psychotherapists, inpatient and outpatient adolescent treatment centers shall be updated annually by the School Counseling Department. This listing will be available to all appropriate personnel through the Guidance Office and Special Services Office.~~

~~-[See POLICY ALERT Nos. 96, 209 and 215]~~

R 5350 STUDENT SUICIDE **PREVENTION**

The following are guidelines to assist school district staff members in recognizing the warning signs of a student who may be contemplating suicide, to respond to a threat or attempted suicide, and to prevent contagion when a student commits suicide.

A. Recognition of Warning Signs of Suicide

All school district staff members shall be alert to any warning signs a student may be contemplating suicide. Such warning signs may include, but are not limited to, a student's:



1. Overt suggestion, regardless of its context, that he/she is considering or has considered suicide or has worked out the details of a suicide attempt;
2. Self-mutilation;
3. Obsession with death or afterlife;
4. Possession of a weapon or possession of other means of suicide or obsession with such means;
5. Sense of hopelessness or unrelieved sadness;
6. Lethargy or despondency, or, conversely, a tendency to become more impulsive or aggressive than usual;
7. Drop in academic achievement, slacking off of energy and effort, or inability to focus on studies;
8. Isolation from others by loss of friends, withdrawal from friends, lack of companionship, or family disintegration;
9. Preoccupation with nonexistent physical illness;
10. Loss of weight, appetite, and/or sleep;
11. Substance abuse;
12. Volatile mood swings or sudden changes in personality;
13. Prior suicide attempt(s);
14. Anxiety or eating disorder;
15. Involvement in an unhealthy, destructive, or abusive relationship; and
16. Depression due to being a victim/target of harassment, intimidation, bullying, or mistreatment by others.



B. Response to the Warning Signs of Suicide

1. Any indication of suicide, whether personally witnessed or received by a report from another, shall be taken seriously and immediately reported to the Principal or designee. Upon receiving such report, the Principal will ensure the student is supervised by a school staff member until a preliminary assessment of the risk is determined.
2. The Principal or designee shall immediately contact the parent(s) of the student exhibiting warning signs of suicide to inform the parent(s) that the student will be referred to the Child Study Team or a Suicide Intervention Team for a preliminary assessment in accordance with C. below.
3. If the threat of suicide is immediate and serious, the Principal will contact local law enforcement and the Superintendent of Schools.

C. Preliminary Assessment and Recommendation(s)

1. The Principal or designee will designate the Child Study Team or the Suicide Intervention Team to immediately meet with the student to complete a preliminary assessment.
2. The Child Study Team or Suicide Intervention Team will make a recommendation(s), based on the preliminary assessment, to the Principal or designee regarding the student's risk of suicide.
3. Upon receiving the recommendation(s), the Principal or designee will immediately meet with the parent(s) to review the findings of the preliminary assessment. Based on the recommendation(s) of the Child Study Team or Suicide Intervention Team, the student may be:
 - a. Permitted to remain in school:
 - (1) If the student remains in school after the preliminary assessment, the Principal or



designee will designate a school staff member to follow-up with the student on any recommendations of the Child Study Team or Suicide Intervention Team.

b. Referred to the Child Study Team for further evaluation;

c. Removed from the school and released to the parent(s) and will be required to obtain medical or psychiatric services before the student may return to school:

(1) The parent(s) will be required to submit to the Superintendent a written medical clearance from a licensed medical professional selected by the parent(s) and acceptable to the Superintendent, indicating the student has received medical services, does not present a risk to himself/herself or others, and is cleared to return to school. The Superintendent will not act unreasonably in withholding approval of the medical professional selected by the parent(s). The written medical clearance may be reviewed by a Board of Education healthcare professional before the student is permitted to return to school.

(2) The parent(s) shall be required to authorize their healthcare professional(s) to release the student's relevant medical information to the school district's healthcare professional, if requested.

d. Required to comply with the recommendation(s) outlined in C.3.a., b., and/or c. above, and/or any other recommendation(s) of the Principal or designee to ensure the student's safety and the safety of others.

4. In the event the parent(s) objects to the recommendation(s) or indicates an unwillingness to cooperate with the school district



regarding their child, the Principal or designee will contact the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, Division of Child Protection and Permanency to request intervention on the student's behalf.

D. Response to Attempted Suicide by a Student

- 1. Any school district staff member, volunteer, or intern with reasonable cause to suspect or believe a student has attempted suicide, shall immediately report the information to the Principal or designee or their immediate supervisor.**
- 2. A Principal or designee or supervisor who receives a report of a student who has attempted suicide will immediately report it to the Superintendent or designee, who shall promptly report it online to the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, or as otherwise required by the Department of Children and Families.**
- 3. The school district staff member who witnesses a suicide attempt on school grounds, at a school sponsored event, or on a school bus shall immediately contact local law enforcement and emergency medical services, as appropriate.**

E. Response to Suicide Committed by a Student

- 1. Any school district staff member, volunteer, or intern with reasonable cause to suspect or believe a student has committed suicide, shall immediately report the information to the Principal or designee or their immediate supervisor.**
- 2. A Principal or designee or supervisor who receives a report that a student has committed suicide will immediately report it to the Superintendent or designee, who shall promptly report it online to the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, or as otherwise required by the Department of Children and Families.**
- 3. The Principal of the school the student attended will assemble school staff members as soon as possible, to provide school**



staff members information, plans for the school day, and guidelines for handling the concerns of students.

4. The Principal of the school the student attended will use a School Crisis Team to assist school staff members in dealing with any issues that arise due to the situation and to assist students in the loss.
5. The School Crisis Team will assist teachers in responding to the needs of students. Students who were close to the victim shall be offered special counseling services and parents will be notified of available community mental health services.
6. School staff members shall be especially alert to warning signs of contemplated suicide among the victim's peers.
7. All Principals in the school district will be promptly informed when a student enrolled in the district commits suicide. The district, with the approval of the Superintendent, may provide support and services to school staff members and students as needed.
8. The Principal of the school the student attended may, with the approval of the Superintendent, provide any additional support and services that will assist school staff members and students in the loss.

F. Prevention of Suicide Contagion

1. School staff members, under the direction of the Principal or designee, shall attempt to prevent suicide contagion by:
 - a. Avoiding the glorification or romanticization of suicide;
 - b. Helping students recognize that suicide is irreversible and permanent and does not truly resolve problems;
 - c. Encouraging students to ask questions when a fellow student suggests suicide and report to a school staff member;



- d. Discussing ways of handling depression and anxiety without resorting to self-destruction; and
- e. Implementing any other strategies to prevent suicide contagion.

Adopted: 22 May 1997
Revised: 22 August 2002
Revised: 17 July 2005
Revised: 21 August 2008
Revised: 9 April 2009
Revised: 22 February 2018

2nd Reading 28 June 2018

