

R 5350 PUPIL 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 In any such situation a commitment to pupil confidentiality must be superseded by lifesaving intervention steps;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 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 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 General Office so that appropriate personnel may be notified.
2. Try to calm the 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 pupils who may be present are protected from possible harm. This should be accomplished by attempting to remove any 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 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 pupil has self-destructive tendencies shall notify the director of guidance, an administrator, SAC, and/or counselor. If the 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 pupil, if the intervention team member deems the situation to be serious (for example, if the 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 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 DYFS, 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 pupil under complete and continuous adult supervision in a safe and secure environment such as the counselor's, administrator's, nurse's, CST, or pupil assistance coordinator's office. If it is determined that the pupil's distress is not the result of abuse, neglect, or exploitation by a parent or guardian, contact the 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 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 Youth and Family Services shall be called and asked to implement their procedures.

2. Keep the pupil under complete and continuous adult supervision in a safe and secure environment such as the counselor's, administrator's, nurse's, CST, or pupil assistance coordinator's office.
3. Immediately contact the appropriate Vice Principal.
4. Documents #1 and #2 shall be completed by one of the two staff members who are involved in the pupil's assessment.
5. The pupil 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 (See Document #3). The parent(s)/guardian(s) or other responsible adult will be required to sign and take Document #2 with them. Document #2 must be signed by the agency or professional and submitted to the staff member who completed Document #2 and was involved with the initial assessment and they, in turn, will submit it to the appropriate Vice Principal before the pupil may return to school.
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 Documents #1 and #2 to his/her attention.



7. Copies of Documents #1 and #2 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 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 pupil shall be kept under close adult supervision at all times. If the pupil is difficult to control, the police also shall be notified for assistance. 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 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 Division of Family Services to intervene on behalf of the pupil. The District Superintendent shall be notified so that he/she may contact the School Board Solicitor.
2. If a 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 pupil has been provided with emergency medical attention, the Principal shall notify the Superintendent.
3. The Principal will call a faculty meeting at the end of the day 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 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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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, pupil assistance coordinator, District Superintendent, School Board Solicitor, the 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 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 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 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 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 pupils arrive on the first



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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 pupils who were especially close to the deceased should be compiled to offer those 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 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 pupils.

8. The behavior of all 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 pupils, family members, and any other concerned community members.

10. 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 pupils considered to



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be "at risk of suicide". School personnel and/or mental health workers should be available to meet with parents.

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 pupil has self-destructive tendencies, shall notify the Principal or designee.

2. This policy and related procedures shall be distributed to private schools to which we send our pupils. Private school personnel shall be directed in cases of suicide ideation or attempt to notify the school social worker. The school social worker shall consult with private school personnel to facilitate implementation of this policy to the extent practical within the private school setting. The social worker shall also notify the supervisor of special services and the guidance director to determine what steps might be needed to implement a support plan within our own schools.

3. A listing of available child and family counseling services, psychotherapists, inpatient and outpatient adolescent treatment centers shall be updated annually by the director of guidance, special services, CST's supervisors, and school nurses. This listing will be available to all appropriate personnel through the Guidance Office and Special Services Office.

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R 5350 STUDENT SUICIDE

The following regulations are established for guidance of staff members in recognizing the student who contemplates suicide, in responding to threatened or attempted suicide, and in preventing contagion when a student commits suicide. Because a prompt response may be essential to a student's life, the designation of a district position in these regulations includes the person who holds that position and, if the position holder is absent or unavailable, the person temporarily charged with the responsibilities of the position.

A. Recognition of Potential Suicide

All school personnel, both teaching staff members and support staff members, shall be alert to any sign that a student may be contemplating suicide. Such signs include, but are not necessarily 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. Evidence of preparation of a will, intention to dispose of his/her effects and belongings, or otherwise get life "in order";
3. Obsession with death or afterlife;
4. Possession of a weapon or 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 ills;
10. Loss of weight, appetite, and/or sleep;
11. Substance abuse; and
12. Loss of economic resources.

B. Response to Potential Suicide

1. Any indication of a potential suicide, whether personally witnessed or received by report from another, must be taken seriously and must be reported to the Principal immediately.
2. The Principal shall immediately inform the Child Study Team, which shall investigate the matter promptly and conduct such evaluations as may be appropriate.
3. The Principal will inform the student's parent, in a conference if possible, of the signs demonstrated by the student and of the district's concern and seek parental approval of the student's evaluation. In the event parental abuse or neglect is suspected, the Principal or the employee who forms the suspicion will immediately so inform the Department of Children and Families, Division of Child Protection and Permanency in accordance with Policy 8462.
4. If the threat of suicide is immediate and serious, the Principal may appoint teaching staff members and/or Child Study Team members to a suicide intervention team, which shall determine the potential of the threat by directly questioning the student, without mincing words, about:



- a. Whether any suicide plans have been made, how detailed the plans are, and whether any preliminary actions have been taken,
 - b. The student's feelings of hopelessness and the length of time the student has had such feelings,
 - c. The student's thoughts of suicide and how persistent and strong those thoughts are, and
 - d. Whether the student has considered alternative courses of action to resolve his/her problems.
5. After gathering information, the suicide intervention team shall determine the life-threatening risk of the situation based on the student's signs of possible suicide (paragraph A1) and the student's responses to questioning.
6. If it is determined that a substantial risk of suicide exists, the Suicide Intervention Team shall:
- a. Assign staff members as required to assure that the student is never out of the presence of an adult who has been fully informed that the student may be in danger of self-destruction,
 - b. Refer the student to the Child Study Team for comprehensive evaluation,
 - c. Notify the student's parent immediately and strongly recommend consultation with a licensed mental health professional or agency,
 - d. Request the parent to sign a release of information form authorizing the chosen mental health professional or agency to



share with appropriate district personnel such relevant information as premature termination of treatment, additional threats and/or attempts of suicide, and continuing warning signs.

7. A member of the Suicide Intervention Team will be appointed to follow up on the student's progress and to determine whether the student's parent has consulted a mental health professional or agency. Follow up reports will be made to the Principal.

8. If the student's parent does not sign the release of information form or does not cooperate in a comprehensive Child Study Team evaluation or does not seek treatment for the student, the Principal shall inform the Department of Children and Families, Division of Child Protection and Permanency.

C. Response to Suicide Attempt

1. Any attempted suicide, whether or not on school premises or during the school day, must be reported immediately to the Principal.

2. The staff member who witnesses a suicide attempt on school premises or at a school sponsored event or in the course of school-related travel shall render first aid in accordance with Policy 8441 and summon medical assistance as appropriate.

3. Procedures outlined at paragraph B2 through paragraph B8 above will be followed.

D. Prevention of Suicide Contagion

1. All district Principals will be promptly informed when a student of this district commits suicide.



2. Each Principal will assemble teaching staff members prior to the opening of school to provide them with accurate information, plans for the school day, and guidelines for handling the concerns of students.
3. The Principal of the school or building that the victim attended will assign a crisis team from the student personnel staff to assist the staff in dealing with the general school situation and any individual problems that may arise.
4. The suicide will not be given prominence by public announcement or a school-wide assembly. School will not be closed in order to permit students and staff members to attend the victim's funeral.
5. Teachers will respond to the needs of students with as little interruption of the educational program as possible.
6. Students will be provided with accurate information and will be given the opportunity to discuss their feelings of loss and their memories of the victim, both good and bad, without penalty.
7. All school personnel shall be especially alert to signs of contemplated suicide among the victim's peers.
8. Teaching staff members, under the direction of the Principal, shall attempt to prevent social contagion by:
 - a. Preventing glorification or romanticization of the suicide,
 - b. Helping students recognize that suicide is irreversible and permanent and does not truly resolve problems,
 - c. Encouraging students to ask probing questions when a fellow student suggests suicide and to report such suggestions to a teaching staff member, and



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d. Discussing ways of handling depression and anxiety without resort to self-destruction.

9. Students who were close to the victim, and their parents, shall be offered special counseling services and notified of available community mental health services.

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