TRIO Wolf Creek Distance Learning Charter School #4095

Procedure 135

Responding to Suicide: Intervention and Postvention Procedures

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this district procedure is to protect the health and well-being of students by having procedures in place to prevent, assess the risk of, intervene in suicidal ideation, and respond to suicide completion. This procedure covers actions that take place in the school, on school property, at school-sponsored functions and activities, on school buses or vehicles and at bus stops, and at school-sponsored out-of-school events where school staff are present. This procedure will also cover appropriate school responses to suicidal or high-risk behaviors that take place outside of the school setting.

INTERVENTIONS

The following are procedures for responding to students who express a desire to harm themselves or dealing with students who attempt suicide while on or off school property.

- All threats of self-harm must be taken seriously.
- Under no circumstances should an untrained person attempt to assess the severity of suicidal risk
- All assessment of threats, attempts, or other risk factors must be left to the appropriate professionals (that is, school counselors, school psychologists, mental health therapists, school resource officers, administration, school nurses, and similar professionals). In cases of suicidal risk, the school should maintain a confidential record of actions taken. This will assure that appropriate assessment, monitoring, and support are provided and will document the school's efforts to intervene and protect the student.

INTERVENTION: SUICIDAL IDEATION AND THREATS

When the risk of suicide exists, the situation is managed by the school counselor and administration. The director and counseling department will direct all steps in this procedure and will document steps in the handling of information.

Steps for School Staff and Teachers

1. During a campus day, if a student indicates to any school employees that they are thinking of harming themselves, immediately contact the director or school counselor.
2. ***Do not leave the student alone.*** Take immediate action to isolate the individual posing a threat and prevent access to potential weapons (if known).
3. The student should be escorted to the counseling department or director's office.

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4. The individual working with the student shall fill out a Third Party Statement to inform others of the emergency situation. A copy of the Notification of Emergency Conference Form and the Third Party Statement should go to the following:
    a. Parent or guardian or emergency responders
    b. Guidance Counselor
    c. Confidential file at the school (*not* the cumulative folder)
5. Maintain a safe environment for other students.

Steps for School Director and Counselors

ASSESSMENT OF RISK/THREAT:

1. The counselor will assess the seriousness of the threat and inform the director.
2. In the case of a life-threatening situation, the student and the staff members involved must understand that the issue of confidentiality shall no longer apply.
3. Trained staff will question the student using the school's risk assessment protocol.
4. If staff ascertains that the student needs a more complete assessment by a mental health professional, or is at imminent risk for suicide, immediate contact with the parent/guardian should be made and require the parent/guardian to come to the site. In the event that the parent/guardian cannot or will not come to the school site, law enforcement should be contacted. The student may only be released to a parent, guardian, or law enforcement officer or emergency medical staff.

INTERVENTION: SUICIDE ATTEMPT ON CAMPUS

When dealing with students who attempt suicide while on campus, the situation is managed by the Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART). DART members may include the school director, dean of students, school counselors, support student, faculty, law enforcement, and guidance director. The director and dean of students will direct all steps in this procedure and will document steps in the handling of information.

Steps for School Staff and Learning Managers

1. During a campus day, if school staff becomes aware a student is attempting or has attempted suicide on school property, immediately notify the director, the school resource officer, and the school nurse.
2. ***Do not leave the student alone.*** Take immediate action to isolate the individual posing a threat and prevent access to potential weapons (if known).
3. If the student is in possession of lethal means, secure the area and prevent other students from accessing this area. Lethal means must be removed without putting anyone in

danger. It is best to call a trained law enforcement officer to remove lethal means. Law enforcement officers have special training to de-escalate a situation that can very quickly become dangerous (such as possession of a gun or knife).

4. If the student is in imminent danger, call 911 immediately and then notify the director. The director or nurse will determine if the student is in need of medical attention and make the appropriate additional calls.
5. Maintain a safe environment for other students.

Steps for Director and Counselor

Maintain a safe environment for other students. Initiate lockdown procedures, if necessary.

1. The parent/guardian must be notified immediately.
2. The student may only be released to a parent/guardian, law enforcement official, or emergency medical staff.
3. The director and/or a school counselor will offer support to the family, letting them know specifically the services that the school can offer to their child and referral information for those services that cannot be provided by the school.
4. The student's absence will be excused and credit will be given for work completed. Nonessential work will be excused.
5. However, if another person was threatened or a weapon was brought to the building, the school's approach may be altered accordingly to match other policies and procedures.
6. The importance of restricting access to means of suicide and general safety planning should be stressed to the parent/guardian.

PROCEDURES FOR ASSISTING OTHER STUDENTS DURING A CRISIS

1. During the crisis, clear the area of other students immediately. Remove students who witnessed the event to a private area where a crisis team member can debrief them. It is best to keep the general student body in current classrooms and provide a supportive presence until the emergency is under control.
2. Alert teachers to the situation through text messages or other previously established methods of communication.
3. Provide teachers with a short scripted message to communicate to students. Unless the entire student body witnessed the event, do not provide information about either the student or situation. Partial information can contribute to chaos. (Use language such as "Our school is having a crisis response drill. We will remain in the designated areas until we get further instruction.")

4. The director or designated staff person alerts the Chisago Lakes School District, who in turn will notify school counselors, nurses, and others able to help siblings and other students who might be affected.
5. A faculty meeting may be called by the director or director's designee at the end of the day to inform teachers of the event, offer them an opportunity to address their feelings and concerns, and plan appropriate procedures for subsequent campus days. Students who may be affected by a suicide attempt should be identified by appropriate staff members by informing the student's school counselor. A follow-up plan should be developed to help support any identified situations where services could be provided via the school counseling department or crisis response team.
6. If a student alerted the staff to the situation, a debriefing for that student should take place and further intervention provided as necessary.

ATTEMPT OFF SCHOOL PREMISES

1. If the suicide attempt is made at home and the parents/guardians share this information with the school, a member of the crisis intervention team will contact the family immediately and offer assistance in whatever way is deemed necessary. The parents or guardians will be informed of the school's policy regarding the need to obtain medical/psychiatric "clearance" prior to re-entry to school.
2. If students are aware of the attempt, follow established procedures for outreach to vulnerable students.

Steps for Concerns about Mental Health or Possible Suicidal Idealizations while students are off campus

With the unique nature of an online school setting staff will be trained on procedures for if they feel a student is not safe and is not present on campus.

Staff will notify the director, dean, or school counselor immediately of any safety concerns.

The director, dean, school counselor, or staff member will attempt to contact student in order to assess risk level.

The director or staff member will attempt to contact a parent about safety concerns and ensure that the student is physically safe in their environment. If not able to contact the parent or guardian the director will work with the staff member to contact the local authorities for a wellness check.

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Follow up procedures will include offering of mental health services on campus and meeting with staff as needed.

Staff will be reminded that if they have concerns that they are always able to contact the local authorities or 911 if the timing of the concerning communication does not make contacting others optimal.

Steps for Re-integration of the Student into School

1. The student and parent/guardian meet with the student's school counselor and director to begin a Student Re-entry Plan at least 24 hours before the student returns to school. Among the things that might be discussed would be the student's need to return to school on a half-day or full-day basis.
2. The school counselor holds a conference with the student's teachers to complete the Student Re-entry Plan. If a teacher is unable to attend, the student's counselor will send the Student Re-entry Plan, in writing, to the student's teachers within 24 hours of the student's return to school. Classroom modifications, concerns, and safety will be discussed. Consider creating a 504 plan (guidelines for implementation of federal disability regulations).
3. If the student is on an IEP (individualized education plan), the teacher of record should be included in the re-entry meetings.
4. The school counselor will adjust the student's schedule if needed. Classroom teachers *do* need to know whether the student is on a full or partial study load and should be updated on the student's progress in general. They *do not* need clinical information or a detailed history.
5. Discussion of the case among personnel directly involved in supporting the student should be conducted in private settings and be specifically related to the student's treatment and support needs. Discussion of the student among other staff should be strictly on a need-to-know basis, that is, information directly related to what staff should know to work with the student.
6. The student should complete a Safety Plan with the school counselor before returning to campus. The student should be asked to identify a trusted adult at school with whom he/she feels comfortable. This trusted adult should agree to check in on the student.

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POSTVENTION: AFTER A STUDENT DEATH WHEN SCHOOL IS IN SESSION OR OVER BREAK

The director, working along with the DART (Disaster Assistance Response Team), will notify the staff through a site calling tree, e-mail, or faculty meeting. The DART will direct all steps in this procedure and will document every step in the handling of information about the suicide. The following Disaster Assistance Response Team Duty Checklist may be used for this purpose with appropriate DART roles assigned.

Steps for Directors and School Counselors

1. The director and/or DART member should contact the police to verify the death and get the facts surrounding the death. It is important for school staff to know the facts to reduce imitative behaviors.
2. Contact with the parent/guardian should be made by phone or in person by the director and/or a DART member. The director and/or a DART member should offer support to the family, letting them know specifically those services that the school can offer to any siblings in the school system and referral information for the services that cannot be provided by the school.
3. Gather any information that the family wants to make known, such as funeral arrangements, visitations, etc.
4. Parental or family permission to release information related to the death is not required since a death is public information. If the death is officially ruled a suicide, it is up to the parent/guardian to release that information. It is not the school's role to share that death is due to suicide.
5. A meeting with all staff is advisable as soon as possible. At this meeting:
    a. Inform all staff about the facts known at that point.
    b. Allow time for staff to ask questions and express feelings.
    c. Ensure that all staff have an updated list of referral resources.
    d. Review the process for students leaving school grounds and tracking student attendance.
    e. Announce to staff that the school will interact with the media only through the district public relations office.
    f. Review planned on-campus discussion formats and disclosure guidelines for talking to students. Prepare staff for student reactions.
    g. Alert staff of the possible contagion effect and advise to watch for "at risk" students.
    h. Compile a list of students who are close to the deceased.
    i. Compile a list of staff members who had contact with the deceased.

j. Compile/update a list of students who may be at risk for suicide.
k. Remind staff about risk factors and warning signs for youth suicide.
l. Provide information regarding counseling/support opportunities for students and staff.

6. A memo should be distributed to staff for communication to students. Teachers may read the information themselves or chose to have a member of the DART discuss the information with students.
7. If news of the suicide is received during the school day, faculty should be alerted by the pre-established communication strategy and provided with basic information about the event. Crisis team members should be involved in this notification to faculty members and staff who are known to have had a close relationship or contact with the deceased student.
8. If the death occurs when school is not in session, community crisis team members should be notified to provide support services for school members at community locations.

Announcement of Death to Students

- All memos to be read to students should be time-dated. “This is the correct information as we know it at this time.”
- Do not provide morbid details such as the method or location of the suicide.
- The memo should identify the individuals (which may be DART members) to whom additional questions may be addressed, and where those individuals will be located.
- The final line of the memo should communicate that the staff will be kept informed as new information becomes available. Allow students an opportunity to express their feelings. “What are your feelings and how can I help?” should be the structure of the conversation.
- Explain and predict what students can expect as they grieve (feelings of anger, guilt, shock, anxiety, loneliness, sadness, numbness, or experiencing physical pain).
- Express to students there is no one right way to grieve. It is important to recognize feelings and communicate them.
- Re-orient students to ongoing classroom activities.
- Avoid assemblies for notification and do not use impersonal announcements over the public-address system. Notify students in small, individual classrooms through faculty members or DART members.

Care for Other Students

Have staff members or the counseling department talk with the most affected friends and determine the type of support needed.

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- Designate space for identified students to receive support services provided by the DART.
- Provide a sign-in and -out sheet for students who are seen by a member of the DART.
- Contact community mental health services, which should be supervised by the DART. Support services can include local mental health agencies, district crisis team school counselors, community crisis hotline agencies, and faith leaders.
- The deceased student's counselor and/or the director should follow the deceased student's classes throughout the day providing counseling and discussion to assist students and teachers.
- Establish care stations in the school staffed by DART members. Make sure that everyone, including faculty, students, and other staff members, knows where these are located. There should be more than one location and locations should be set up in small to midsize rooms.
- Reschedule any immediate stressful academic exercises or tests if necessary.
- Follow up with parental contacts and referrals if necessary.

Care for Staff Members

This can be a very difficult time for all staff members at Wolf Creek. Acknowledging this and voicing where supports can be located are important parts of this priority for caring for all staff members.

- Identifying the Learning Manager who most recently worked with the students to see if additional supports are needed.
- Find time for staff to come together and share concerns with mental health staff present.
- Provide support services and self-care resources for staff well beyond the event.
- Follow up with individual staff members as needed.

Parent/Guardian Notification

- Send a letter home to parents/guardians with notification of the event.
- Opt to answer parent/guardian questions via telephone or written notice. Remember to refer to most recent memos when answering phone calls and questions.
- Offer the following resource information:
    - Warning signs for youth who may be suicidal
    - Supportive services available to students at the school
    - Community resources they may wish to utilize
    - How to respond to students' questions about death
    - Reminders about their child's special needs during this time

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Student Memorials and Funeral Arrangements

- Provide information about visiting hours and funeral arrangements to staff, students, parent/guardians, and community members.
- Follow procedures for onsite memorials created at school.
- No services should be held at school unless it is accepted community practice.
- Funeral arrangements should be in accordance with the procedures for other death of students.
    - Arrange for students and staff to be excused from school to attend the funeral if necessary.
    - Avoid glamorizing the death; do not fly the school flag at half-mast.

The procedures outlined here are, of course, subject to variation in certain circumstances. The following issues, however, need to be addressed consistently:

- When a potential suicide risk is present, the parents or guardians are to be contacted and advised of the steps that need to be taken. Remember to remind them to remove access to lethal means, especially firearms and drugs.
- When confronted with an actual situation in which life-threatening behaviors or ideation is present, immediate mobilization of all appropriate resources is paramount.