

## CRISIS INTERVENTION

### I. **Responding To The At-Risk Student**

#### A. **Suicide - All Risk Levels: Low or Unclear**

Situation: A student is identified by a peer, teacher, or other school personnel as possibly suicidal because he/she has directly or indirectly (e.g. in writings) expressed suicidal ideation or demonstrated other warning signs.

- Each school should have a person or persons (with backups) who are identified for staff and students as the individuals to contact if a student is thought to be at-risk.
- These persons can be anyone designated by the school (SAC, psychologists, guidance counselors, nurses, administrators) who have received special training for dealing with a suicidal crisis.
- The principal of each school must be notified and must indicate how he/she wants to be involved in this particular situation, i.e.,
  - prior to any contact with the student
  - concurrent with contact with the student
  - after contact with the student

Situation: A staff person observes or is told about an overt threat in which the student has directly written or spoken about wishing to commit suicide and/or expressed a suicidal ideation or demonstrated other warning signs.

- The staff member who first becomes aware of the situation must keep the student under continuous adult supervision until the building crisis team member has been notified. Receipt of notification to the team member must be confirmed. Messages should not be communicated via e-mail or voice mail. The building team member will:
  - 1) inform the building principal who shall notify the SAC
  - 2) request that the parent(s) come to the school immediately
  - 3) notify the remainder of the building crisis team as needed.
- SAC will talk/interview the student to clarify the situation and assess the lethality of the threat.
- SAC may recommend a referral to a mental health resource (agency, therapist, hospital, etc.)
- The student may have another staff member present during the interviews with SAC or building team member.
- If student is uncooperative, the police should be contacted.
- If the parent(s) or guardian(s) is unavailable or uncooperative, the school administrator will contact the appropriate state-child protective agency to intervene on behalf of the student. A law enforcement officer can transport to a hospital/facility, if necessary. School personnel may accompany the

child.

- An incident report must be completed by the building administrator as soon as possible after the event and submitted to the superintendent.

**B. Medium to High Risk: Overt Suicide Threat**

Situation: A staff person observes or is told about an overt threat in which the student has directly written or spoken about wishing to commit suicide and/or expressed suicide ideation or demonstrated other warning signs.

- The staff member who first becomes aware of the situation must keep the student under continuous adult supervision until the designated contact person has been notified. Receipt of notification to the team member must be confirmed. Messages should not be communicated via e-mail or voice mail. The building team member will:
  - request that the parent(s) or guardian(s) come to school immediately.
  - inform the building principal who shall notify the Superintendent of Schools.
  - notify the building crisis team member(s).
  - talk with the identified student to clarify the situation and assess the lethality of the threat.
  - recommend a referral to a mental health resource (agency, therapist, hospital, etc.)
  - require an assessment by a mental health professional before the child may return to school.
  - If student is uncooperative the police should be contacted.
- If the parent(s) or guardian(s) is unavailable or uncooperative, the school administrator will contract the appropriate state-child protection agency to intervene on behalf of the student. A police officer can transport to a hospital/facility, if necessary. School personnel may accompany the child.

An incident report must be completed by the building administrator as soon as possible after the event and submitted to the superintendent.

**II. Responding to a Suicide Attempt**

**A. On School Premises**

1. The building team members first priority must be to ensure the short-term physical safety of the student.  
The school nurse shall secure immediate medical treatment, using either first aid techniques or telephoning the local rescue squad.  
The student will be kept under close supervision at all times.  
The police should be called.
2. The school nurse or other designated school building team member will communicate with parents/guardians and principal to establish an interim plan of action.
3. The building team member will make an immediate referral to the appropriate mental health emergency service for the implementation of a

plan for short-term assessment and long-term treatment and will:

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- recommend strongly that parent initiate immediate steps to arrange for a mental health assessment.
  - initiate the signing of information releases to allow school personnel to communicate with the mental health professionals responsible for assessing the student.
  - follow-up (by designated school professional) as necessary to encourage parents and/or student to maintain contact with a mental health agency.
4. If the student has siblings at other schools within the district, the principals of these schools should be informed by the Superintendent.
  5. If the suicide attempt becomes known to other students, steps must be taken to attenuate contagion among vulnerable students and provide needed support to those who may be upset by this news.
    - A brief statement of the facts can be prepared, i.e., that there was an attempt and the student is receiving help. Any additional information is confidential.
    - Close friends and students known to be less stable must be identified and contacted to monitor their response and offer support as needed.
    - Reactions of school staff members should also be monitored in order to ensure the provision of needed support to staff members who may be especially troubled by the suicide attempt.
  6. A staff meeting should be called by the building administrator at the end of the day or as soon as possible to inform teachers of the event, to provide an opportunity to address their feelings and concerns, and to plan appropriate procedures for subsequent school days, if necessary.
  7. If the student is in the process of attempting suicide or has already made an attempt, the building principal or assistant principal should contact the police and other emergency personnel as needed. The area should be cleared of other students immediately. Once the student has been provided with emergency medical attention, the building principal shall notify the superintendent. At the building principal's discretion, all students will be kept in current classes until the emergency is over.
  8. All faculty, staff, or administrators (including the principal) who directly dealt with the suicidal student should participate in a mandatory debriefing session with a mental health consultant who is trained in post-crisis debriefing.
- B. Off School Premises:**
1. The building team members should attempt to engage the student in supportive interaction to determine exactly what happened in the suicide attempt.

2. The building team member will then establish communication with the parent which focuses on:
  - recognition of the seriousness of the problem
  - need for professional help
3. The building team member will make an immediate referral to the appropriate mental appi
  - recommend strongly that parent(s) initiate immediate steps to arrange for a mental health assessment.
  - initiate the signing of information releases to allow school personnel to communicate with the mental health professionals responsible for assessing the student.
  - follow-up (by designated school professional as necessary to encourage parents and/or student to maintain contact with a mental health agency.
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**III. Returning to School After a Suicide Attempt**

1. The appropriate school official, upon learning from student's parents, or, if student is hospitalized, from hospital liaison person, about expected length of absence time, should contact student's teachers and request class work assignments that can be completed at home.
2. The designated staff person will maintain periodic contact with the student while he/she is away from school, keeping her or him informed about latest developments in the school; e.g. team scores, other special events, etc.
3. Immediately prior to student's return, the building team member will seek

treatment objectives which the school might be instrumental in supporting. consultation having occurred.

4. Discussion of the case in general faculty meetings is not recommended, unless such discussion can be specifically related to treatment and support needs of student. Generally, discussion of the case with any faculty or other staff should only be on a specific "need to know" basis. Only those persons directly involved with the student need to know about the attempt. Any discussion by these staff with the colleagues is an unethical breach of confidentiality.
5. Discussion of the case in classroom settings should be avoided entirely since such discussion would constitute a violation of the student's right to confidentiality, and such discussion would serve no useful purpose to the student.
6. If, by chance, the attempt was generally known to faculty and/or students, the same rules concerning general discussion of the incident (4 and 5) still apply.
7. School personnel or students who are aware of the case can be encouraged to discuss any of their concerns or reactions with an appropriate administrator or counselor.
8. The building team member should maintain periodic contact with student and his/her parents, following his or her return to school in order to monitor progress and offer appropriate level of support.
9. Generally, every attempt should be made to help the student return to normal functioning by treating him/her as similarly as possible to any student returning from any injury or illness.

IV. Responding to a Critical Situation:

Situation: A catastrophic situation (i.e. a completed suicide, a tragic car accident, a violent incident, child abuse, abduction, and/or rape/abduction) is reported to the Superintendent.

Each school will have a core Crisis Response Team consisting of previously designated members of the faculty, administration, and mental health services staff. There will also be a previously designated district-wide Crisis Response Team which will be convened to manage catastrophic incidents which have severe impact on all schools in the district.

1. The school superintendent or (designee) will obtain from police all pertinent information concerning the catastrophic incident.
2. The superintendent will convene the school (or District) Crisis Response Team. Based upon the severity of the event, the Team will decide which, if any of steps

3-10 will be implemented.

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3. If the incident occurs or is discovered during the school day, immediate arrangements will be made in order to have siblings of those involved accompanied home.
4. The Crisis Response Team leader will coordinate support (which has been pre-arranged) from community mental health agencies.
5. The Superintendent (or designee) will put into action the planned news media control procedures.
  - designate a spokes-person(s)
  - prepare written news releases. Control/limit access to all other written material.
  - designate grounds access perimeters for news media to minimize disruption to school activities. Specify news media office/interview rooms.
6. The Superintendent or designee will arrange staff meeting as soon as possible in order to:
  - disclose all relevant facts pertaining to the event
  - allow time for immediate staff reactions
  - compile list of all students who were close to those involved in the incident
  - compile list of all school staff members who had contact with those involved
  - update or compile list of all students considered at-risk for possible suicidal ideation
  - review planned school response during subsequent school days and including policy regarding contacts with news media
  - review planned small group (in-class) disclosure to students of relevant facts including suggested discussion format.
  - review procedures for making student referrals from classes to designated crisis/survivor support rooms
7. The Crisis Response Team will initiate meetings with all students. The meetings will be structured in small groups (classrooms) only:
  - disclose all relevant facts pertaining to tragedy
  - proceed with pre-planned small-group discussion process
  - announce locations of crisis/survivor support rooms and time availability
  - re-orient students to ongoing classroom activities.
8. The Crisis Response Team will initiate survivor group counseling sessions for:
  - students who were closest to deceased
  - other concerned/troubled students
  - faculty/staff members
9. The Crisis Response Team will arrange meetings for parents in order to:
  - disclose facts and inform of subsequent steps taken by school
  - review school/community resources they may wish to utilize
  - remind them of their children's special needs during the crisis period.

10. The Crisis Response Team will initiate additional survivor support services as follows:
  - reschedule any immediately, impending stressful academic exercises/tests if possible.

inform local hot-line and mental health center of events at school so they can be prepared to meet student needs.

  - contact administrators in surrounding schools and districts. Aftermath of tragedy also affects students and staff in other schools.

Situation:

**Child abuse is witnessed and/or suspected**

1. The state/child protection agency is notified by staff member.
2. The Principal is notified.
3. The Principal notifies the Superintendent of Schools and a law enforcement official as appropriate.

Situation:

**An abduction occurs.**

1. If the abduction is witnessed or reported, 911 is call immediately.
2. Principal is notified.
3. Principal notifies the Superintendent of Schools.

Situation:

**There is an abduction or rape/abduction attempt.**

1. 911 is notified.
2. Principal is notified.
3. Principal notifies the Superintendent of Schools.
4. The family is notified.
5. The child is contained.
6. The Principal assigns a building crisis team member to serve as a surrogate for the interview with a state/child protection agency representative.

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### **Administrator Checklist: Responding to a Crisis**

Upon receiving notification of a tragedy, the following actions will be taken by school administration:

1. Call police and/or authority to verify facts (Principal/designee)
2. Notify Superintendent of Schools and, if needed, other members of crisis management team; identify district liaison with media; prepare press release/information sheet (Principal/designee)
3. Notify other schools' administration if there are other family members in district (Principal/designee)
4. Activate staff telephone chain and notify staff of meeting to be held before opening of school. (Principal)
5. Activate PTA emergency telephone chain if appropriate. Notify PTA President of tragedy and steps which school will be taking. (Principal) Note: Information on phone chain should be provided to an adult only. Messages regarding specific information should not be left on voicemail or communicated to a child.
6. Conduct pre-school opening meetings of building crisis management team; identify "at risk" students. (Principal/designee)
7. Prepare information sheet for distribution at staff meeting, as appropriate.
8. Contact local clergy to request assistance with students/parents, if appropriate. (Principal/designee)
9. Conduct Staff Meeting
  - Distribute fact sheet to all to be read in homerooms
  - Advise staff of funeral arrangements, if known
  - Identify steps for dealing with students, staff, media
10. Proceed with normal school day schedule as much as possible
11. Contact parents to express sympathy (Principal/designee)
12. Attend funeral as needed; students may attend with prior written parental permission.
13. Schedule subsequent faculty meetings as needed
14. Schedule small meetings with parents and/or students as needed



