

Suicide Prevention Policy

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to protect the health and well-being of all PA Cyber students by having procedures in place to prevent, assess the risk of, intervene in, and respond to suicide. PA Cyber will:

- a) Recognize that physical, behavioral, and emotional health is an integral component of a student's educational outcomes.
- b) Further recognize that suicide is one of the leading causes of death among young people.
- c) Understand the ethical responsibility to take a proactive approach in preventing suicide.
- d) Acknowledge the role of the school in providing an environment which helps to foster positive youth development.

The Suicide Prevention Policy is meant to be paired with support from the Guidance Department as well as the Student Assistance Program (SAP). It covers actions that take place in the school, at school-sponsored functions and activities, and at school sponsored out-of-school events where school staff are present. The policy applies to the entire school community, including educators, school and district staff, students, parents, guardians, and volunteers. The policy will also cover appropriate school responses to suicidal or high risk behaviors that take place outside of the school environment.

Protocols:

All staff will receive initial (upon hire) and annual professional development as it relates to recognizing at-risk behaviors and suicide threats, referrals to the appropriate personnel, response procedures, postvention, and resources for youth suicide prevention. The training will also include information about student groups who are at higher risk for suicide such as those with mental and/or substance abuse disorders, those who are experiencing homelessness, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth.

Prevention:

Policy implementation: The Director of Guidance and Pupil Services will serve as the district suicide prevention coordinator for the school. The district suicide prevention coordinator will be responsible for planning and coordinating implementation of the policy for the entire school.

Each school will also have a suicide prevention coordinator to act as a point of contact in each school for issues relating to suicide prevention and policy implementation. The school counselor in each school will serve as the suicide prevention coordinator. In the event that the school counselor cannot be reached, the Student Assistant Program personnel for each school and the principals for each school will act as the suicide prevention coordinator.

Publication and Distribution: The Suicide Prevention Policy will be distributed annually and is to be included in all student and teacher handbooks as well as on the school website.

Procedures for Early Identification: The school staff along with the Guidance Department and the Student Assistance Program (SAP) will work together to identify students who demonstrate risk factors for suicide. Staff will be made aware of risk factors, who to contact when there is a concern, and the check-in procedure with the student and family when a concern is raised.

Referrals: Students exhibiting risk factors will be referred to the grade appropriate school counselor, who will then assess the situation and make a SAP referral. All school counselors and SAP staff will be familiar with resources and agencies that may be called to assist a student with thoughts of suicide. The student's family will be informed about any concerns raised by school staff and will be given resources to seek help if needed.

Intervention

When a student is identified as potentially suicidal, the student and the student's family will be contacted by the school counselor to assess the risk and facilitate the referral if necessary. If a school counselor is not available, a SAP representative and an administrator will fill this role until a school counselor can be reached.

For students at risk:

1. School staff will stay in contact with the student until a family member or help can be reached.
2. The principal, school counselor, and SAP team member will be notified as soon as possible. If a student verbalizes suicidal ideation during class, the teacher will ask the student to stay in class. The teacher will contact the school counselor and the principal to help assess the situation. The student should not be allowed to log out of class (if possible) until someone at the home can be reached by the school counselor or principal.
3. A phone call should be made to the family with the school counselor, the principal, and SAP on the line. If the student answers and no one is at home, the school counselor will speak to the student while the principal or SAP representative tries to reach a family member. It is possible that emergency services may need to be called.

Parental Notification and Involvement:

The principal, SAP representative or school counselor will contact the parent/guardian as soon as possible after a student expresses suicidal thoughts. If the student has exhibited any type of suicidal behavior, "means of restriction" or limiting the child's access to mechanisms for carrying out a suicide attempt will be discussed. Staff will inform the parent of suicide prevention resources in their area and encourage the parent to seek help. During the conversation, the principal, school counselor, or SAP representative will assess whether there is further risk of harm due to parent or guardian notification.

If the suicide threat is made during after-school hours, students will be directed to call a crisis line, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, provided to them in the student handbook.

Methods of Responding to a Suicide or Suicide Attempt

Suicide Attempt: The school counselor will contact the family to offer any needed help. Mental health resources that the family may use will be discussed. A SAP referral will be made to give the student additional in-school support. The school counselor will also reach out to any other students that may have been impacted by the suicide attempt.

Suicide: The district suicide prevention coordinator, the school suicide prevention coordinator, SAP, and the principal will meet to discuss the implementation of an action plan.

1. *Verify the death.* Staff will talk with the parent/guardian or police to gather more information. The death should not be labeled a suicide until the cause of death has been confirmed.
2. *Assess the situation.* The Suicide Prevention Team will meet to consider how severely the death is likely to affect other students, and to determine which students are most likely to be affected.
3. *Share information.* Inform the staff who have contact with the student that a death has occurred.
4. *Avoid Suicide Contagion.* It should be explained to staff that one purpose of trying to identify and give services to other high risk students is to prevent another death. The team will work together to identify other students who are most likely to be significantly affected by the death. The warning signs and reporting procedures will be discussed with staff again.
5. *Initiate Support Services.* Students identified as being more likely to be affected by the death will be assessed by a school employed mental health professional to determine the level of support needed. The team will coordinate services for the students and staff in need of individual and small group counseling.

Reporting Procedures

When a student expresses suicidal thoughts:

1. Contact the school counselor.
2. If the school counselor cannot be reached, contact the principal and the school SAP representative.
3. The school counselor will contact the student's family.
4. If the threat is deemed immediate, the school counselor, principal, and SAP representative will call home. If the parent/guardian cannot be reached, the school counselor will remain in contact with the student while the principal or SAP representative calls emergency services.

Recommended Resources

Staff:

Lifelines - Suicide Prevention Program - violencepreventionworks.org

Making Educators Partners in Youth Suicide Prevention - sptsuniversity.org

More Than Sad - American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - afsp.org

Suicide SAFE App for iPhone and Droid- SAMHSA

The Trevor Project - thetrevorproject.org

Students:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: The Lifeline is a 24-hour, toll-free suicide prevention service available to anyone in suicidal crisis or their friends and loved ones. Call 1-800-273-8255.

The Trevor Lifeline: Suicide prevention lifeline for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning young people. Available 24 hours a day. Call 1-866-488-7386