

SUICIDE AND INTERVENTION

- POLICY -

The Board recognizes that school personnel will, from time to time, become aware of or receive reports of students contemplating or attempting suicide. Although the parents or guardians of suicidal students are responsible for their care, the Board, in placing the primary focus on the safety and care of students, endorses appropriate supportive measures for supporting suicidal students as well as their parents or guardians.

- REGULATIONS -

1. For the purposes of this policy, “principal” means the School Principal, Vice-Principal or the teacher in charge and “counsellor” means the school counsellor in high schools or the itinerant elementary school counsellor in elementary schools.
2. For the purposes of this policy, “suicide intervention” is distinct from “risk assessment.”
 - 2.1. Principals and counsellors employ suicide intervention strategies to determine what steps are necessary to ensure the immediate safety of a student.
 - 2.2. Suicide intervention leads to a risk assessment normally conducted by a community counsellor with specific training. Normally, school personnel do not conduct risk assessments; however, they collaborate with the community mental health professional conducting the risk assessment. In the event that no community mental health professional is available, a properly trained counsellor may conduct a risk assessment.
 - 2.3. School personnel do not provide the therapeutic follow-up required by suicidal students; however they collaborate with the community mental health professional who provide therapy and, if appropriate, maintain a counselling relationship with the student.
3. The Board supports situational variations to these procedures if the variations are made to ensure the safety of students and staff.
4. The safety of a suicidal student takes priority over maintaining confidentiality. Information about a student that will help protect them may be shared; however, the student’s confidentiality will be protected as much as is feasible.
5. Any staff member who suspects that a student is suicidal must immediately inform the principal or counsellor.

Suicide Intervention

6. Procedure for caring for a student who threatens suicide:
 - 6.1 Suicide threats may come in the form of statements or actions. Suicidal statements may be verbal or written, including statements made via email or on a social networking site. Suicidal actions include gestures and drawings depicting self-harm.
 - 6.2 Suicide threats must never be ignored. When a staff member receives a report that a student is contemplating suicide, they must report immediately to the principal or counsellor.
 - 6.3 Upon learning that a student may be contemplating suicide, the principal or counsellor determines what intervention is necessary. The student's age, gender, ethnicity, history, relationships, substance use and access to firearms are all factors to consider when determining the appropriate intervention.
 - 6.4 Early in the intervention, the student's parent or guardian is informed. If the threat is accompanied by a disclosure of parental abuse, then the Ministry of Child and Family Development is informed instead.
 - 6.5 Principals and counsellors match the intervention to the situation and perceived level of threat. In the case of a low risk student, the intervention may be limited to a call to the parent who takes the student to a counsellor. In cases of high-risk, non-compliant students, it may be necessary to call the RCMP to escort the student to the hospital.
7. Procedure for caring for a student who has attempted suicide:
 - 7.1 The first staff member reaching the student offers assistance if, in their judgement, it is safe for them to do so. They stay with the student and send for:
 - 7.1.1 A first aid ticket holder if first aid assistance is required,
 - 7.1.2 The principal,
 - 7.1.3 The counsellor and
 - 7.1.4 An ambulance (it is advisable to transport the student to the hospital via ambulance even if the injuries are not serious).
 - 7.2 To ensure that the student is not left alone while waiting at the hospital, the principal informs hospital staff that a student is en route and gives them information about the nature of the injuries and that they were self-inflicted.
 - 7.3 The principal or counsellor informs the parent/guardian about the incident.
8. Procedure for caring for a student who is in the act of attempting suicide:
 - 8.1 Ensuring the safety of students and staff is the overriding concern. The first staff member reaching the student clears and secures the area and sends for the principal and the counsellor. If the student does not have a weapon, they stay with the student. If the student has a weapon, they move to safety.

- 8.2 The principal sends for the RCMP and takes charge of the situation until their arrival. The RCMP intervenes to stop the attempt and arranges for transportation to the hospital.
 - 8.3 If safe to do so, the counsellor attempts to calm and de-escalate the student until the RCMP arrives and takes over. If a counsellor is not available, the principal may designate another staff member to stay with the student.
 - 8.4 Staff should not physically intervene except as a last resort and only if the intervention can be accomplished without danger to themselves or others.
9. Follow-up procedure for suicide attempts and threats:
- 9.1 The principal ensures that suicide attempts and threats are accurately documented.
 - 9.2 Suicide attempts are reported to the Superintendent.
 - 9.3 In consultation with the counsellor and the Assistant Superintendent, the principal plans follow-up that considers the counselling needs of all students and staff and may include Critical Incident Response, counselling provided by the school counsellor and/or counselling provided by community counsellors.
 - 9.4 The principal and/or counsellor prepare a plan of care for the student's return to school. This will usually be done in consultation with the student's parent or guardian, community counsellor, doctor and/or psychologist. The student will be included in the planning process if able.
 - 9.5 If, in the opinion of the principal or counsellor, the parent or guardian does not act to ensure the safety of a suicidal student, they must report this to the Ministry of Child and Family Development.
 - 9.6 Principals and counsellors should be familiar with community resources available in the community and offer advice and guidance to students and their families so that they can access appropriate resources.

Suicide Completion

10. In the event that a student suicide is completed, at the earliest possible time a scripted announcement will be made by the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent to staff at the school where the student attended. The principal or Assistant Superintendent will make a separate scripted announcement to students. In the event of the death occurring during a school break this will take place on the first school day following the break.
11. The principal and Assistant Superintendent will collaborate with community partners to offer ongoing counselling and supports for students and staff.

12. Contagion or copycat suicides are a significant concern for schools. Schools need to respond to grief and also be alert to other students that may be vulnerable as a result of the death.
13. A delicate balance must be struck to create opportunities for students to grieve without increasing suicide risk for other students by glorifying, romanticizing or sensationalizing suicide.
14. After a suicide, a principal may receive a request to locate a permanent memorial to the student on school property. The principal should refuse such memorials as vulnerable youth may perceive the memorials in a different light from the intended purpose. Youth contemplating suicide may view the memorials as evidence that suicide is an appropriate or desired response to their pain.
15. In the event that memorial tributes are created by students in the school, the tributes shall be left for the remainder of the school day and at the end of the day will be respectfully collected and removed by the principal or designate. These may be offered to the family by the principal.

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