

Plano High School
Student Services
704 W. Abe St
Plano, IL 60545

SUICIDE PREVENTION/INTERVENTION GUIDELINES

Q. Who evaluates the risk factor when a student makes a suicidal threat or gesture?

A member of the Student Services (SS) Team should evaluate the risk when a student makes a reference to suicide. At any point, a building staff member may contact a SS member for consultation regarding the assessment of student suicidal risk.

Q. Who must be informed in the building when a student exhibits at-risk suicidal behavior?

A staff person with a concern about an at-risk student should IMMEDIATELY inform the building principal and a SS member. Do NOT wait until the end of the day. If the SS member is contacted directly, it is up to the SS member to contact the building principal and the Police Liaison officer.

The SS member should collect information and facts about the student's remarks or threats, so that the parent can be fully informed as soon as possible. It is mandatory that a parent/guardian be informed. Details of parental notification will be included in these guidelines.

Q. What is the appropriate response when a student talks about suicide or makes a suicidal gesture during the school day?

Research indicates that the majority of persons who commit suicide have verbalized their intent. The staff person witnessing the remark or behavior should always take it seriously.

Ask a student directly if he/she is thinking about suicide. Avoid a panic reaction – stay calm and listen. Avoid criticism and listen to what the student is sharing. It is important for the staff person to promote a climate of trust, which will allow the student to express the feelings that are troubling him or her.

Do not promise the student you won't tell. You are a mandated reporter. Avoid in-depth discussion and take on the role of the confidante. Let the SS member or principal proceed with the necessary steps.

Q. What are the requirements of parental notification?

Notification of parent/guardian should be made by the designated SS member. It is the school's responsibility to inform parents whenever there is a reasonable concern regarding suicidal risk. When informing parents, pertinent information should be shared, often including the role of the referral agent (teacher, coach, peer, etc...), the risk factors prompting the referral, and the current mental status of the student. It is preferable that there be a face-to-face contact with the parent/guardian, but it is often necessary to share information, provide community resources, and develop an ongoing safety plan by phone.

Q. What role do parent/guardians play following notification?

It is the parents' responsibility to act on the information forwarded to them by the school.

At times, a parent/guardian is unable to access community support systems. If this occurs, the SS member may seek consultation (SS members, school/district administrators, community resources) in an effort to meet the student's need.

When a parent is unwilling to follow the steps toward the safety of the student, mandated reporting may be necessary. Illinois Health and Welfare Guidelines mandate that a minor receive necessary treatment for life-threatening physical or mental illness. This may include reporting the concern to the School Liaison Officer. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services should also be contacted immediately when school staff is concerned about a student at-risk and appropriate parental response is questionable. The phone number is 1-800-252-2873.

Q. What are the confidentiality issues that arise for school staff as they deal with suicidal students?

Thoughtful dissemination of information at the building level about the student's needs should occur. The primary purpose of sharing information about the student is to establish a supportive network for the student within his or her school day.

A release of information is required to share any information with an outside agency.

The exception to this rule would be in sharing identifying information required to secure immediate mental health services (911 emergency services).

Q. Should a student at-risk for suicide be allowed to return home without parental notification?

A student judged to be at imminent risk for suicide should NEVER be permitted to return home without parent notification.

In a situation where it is not possible to reach a parent or guardian, consultation with a building and/or district administrator will take place to discuss a safety plan, including student supervision and possible involvement of emergency services.

Q. When a student informs a staff member that a peer is at-risk for suicide, what steps should be taken?

Peer reports will be taken seriously. The staff person who receives a peer report should IMMEDIATELY initiate the referral procedure.

Q. What constitutes reasonable follow-up measures after a student has made a suicide attempt or gesture and/or has been treated by an outside agency?

Follow up will be monitored by SS member to monitor the ongoing needs of the student. With Release of Information there may be consultation with outside service providers, along with parent/guardian, in an effort to coordinate appropriate support services.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Q. What should a staff member do if he/she learns that a student has either exhibited suicidal behavior or had treatment for at-risk behavior?

Inform an SS member of the information received.

STUDENTS AT RISK

A **risk factor** is a characteristic that can be attributed to suicidality. All of these factors need to be taken into consideration when assessing students for risk of suicide. Risk factors for youth suicide include:

- Psychopathology
 - This includes students who struggle with mood instability (i.e. depression), substance abuse issues, conduct/discipline, anxiety/stress/perfectionism.
- Parenting/Familial Problems – History of family mental health issues.
- Cognitive deficits
- Interpersonal isolation/alienation (including those who are bullied or have few attachments)
- Hopelessness / self-deprecation
- Poor coping with lack of resiliency. Factors that may lead to an erosion of coping skills:
 - School failure or crises –especially for students who normally do not experience failure
 - Peer-rejection/bullying (in-person, via text, or on-line)
 - Breakup of a relationship, romance
 - Death of a family member
 - Discipline problems at school, home or legal
 - Unwanted pregnancy
 - Move to a new city/school district
 - Family risk factors: divorce, parental conflicts, alcohol or drug abuse

A **warning sign** is an acute risk factor or *red flag*. These include:

- Suicidal ideation (threatened or communicated)
- Substance abuse (excessive or increased)
- Purposeless thoughts (no reason for living)
- Anxiety (often with agitation or insomnia)
- Hopelessness (feeling trapped or helpless)
- Withdrawal from friends, family, or society
- Anger (rage or seeking revenge)
- Recklessness (risk taking)
- Mood changes (dramatic)
- Seeking means (i.e. buying a gun, seeking pills, etc.)

The following events may seem inconsequential by adult standards; however, to a troubled adolescent, it may be the “final straw”.

*American Association of Suicidology Accreditation Resource Guide.

Remember there is help available ... Don't hesitate to contact someone

SIX CRITICAL LIFE MESSAGES

Children need a safe place where they can be themselves and take important steps towards a healthy life. Educators and parents can help children achieve these goals by delivering six critical life messages:

1. I BELIEVE IN YOU
2. I TRUST IN YOU
3. I KNOW YOU CAN HANDLE IT
4. YOU ARE LISTENED TO
5. YOU ARE CARED FOR
6. YOU ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO ME