

5350 PUPIL SUICIDE

The success of an adolescent suicide intervention and post-vention program depends upon clearly stated and commonly understood procedures and regulations. It is important that all staff be made aware of their responsibilities in the event of a potential or imminent suicide incident, and that a chain of communication identifying appropriate school personnel and others be established. The post-vention procedures assist the school to react to the tragedy effectively in a time of crisis.

Suicide Intervention Guidelines

The identification of a pupil at risk (threatening suicide) can be made by:

- Staff members
- Pupils at risk
- Peers
- Parent(s) or legal guardian(s)

Should a Board of Education employee be notified by a pupil that he/she may be suicidal, the following procedures shall apply:

- The staff member should immediately attempt to ascertain the relevant facts and the seriousness of the pupil's situation. These facts should be discussed with the pupil in an empathetic fashion which encourages the pupil to ventilate and share his/her feelings.
- The pupil shall not be left alone at any time by the employee.
- The pupil will be escorted to the Guidance office and then directed to his/her counselor. Should the counselor be unavailable, the pupil will then be directed to any available counselor or the nurse.



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- Once the guidance counselor has engaged the pupil, he/she shall notify the Principal, the school psychologist and the Student Assistance Counselor immediately of the proceedings and the pupil involved. Should the Principal be unavailable, the Assistant Principal or some other building administrator shall be notified.
- Should a Board of Education employee be informed of a potentially suicidal pupil by a third party or suspect that a pupil is suicidal based upon observation or for any other reason, the following procedure shall apply:
- The employee shall report the identified pupil to his/her guidance counselor immediately. If the counselor is unavailable, the employee shall contact an administrator, who in turn shall contact the school psychologist and the Student Assistance Counselor.
- The guidance counselor, along with the Student Assistance Counselor and the administrator, shall be responsible for making immediate contact with the identified pupil and interview the pupil to assess the situation.
- Parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the pupil should be informed at once.
- The pupil should not be left alone.
- If parent(s) or legal guardian(s) are known to be concerned and appear to be cooperative, they should be given all information available and be encouraged to seek professional help in addition to any school specialists that have become involved.

If parent(s) or legal guardian(s) are known to be uncooperative or unavailable the local police/juvenile officer should be requested and should take the pupil home, preferably accompanied by a staff member.

- If it appears that the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the pupil cannot or will not be available to help, then the Division of Youth and Family Services shall be contacted so as to intervene on behalf of the pupil.



Post-vention Procedures in the Event of a Completed Suicide

If news of a death by suicide is received, the Principal or designee shall verify the information with the police and notify the school Superintendent immediately. Any sibling or other family members of the deceased should be escorted to the Principal's office and sent home with responsible adult supervision. All contacts with the news media should be referred to the school Superintendent, and/or Principal, who will be responsible for assuring that they are handled in a manner intended to discourage sensational coverage of the tragedy.

In an effort to responsibly deal with emotional reactions within the school community and to decrease the potential for a contagious effect, the following procedures should be initiated:

- An emergency faculty meeting should be called by the Principal at the end of the day, in order to disclose all relevant facts pertaining to the tragic news, and to outline procedures to be followed during the subsequent days and weeks. If news of the suicide is received at night or over the weekend or vacation, an emergency meeting should be called before the pupils arrive on the first school day.
- A written statement should be prepared by the Principal for the purpose of assisting all teachers to maintain consistency in reporting the facts surrounding the suicide to pupils. Under no circumstances will pupils be informed of the suicide in a large assembly or over the school's public address system.
- Community resources (e.g., community mental health personnel, members of the clergy, and other appropriate individuals) should be mobilized to assist school personnel in counseling pupils, family members, and any other concerned community members.
- During the emergency faculty meeting, the following step should be considered: compiling a list of any pupils who were especially close to the deceased in order that they be offered an opportunity to gather in designated "survivors" group counseling sessions.
- Pupils should be allowed to leave class during the following day in order to obtain support offered by the school counseling departments, on-site mental health professionals, and other designated volunteer resources.



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Trained personnel should give special attention to all pupils considered to be at risk of suicide.

- To the extent possible, efforts will be made to insure that regular school routine is followed. However, it is advisable that stressful activities such as major examinations be rescheduled for later dates. Activities to be avoided include special memorial services, flying the flag at half mast, or otherwise "glamorizing" the suicide.

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