

JHH. SUICIDE PREVENTION AND POSTVENTION

I. PURPOSE

The School Board of the City of Norfolk, in recognition of the need to protect the health, safety and welfare of its students, to promote healthy development, to safeguard against the threat or attempt of suicide among school-aged youth, and to address barriers to learning, hereby adopts this policy. This policy corresponds with and supports other federal, state and local efforts to provide youth with prevention education, early identification and intervention, and access to all local resources to promote health and prevent personal harm or injury.

II. SUICIDE PREVENTION EDUCATION

Students will receive age-appropriate lessons in their classrooms through health education on the importance of safe and healthy choices, as well as help seeking strategies for self or others. Lessons will take place during the student's 4th, 6th, and 9th grade years. Students are taught not to make promises of confidence regarding suicidal ideation when they are concerned about a peer or significant other.

Lessons will contain information on comprehensive health and wellness, including emotional, behavioral and social skills development. Lessons will be taught by health and physical education teachers, community service providers, and counselors hired specifically to address suicide prevention screening needs.

The suicide prevention counselors will work with all schools and provide guidance, support, interventions, and assistance with connecting students in need with school and community resources. The suicide prevention counselors will also be utilized to train school staff members regarding suicide prevention background information, recognitions of students in need, and appropriate processes and procedures once a student is identified.

Students will be provided with a mechanism to ask for confidential help. Students who are in need of intervention will be referred to staff that will be able to address their concerns and provide the student and their families with appropriate resources to address their needs. Staff that may be asked to help include, but are not limited to, school counselors, suicide prevention counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, and day treatment providers). When appropriate, school support staff will make contact with local behavioral health centers and hospital emergency rooms to have a clinical assessment done to ensure the safety of the student in crisis. In all instances of homicidal or suicidal ideation, the school administration will be made aware of the presenting concerns so that they may be involved in the decision-making process. Immediate safety concerns should also involve first responders such as School Security Officers, School Resource Officers, and 911 (police/ambulance/fire).

III. TRAINING AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Any person licensed as administrative or instructional personnel by the Board of Education and employed by the Norfolk City School Board who, in the scope of his employment, has reason to believe, as a result of direct communication from a student, that such student is at imminent risk of suicide, shall, as soon as practicable, contact at least one of such student's parents to ask whether such parent is aware of the

student's mental state and whether the parent wishes to obtain or has already obtained counseling for such student.

All staff are responsible for safeguarding the health and safety of students. All staff are expected to exercise sound professional judgment, err on the side of caution and demonstrate extreme sensitivity throughout any crisis situation. All school personnel should be informed of the signs of youth depression/suicide.

Any staff member who is originally made aware of any threat or witnesses any attempt towards self-harm, that is written, drawn, spoken or threatened, will immediately notify the principal or his/her designee. A threat in any form must be treated as real and dealt with immediately. No student should be left alone, nor confidences compromised.

Appropriate confidentiality is important to maintain good relations between students and the administrators/counselors that they interact with. However, in cases of life threatening situations (harm to self or others), a student's confidentiality will be waived. The district's suicide crisis response procedures will be implemented when students have indicated potential suicidal or homicidal ideation.

IV. SUICIDE CRISIS RESPONSE PROCEDURES - SUICIDE THREAT

A. Definition

A suicide threat is a verbal or non-verbal communication that the individual intends to harm him/herself, with the intention to die, but has not acted on the behavior.

B. Procedures

1. The staff member who learns of the threat will locate the individual and arrange for or provide constant adult supervision.
2. The above-mentioned staff member will ensure that the school principal/designee has been informed.
3. The principal/designee will involve student services staff (school counselor, school social worker, school psychologist), or other trained mental health professional in their absence, to assist the administrator with decision-making related to the presented concerns.
4. The appropriate staff or approved agency provider will determine risk and intervention needed by interviewing the student, and gathering appropriate supportive documentation from teachers or others who witnessed the threat.
5. The principal/designee will:
 - a. Contact the parent/guardian, apprise them of the situation and make recommendations. The person or persons conducting the threat assessment interview should collaborate with the administrator to ensure that the parent/guardian receives appropriate information.
 - b. In nearly all instances, the parent should be notified of the suicidal ideation via direct contact. A voicemail, text, or email should not be the only method of communication. The parent needs to be adequately informed of the situation so that a reasonable and safe response can be formulated. The lone exceptions would be if the parent is the direct reason for the suicidal ideation (as indicated by

student or other credible evidence). In instances such as this, the Department of Human Services should be contacted for guidance.

- c. The student cannot be released to go home until contact has been made with the parents/guardians. If contact cannot be made, a call to social services or the police may be necessary to determine appropriate next steps.
 - d. Put all recommendations regarding the student's suicidal ideation in writing to the parent/guardian. Have the parent sign the recommendation form and keep a copy for the school. Mail the recommendation through certified mail if there is any question or doubt of the parent/guardian receiving the recommendations.
 - e. Maintain a file copy of the letter in a secure and appropriate location.
6. If the student has demonstrated significant risk with regard to suicidal ideation, the school should assist the parent with getting an emergency assessment done to address the safety and mental health needs of the student.
 7. If the parent refuses to cooperate, and there is any doubt regarding the child's safety, the school administrator/designee should call human services or the police to pursue a potential involuntary mental health assessment.

Note: If a threat is made during an after-school program, and no school or district mental health personnel are available, human services or the police should be called to receive immediate guidance. As in other circumstances, the parent should be made aware of the student's suicidal ideation. The school administrator/designee should be made aware as soon as is possible so that they may appropriately follow up with the student and his/her family.

V. SUICIDE CRISIS RESPONSE PROCEDURES - CONTACTING THE PARENT/GUARDIAN

If the section below titled "Abuse or Neglect" does not apply, then the staff member shall call at least one of the student's parents/guardians. When contacting a parent/guardian, the staff member should:

1. Provide his/her name and position in the school;
2. Tell the parent/guardian that he has reason to believe, as a result of direct communication from the student, that the student is at imminent risk of suicide;
3. Assure the parent/guardian that the student is currently safe;
4. State the legal requirement for the call, citing Va. Code § 22.1-272.1;
5. Ask the parent/guardian whether he or she is aware of the student's mental state;
6. Ask the parent/guardian whether he or she wishes to obtain or has obtained mental counseling for the student;
7. Provide names of community counseling resources, if appropriate, and offer to facilitate the referral; and
8. Determine the parent's intent to seek appropriate services for the student.

A. Inability To Reach Parent/Guardian

If the staff member is unable to make contact with the parent/guardian by the end of the school day, then he shall follow the school's crisis management plan.

B. Required Documentation

The staff member shall document the phone call to the parent/guardian by recording: (a) the time and date of the call; (b) the individual contacted; (c) the parent/guardian's response; and (d) anticipated follow-up.

C. Additional Concerns

If parental/guardian contact is made and, in the course of this contact, relevant issues of abuse or neglect are discovered (e.g., a parent acknowledges the child's suicidal intent but indicates no intent to act for the well-being of the child), the staff member shall report the abuse or neglect in accordance with policy *JHG/GAE. Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting*.

D. Duty To Keep Student Safe And Secure

A student who is at imminent risk of suicide shall remain under adult supervision until a parent/guardian or other authorized individual accepts responsibility for the student's safety.

VI. ABUSE OR NEGLECT

If the student has indicated that the reason for being at imminent risk of suicide relates to parental abuse or neglect, contact shall not be made with the parent. Instead, the staff person shall, as soon as practicable, notify the local department of social services of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or the state Department of Social Services' toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline as required by Policy JHG/GAE Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting and Va. Code § 63.2-1509. When giving this notice to the local or state department, the person shall stress the need to take immediate action to protect the child from harm.

VII. SUICIDAL ATTEMPT ON SCHOOL GROUNDS OR DURING A SCHOOL- SPONSORED ACTIVITY

In the event of a suicide attempt on school grounds, the first district employee on the scene must initiate district emergency medical procedures such as calling 911. Help from other staff members should be sought out to assist as needed and to notify administration so that emergency lockdown procedures (such as a lockdown) can be initiated if appropriate. The response to a suicide attempt on campus may include the following steps:

1. A staff member must notify the principal/designee.
2. Staff members should move all other students out of the immediate area and arrange appropriate supervision. Students should not be allowed to observe the scene.
3. Principal/designee will involve student support personnel (counselors, social workers, psychologists, day treatment providers) to assist as needed.
4. Principal/designee will contact parent/guardian and ask them to come to the school or hospital.
5. Principal/designee will inform Central Office (Student Support Services, Executive Directors, and Superintendent's Office) to inform them of the circumstances and request additional support as needed.
6. Principal/designee will document in writing all actions taken and recommendations.

7. Student services staff will promptly follow up with any students or staff who might have witnessed the attempt, and contact their parents/guardians. Student Services staff will provide supportive counseling and document all actions taken.
8. Media representatives should be referred to the appropriate school spokesperson (Communications Director). School staff should make no statements to the media.
9. Principal/designee will work with treating facilities and or counselors to help ensure the student's smooth transition back into school.

VIII. RESPONSE TO A COMPLETED SUICIDE ATTEMPT RESULTING IN A STUDENT DEATH OFF CAMPUS

The principal or his/her designee, once notified of the death, will:

1. Immediately notify Central Office Administration (Student Support Services, appropriate Executive Director, School Counseling Office, and Superintendent's Office). Communication should be able to flow in both directions in case the principal is not the first person notified.
2. Verify and obtain as much factual information as possible via the school, police, the parent/guardian, or others who may have the facts depending on circumstances. Appropriate sensitivity should be exercised.
3. It should be determined if the student has a sibling or siblings in other schools that may need support.
4. Assemble the crisis response team using school-based and community resources.
5. Do not describe the death as a suicide with the general public, parents, staff or students unless you have confirmation that this is correct information.
6. Promptly collect and safeguard the student's belongings from desk or locker. Consult with family members and determine a mutually agreeable date and time in private, to return these belongings.
7. Inform the faculty that a sudden death has occurred. This is typically done through a staff meeting to share appropriate information and provide support as needed. Outline procedures that will be followed for informing appropriate students and addressing the needs of those that may be upset.
8. Designate space for all crisis response activities.
9. Refer staff members in need to district's EAP (Employee Assistance Program) for additional support.
10. Prepare and send a parent information letter home with students after consulting with the Communication Office. The letter should indicate the support that will be available.
11. Prioritize classrooms and students who will need immediate attention and connect them with the crisis response team.
12. Do not disclose any information or details to the media, but instead refer media requests to the Norfolk Public School's Communication Director.
13. Meet with the crisis response team at the end of the day or days during crisis management activities to ensure the exchange of important information and the planning of further activities.
14. Check in periodically with the family, staff and students to ensure that everyone is supported within the context of the school setting.
15. Acknowledge those who assisted in the postvention including the faculty, ancillary staff, crisis team and any outside agency or community assistance.

IX. ACTIONS TO AVOID

The goal at a minimum when addressing a school crisis is to avoid creating further trauma in the students that we are serving. Helpful suggestions include:

1. Do not announce the death of anyone over the public address system.
2. Avoid canceling school, classes or pre-planned activities unless absolutely necessary. Students typically find comfort in following their normal routine when they are under stress.
3. Extraordinary circumstances may require creative solutions.
4. Prior to proceeding with any cancellations, please speak with the school's Executive Director or the Superintendent's Office.

X. MEMORIALS

It is recognized that grieving individuals need a variety of opportunities to personally express their emotions and reactions to this type of death. Recommendations and ideas for a memorial should be taken into consideration and discussed with the crisis response team prior to being implemented.

Memorials must be carefully and tastefully planned, considering a broad range of responses. A variety of activities may in fact occur to celebrate positive remembrances.

XI. DISTRICT RESOURCES

The Department of Student Support Services or the Office of School Counseling and Guidance may be contacted for additional supports. Efforts to address the needs of students in crisis at school should be managed by school administration with support and guidance from NPS support employees. Schools will work with outside agencies as appropriate and needed. First responders (fire, police, and paramedics) will be integrated into the response, when appropriate, such as when public safety is in jeopardy or law violations have been committed.

XII. SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCES

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

To chat online with a counsellor, go to

<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/GetHelp/LifelineChat.aspx>

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

For the hearing impaired, contact the Lifeline by TTY at: 1-800-799-4889

Virginia Beach Psychiatric Center

Phone: 757-627-LIFE (5433)

Kempsville Behavioral Health Center

Phone: 757-461-4565

Norfolk Sentara General Hospital

Address: 600 Gresham Drive, Norfolk, VA 23507

Phone: 757- 388-3000

Bon Secours DePaul Hospital

Address: 150 Kingsley Lane, Norfolk, VA 23505

Phone: 757- 889-5000

In an acute crisis, call 911 or go to a nearby psychiatric hospital. If there is no facility close by, go to a nearby hospital or emergency room.

- Do not leave the person alone.
- Remove from the vicinity any firearms, drugs or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt.
- Hospitalization may be necessary at least until the crisis abates.

Policy Ref.:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (n.d.) Risk Factors and Warning Signs. Retrieved on December 19, 2016 from <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/risk-factors-and-warning-signs/>
Jacobs, B. (2006). Suicide Prevention and Intervention in Schools. New Mexico State University, Cooperative Extension Service.

Kerr, M. M. (2016). School crisis prevention and intervention. Waveland Press.

NASP Center (n.d.), After a Suicide: Answering Questions from Students. Retrieved on December 20, 2016 from <http://www.naspcenter.org/principals/aftersuicide.html>

Trevor Project (n.d.), Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention. Model Language, Commentary, and Resources, retrieved on December 20, 2016 from http://b3cdn.net/trevor/10a65fa42e6ebddc24_qem6bvseu.pdf

Policy Ref. Updated:

Legal Ref.:

Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, §§ 22.1-272.1 and 63.2-1509.

Va. Board of Education "Suicide Prevention Guidelines," (Revised 2003).

Cross Ref.:

JHG/GAE. Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting

EB. School Crisis, Emergency Management and Medical Emergency Response Plan

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