

Self-harming Behavior

Suicide Awareness, Prevention and Response

The District shall utilize a multifaceted approach to suicide prevention which integrates school and community-based supports.

I. Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Education

A. Protocols for Administration of Student Education

Students shall receive age-appropriate education on the importance of safe and healthy choices, coping strategies, how to recognize risk factors and warning signs, as well as help-seeking strategies for self or others including how to engage school resources and refer friends for help.

Lessons shall contain information on comprehensive health and wellness, including emotional, behavioral and social skills development.

B. Protocols for Administration of Employee Education

All District employees, including but not limited to secretaries, coaches, bus drivers, custodians and cafeteria workers, shall receive information regarding risk factors, warning signs, response procedures, referrals, and resources regarding youth suicide prevention.

As part of the District's professional development plan, professional educators in school buildings serving students in grades six (6) through twelve (12) shall participate in four (4) hours of youth suicide awareness and prevention training every five (5) years.

Additional professional development in risk assessment and crisis intervention shall be provided to guidance counselors, District mental health professionals and school nurses.

C. Resources for Parents/Guardians

The District may provide parents/guardians with resources including, but not limited to, health promotion and suicide risk, including characteristics and warning signs; and information about local behavioral/mental health resources.

II. Methods of Prevention

The methods of prevention utilized by the District include, but are not limited to, early identification and support for students at risk; education for students, staff and parents/guardians; and delegation of responsibility for planning and coordination of suicide prevention efforts.

A. Suicide Prevention Coordinators

a. District-Wide –

A District-wide suicide prevention coordinator shall be designated by the Superintendent. This may be an existing District employee. The District suicide prevention coordinator shall be responsible for planning and coordinating implementation of this policy.

b. Building Level –

Each building principal shall designate a school suicide prevention coordinator to act as a point of contact in each school for issues relating to suicide prevention and policy implementation. This may be an existing District employee.

B. Early Identification Procedures

Early identification of individuals with one (1) or more suicidal risk factors or of individuals exhibiting warning signs, is crucial to the District's suicide prevention efforts. To promote awareness, District employees, students and parents/guardians should be educated about suicidal risk factors and warning signs.

Risk factors refer to personal or environmental characteristics that are associated with self-harming behavior and/or suicide including, but not limited to:

1. report of self-abuse by the student themselves,
2. physical evidence of cutting or other self-abuse,
3. writings,
4. artwork,
5. comments (to peers, to teachers and other school personnel, from other children),
6. change in certain behaviors,
7. decrease in everyday interests,
8. giving away possessions,
9. withdrawal,
10. drop in grades,
11. sudden loss or gain in weight,
12. fainting,

13. lack of interest in social situations involving eating, and
14. frequent bathroom visits.

C. Referral Procedures for At Risk Students

Any District employee who has identified a student with one (1) or more risk factors or who has an indication that a student may be contemplating suicide, shall refer the student for further assessment and intervention.

The District shall document the reasons for referral, including specific warning signs and risk factors identified as indications that the student may be at risk.

For students with disabilities who are identified as being at risk for suicide or who attempt suicide, the appropriate team shall be notified and shall address the student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Board policy.

If a student is identified as being at risk for suicide or attempts suicide and the student may require special education services or accommodations, the Director of Special Education shall be notified and shall take action to address the student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Board policy.

III. Methods of Intervention

The methods of intervention utilized by the District include, but are not limited to, responding to suicide threats, suicide attempts in school, suicide attempts outside of school, and completed suicide. Suicide intervention procedures shall address the development of an emotional or mental health safety plan for students identified as being at increased risk of suicide.

IV. Methods of Response to Suicide or Suicide Attempt

The methods of response to a suicide or a suicide attempt utilized by the District include, but are not limited to:

1. Identifying and training the school crisis response/crisis intervention team.
2. Determining the roles and responsibilities of each crisis response team member.
3. Notifying students, employees and parents/guardians.
4. Working with families.
5. Responding appropriately to the media.

6. Collaborating with community providers.

V. Reporting Procedures

When referring a student suspected of self-harming behavior, the school counselor, school nurse or other school based mental health specialist shall take the following steps in the order warranted by the situation and, in the case of nurse or counselor, in consultation with the school-based mental health specialist or qualified medical personnel:

- contact the student's parents and/or guardians as listed in the student's emergency contact;
- do an initial risk assessment to determine the severity of the situation;
- report the behavior to the school principal;
- refer according to the Student Assistance Procedure;
- protect the confidentiality of the child while addressing the concerns of any other child or children; and
- involve police or emergency services if student is in immediate danger and parents cannot be located or are unable or unwilling to help

District employees shall be responsible for effective documentation of incidents involving suicide prevention, intervention and response. Effective documentation assists in preserving the safety of the student and ensuring communication among school staff, parents/guardians and mental health service providers.

The District shall document observations, recommendations and actions conducted throughout the intervention and assessment process including verbal and written communications with students, parents/guardians and mental health service providers.

When a District employee takes notes on any conversations or situations involving or relating to an at-risk student, the notes should contain only factual or directly observed information, not opinions or hearsay.

The suicide prevention coordinator shall provide the Superintendent with a copy of all reports and documentation regarding the at-risk student. Information and reports shall be provided, as appropriate, to guidance counselors, District mental health professionals and school nurses.

A. Re-Entry Procedures

A student's excusal from school attendance after a mental health crisis and the student's return to school shall be consistent with state and federal laws and regulations.

A District-employed mental health professional, the building principal or suicide prevention coordinator shall meet with the parents/guardians of a student returning to school after a mental health crisis, and, if appropriate, meet with the student to discuss re-entry and applicable next steps to ensure the student's readiness to return to school.

When authorized by the student's parent/guardian, the designated District employee shall coordinate with the appropriate outside mental health care providers.

The designated District employee will periodically check in, as needed, with the student to facilitate the transition back into the school community and address any concerns.

VI. Suicide Awareness and Prevention Resources

The District shall notify District employees, students and parents/guardians of this policy and shall post the policy on the District's website.

A listing of resources regarding suicide awareness and prevention shall be attached to this policy.

Guidelines for other Types of Self-harming Behavior

While this is not an exhaustive list, signs of self-harming behavior may be seen in one or more of the following relating to a student:

1. report of self-abuse by the student themselves,
2. physical evidence of cutting or other self-abuse,
3. writings,
4. artwork,
5. comments (to peers, to teachers and other school personnel, from other children),
6. change in certain behaviors,
7. decrease in everyday interests,
8. giving away possessions,
9. withdrawal,
10. drop in grades,
11. sudden loss or gain in weight,
12. fainting,
13. lack of interest in social situations involving eating, and
14. frequent bathroom visits.

Procedures for Referral of Concern of Self-Harming Behavior

When referred to a student suspected of self-harming behavior, the school counselor, school nurse or other school based mental health specialist shall take the following steps

in the order warranted by the situation and, in the case of nurse or counselor, in consultation with the school-based mental health specialist or qualified medical personnel:

- contact the student's parents and/or guardians as listed in the student's emergency contact;
- do an initial risk assessment to determine the severity of the situation;
- report the behavior to the school principal;
- refer according to the Student Assistance Procedure;
- protect the confidentiality of the child while addressing the concerns of any other child or children; and
- involve police or emergency services if student is in immediate danger and parents cannot be located or are unable or unwilling to help

References:

School Code – 24 P.S. Sec. 1526

State Board of Education Regulations – 22 PA Code Sec. 12.12

Adopted: September 25, 2006

Revised: February 23, 2015

Revised: June 11, 2015

Reviewed: August 31, 2021