

STUDENT: 3.0

POLICY: 3.32

CRISIS AND SUICIDE REACTIONS

The Board of Education recognizes the importance of outline procedures dealing with the district response to crisis and possible suicide situations. This policy provides a framework for administrative and staff action should such a crisis arise.

Policy: 3.2
Adopted: 5/17/89
Amended:

CRISIS AND SUICIDE REACTIONS

I. Procedural Guidelines for Students Verbalizing Suicide Intentions

The expression of a suicide intention on the part of the student is defined as an extraordinary event that may require specific efforts to resolve.

In view of the nature of this type of problem, the following procedures are to be followed when school personnel hear that a student has verbalized suicide intentions:

- A. As soon as an employee becomes aware that a student has verbalized a suicide intention, the employee will notify the building principal or his/her designee.
- B. The principal and the guidance counselor will confer with the student. Depending on their evaluation of the student's emotional state and physical condition, the student may be isolated in an area where he/she may be observed at all times until the student leaves or is removed from the building, or the student may return to class to complete his/her daily schedule. The principal or guidance counselor may notify appropriate faculty and may check on the student hourly throughout the remaining portion of the school day.
- C. Within the initial conference with the student, the principal or the guidance counselor will give the student (if age appropriate) the phone number of the appropriate office within the Berks County Mental Health/Mental Retardation Office for the student to access appropriate professional referral agencies to deal with his/her intentions.
- D. At the time of the initial conference, the student's parents will be called and informed of the expressed intentions of the student. Parents may be asked by the principal to come to school to talk with the principal and the student concerning the expressed intention.

Repeated attempts will be made to contact the parent if the parent cannot be reached initially. If an alternate adult to the parent is listed in the school records, efforts will be made to reach this person, when reasonable efforts have failed to reach the parent.

- E. If the student is absent and if a school employee receives information of the expression of a suicidal intent, the parents or alternatives will be called and informed. The parents will be apprised that school services are available for help, and the parents will be given the appropriate information for referral to the appropriate county agencies.

- F. After assessing the degree of magnitude of the expressed suicidal intentional, the building principal or counselor may obtain additional assistance from the appropriate county agencies.
- G. Should the parent come to school upon the request of the building principal or counselor, the school officials will discuss their assessment of the current situation and will give the parents the information needed for a referral to the appropriate county agency.
- H. If a clear and present danger to the life of the student exists in the judgment of the school officials directly involved with the situation and if the parent refuses to come to school or to be involved in resolving the problems, the principal will call the Mental Health/Mental Retardation Service Access and Management Office to speak to the MH/MR delegate if the student is at least 14 years of age. The delegate will provide assistance to the principal.

If the child is under 14 years old, the principal should call the Intake Supervisor of the Berks County Children and Youth Services Office. The Intake Supervisor will provide assistance to the principal.

- I. The principal will send a complete report about the incident and the response to the situation to the Superintendent or his/her designee.
- II. Procedural Guidelines for Students Who Return to School after Having Attempted or Verbalized Suicide Intention.

The following procedures are to be used when a student returns to the school setting after having attempted suicide or after having verbalized suicidal intentions and when the student or parent wish to use school counseling services following such an event.

- A. The counselor will request as soon as possible, parent permission for the school to obtain a written report from the psychiatrist, psychologist, (or appropriate Social Service Agency), who evaluated the student.
- B. The counselor will telephone the psychologist or psychiatrist, as soon as possible, in order to obtain a verbal report on the student's status.
- C. The counselor will verbally apprise the principal of the psychiatrist's or psychologist's evaluation findings and recommendations.
- D. The counselor will be available to provide the student with short-term supportive counseling and monitor the student's in-school performance.

- E. The frequency and nature of the short-term supportive counseling and monitoring will be determined on an individual basis by the principal and counselor. The student's teachers as well as the school nurse will be informed of the situation and asked to assist in the support effort and to help monitor the student's progress. The monitoring process will be developed in collaboration with the parents as deemed necessary.
 - F. As deemed necessary by the school support team, the principal or counselor will keep the parents informed of the student's progress while the counselor is providing short-term counseling to the student and while the monitoring of the student's progress continues.
 - G. If the student is in private therapy and if school employees identify behavioral or emotional irregularities on the part of the student, the principal or counselor will inform the parent and request a conference to discuss the irregularities.
 - H. The principal will send a confidential report to the Superintendent or his/her designee when the school completes the short term supportive counseling or monitoring.
- III. Establishment of a Crisis-Center Following a Student Suicide, Accident or Death from Natural Causes or Following a Tragic Event.

The following guidelines outline general procedures for the school to follow in the aftermath of the death of a student by suicide, accident, or natural causes or in the aftermath of a tragic event:

- A. If a student is found dead of an apparent suicide, accident, or natural causes or in the aftermath of a tragic event, the Superintendent or his/her designee and the appropriate building principal will:
 - 1) Make every effort to confirm the facts about the event prior to any announcement to students.
 - 2) Coordinate any announcements among buildings if the student(s) attended more than one building or if the student(s) has siblings or near relatives attending other buildings.
 - 3) Will call the student's family to express the school's sorrow on behalf of the faculty and to offer appropriate support. If deemed necessary by the Superintendent, school officials may make a home visit to the student's family.

- 4) Notify appropriate law enforcement or medical agencies as necessary.
- B. The principal will notify faculty and arrange for a meeting as needed.
 - C. The principal will provide the Superintendent with the names of students involved so that siblings may receive needed support.
 - D. The Superintendent or his/her designee in cooperation with the principal, guidance staff and nursing staff will meet to plan the activities for the following days to allow for students an opportunity to express their feelings and to provide support for each other. This will be accomplished through the establishment of a crisis center to service students' emotional needs.
 - E. During this period, the Superintendent or designee will coordinate the district's interaction with media.
 - F. School officials may seek appropriate aid as needed from licensed psychologists or psychiatrists.
 - G. When a faculty meeting is held in response to a tragedy, the agenda of the meeting may include but not be limited to the following topics:
 - 1) Principal reviews the known facts of the tragedy in order to establish a common reference base and to dispel rumors.
 - 2) Guidance staff describes the feelings which students may be experiencing and suggests how the teachers might handle these feelings.
 - 3) Teachers are encouraged to allow for the expression of grief in their classes.
 - 4) Teachers are asked to dispel rumors wherever possible and to discourage any glorification of the event.
 - 5) Teachers are told about the establishment of a Crisis Center. Arrangements are made to escort those students to the center who appear to be emotionally upset by the tragedy.
 - 6) The staff may be asked to meet immediately after school to review the day's events and plans for future responses.

- H. Principal, guidance counselors and/or other appropriate staff may meet with each grade either by individual homerooms or total grade to cover the following items:
 - 1) Review the known facts and to dispel rumors.
 - 2) De-mythologize the act.
 - 3) Inform them of the Crisis Center.
 - 4) Encourage them to express their reactions in whatever way is appropriate for them.
 - 5) Discuss possible guilt or feelings of responsibility.
 - 6) Discuss possible fears for their own safety and that of their siblings and peers.
 - 7) Ask them to be supportive of one another and to escort any friend who is upset to a teacher or the Crisis Center.
 - 8) Reassure them that any adult in the building is available to help.
 - 9) Encourage students to discuss their feelings with their parents.
- I. Principal and/or guidance counselors meet with the building's paraprofessional staff to cover the items reviewed at the faculty and student meetings.
- J. A Crisis Center may be established in the guidance office or another appropriate building site. Additional pupil services staff from other buildings may be called to assist.
- K. Phone calls may be made by the principal and/or guidance counselors to parents of individual "high risk" students. These students are students who appear especially upset, depressed or demonstrate other signs of not dealing well with the incident. Phone calls should explain to the parents their children's reactions and give appropriate advice as to how the parents should handle their son/daughter. Parents may be asked to take their child home for the day.

- L. All building staff may be assembled after school to:
 - 1) Allow for the expression of feeling and mutual support.
 - 2) Review the day's events.
 - 3) Review the characteristics of "high-risk" students and compile a list based on staff observations of individual student reactions during the day.
 - 4) Announce the wake and funeral arrangements and encourage staff to attend in order to provide support to students and their families.

- M. Principal and guidance counselors will meet with the Superintendent or his/her designee to assess current school response and develop any additional services needed to assist the school community.

- N. Outside consultants may be called as needed to provide:
 - 1) Psychiatric or psychological consultation for individual students.
 - 2) Speak at a general faculty or building staff meeting on the issue of adolescent suicide, identification, prevention, and response.
 - 3) Conduct evening informational meetings for all concerned community members.

- O. Crisis Center staff will continue to meet with "high risk" students individually and in small groups to provide support. Parents are kept informed and staff concerns are addressed.

- P. Outside consultants and the staff of the Crisis Center may conduct an evening meeting of parents of "high-risk" students. Crisis Center staff and consultants will be available to answer privately parents' specific concerns about their son or daughter's reactions. Information on accessing the appropriate county referral agencies will be given to all parents attending the meeting.

- Q. The Crisis Center will continue to operate to meet student and staff needs. At the end of each school day, the principal, the guidance staff, and the nurses will meet to assess the continuing needs of the students and staff for the operation of the Crisis Center.

- R. Support personnel (i.e. administrators, nurses, and counselors) will continue to serve in the Crisis Center as needed.

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