

District Policy & Regulations

BOARD OF EDUCATION COLUMBUS SCHOOL DISTRICT

STUDENTS
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STUDENT SUICIDE

The Columbus School District recognizes that students undergo considerable stress related to development and personal growth. Youth is a time of discovery but also of profound searching and identity formation. Some children and adolescents find this struggle harder than others. Some feel unequal to the challenge. Consequently, some students contemplate suicide as an alternative.

Considering suicide as a solution to personal problems is a tragedy. Therefore, the Board endorses efforts toward making staff members more sensitive and cognizant concerning the issues of youth suicide. In dealing with these issues the Superintendent shall provide for periodic faculty in-service, the development of suicide programming, and the establishment of a uniform protocol to respond to suicidal students.

Prevention:

The District will foster faculty awareness of the warning signs of suicide through periodic faculty in-service. The faculty in-service shall include the dimensions of suicide and ways of responding to suicidal students.

The District will also develop suicide prevention programming for students as a specific and integrated part of the curriculum. Primary prevention programming will continue with District efforts to promote positive student growth in the areas of self-concept, decision-making skills, and problem solving methods.

The purpose of the prevention programming is to help students become aware of their own attitudes about suicide; to become knowledgeable about the problem and misconceptions of suicide, to become familiar with the school and community resources that provide crisis intervention services, and to provide appropriate decision alternatives to deal with personal crisis.

Intervention:

The District will establish a uniform protocol to respond to the potentially suicidal student. These efforts will be made to ensure more effective assessment and referral of these students to the appropriate agency.

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The Superintendent will provide for the development of a uniform plan of response by staff and designated professionals to effectively deal with threatened, attempted, or complete suicides. Additional purposes of intervention strategies will be to plan for structured expression of grieving and emotional reaction by students. Support services will be provided to normalize the suicidal student's return to school.

SUICIDE PROCEDURES: STUDENTS WHO THREATEN SUICIDE

Initial Concern

Teachers, students, or other persons should immediately notify a counselor, school psychologist, or building principal of a possible suicide threat.

Initial Action

The counselor, school psychologist, or team member will immediately attempt to contact the student in question. The counselor or designated staff member will be advised to stay with the student during the duration of the crisis if suicide is considered to be imminent.

If the student cannot be contacted, attempts will be made to contact parent(s) or guardian. If parent(s) or guardian are unavailable, team members will decide about the appropriateness of further contacts.

Assessment

The school counselor or school psychologist, with another trained team member will immediately assess the degree of potential suicide risk. Consultation with other mental health professionals will be made when deemed appropriate by the team.

At this time, at least (2) members will meet to review the information and formulate a plan of intervention.

Intervention

The parent(s) or guardian will be notified corresponding to the level of severity. In the case of a life-threatening situation, the following steps will be taken:

- A. The administrator, counselor, and school psychologist will confer with parents to review the seriousness of the matter and coordinate the immediate action which needs to take place.

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- B. These immediate actions will consist of:
1. referral to Columbia County Mental Health Services or other appropriate counseling agency and obtain all forms signed for release of confidential information for mental health services and school records.
 2. a staffing with all teachers currently involved with student to assist in dealing appropriately with student's emotional and educational needs (including mental health, service representatives, school psychologist, counselor);
 3. supportive follow-up with the student and parent(s) or guardian by a designated team member within the following week is strongly recommended.
- C. If parent(s), guardian, relative, or other responsible adult cannot be reached, Social Services Protective Unit and/or appropriate law enforcement agency unit will be notified to provide a safe place until someone can be reached.
- D. The police will also be notified in the event of the following circumstances:
1. student leaves school premises
 2. student is a serious danger to others
 3. any other situation where additional control is needed

Follow-up

Within five (5) days after gathering the needed information, the school administrator or his/her designee shall complete the Suicide Assessment and Intervention Form in duplicate. One (1) copy should be maintained by the building administrator in a separate suicide risk confidential file and one (1) copy should be sent to the school psychologist.

Within ninety (90) days of the incident, the building administrator will call a follow-up staffing with appropriate personnel.

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SUICIDE PROCEDURE: STUDENTS WHO ATTEMPT SUICIDE WHILE UNDER SCHOOL SUPERVISION

Initial Concern

Teachers, students, or other concerned persons should immediately notify the building administrator, counselor, or school psychologist of a suicide attempt.

Intervention

- A. Medical assistance will be requested immediately when needed.
- B. The parent(s) or guardian will be notified immediately. A consultation including parent(s) or guardian, appropriate school personnel and a mental health professional will be held as soon as possible.
- C. The student will be released to his/her parent(s), guardian, or other responsible adult upon completion of the consultation and consideration of necessary counseling and emergency safety procedures.
- D. If parent, guardian, or other responsible adult cannot be reached, Social Services Protective Unit and/or appropriate law enforcement agency will be notified to provide a safe place until someone can be reached.
- E. The police will also be notified in the event of the following circumstances:
 1. student leaves school premises
 2. student is a serious danger to others
 3. any other situation where additional control is needed

Course of Action:

A team of at least two (2) trained employees, chaired by the building administrator, will be convened to determine appropriate course of action. The course of action will be determined based upon additional information from the medical and the student suicide assessment. The team will consider the place of the attempted suicide and the severity of student reaction to the attempted suicide.

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Supportive Services:

- A. A team member will be available to provide support and direction to family members. Crisis intervention counseling will be provided for sibling, family members, and other affected peers when necessary.
- B. A staffing will be held with all teachers currently involved with the student to assist in dealing appropriately with student's emotional and educational needs. (Including mental health service representatives, school psychologist, counselor.)
- C. Supportive follow-up with the student and parent(s) or guardian by a designated team member within the following week is strongly recommended.

Information Dissemination:

The team, chaired by the building administrator, will assess how information regarding the suicide attempt will be disseminated and arrange for a staffing, when deemed appropriate, with all teachers currently involved with the student.

Follow-up:

Within five (5) days after gathering the needed information, the school administrator or his/her designee shall complete the Suicide Assessment and Intervention Form in duplicate. One (1) copy should be maintained by the building administrator in a separate suicide risk confidential file and one (1) copy should be sent to the school psychologist.

The case will be reviewed by the team on a periodic basis to ensure ongoing treatment and help to the student. Consultation with the parents and referral agency shall continue on a regular basis.

SUICIDE PROCEDURE: STUDENTS WHO ATTEMPT SUICIDE OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL SUPERVISION

Referral:

Student, staff, or any individual may report information regarding a suicide attempt. When such information is received by a team member, a meeting of the team will be held that school day to review the information and to plan the course of action.

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Course of Action:

The team, chaired by the building administrator, will determine the course of action based upon severity and place of the attempted suicide and upon the severity of student reaction to the attempted suicide. After the assessment has been made, the team will use the “Students Who Threaten Suicide” and the “Students Who Commit Suicide” procedures as references for determining further intervention.

Supportive Services:

A team member will be available to provide support and direction to family members. Crisis intervention counseling will be provided for siblings or family members when necessary.

Information Dissemination:

The team, chaired by the building administrator, will assess how information regarding the suicide attempt will be disseminated and arrange for a staffing with all teachers currently involved with the student when deemed appropriate.

Follow-up:

Within five (5) days after gathering the needed information, the school administrator or his/her designee shall complete the Suicide Assessment and Intervention Form in duplicate. One (1) should be maintained by the building administrator in a separate suicide risk confidential file and one (1) copy should be sent to the school psychologist.

The case will be reviewed by the team on a periodic basis to ensure ongoing treatment and help to the student, consultation with the parents and referral agency.

SUICIDE PROCEDURE: STUDENTS WHO COMMIT SUICIDE

Initial Staff Meeting:

In the event of a suicide of a student, the building principal, upon conferring with the team members, will meet with the school staff before the beginning of the next school day. The meeting will allow the staff to express their own personal feelings and thoughts in regard to suicide and this particular situation. There will be a definite need to deal with survivors’ feelings of grief, guilt, rejection, anger, and more.

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Media Information:

The building administrator is the crisis control chairperson. All inquiries from the media and the general public will be directed to the building administrator. Mental health consultation regarding appropriate media exposure will be obtained as deemed appropriate by the building administrator.

Supportive Services:

The building principal upon conferring with the team will decide if appropriate consultants be hired to assist staff and students to deal with the trauma of the suicide.

Factual Information:

Factual information about the suicide will be gathered by the team to help deal with the event in an objective manner. This is important to help eliminate rumors and glamorization of the recent happenings.

School Day Activities and Schedule:

- A. A plan should be outlined by the building principal for the day's activities and use of area resource personnel. This plan should include dissemination of the factual information to the faculty.
- B. The team members and other professional staff, along with assistance from faculty will:
 1. present the information to their class about the suicide;
 2. allow ample time for the student reaction and interaction;
 3. inform the students that concerned staff and counselors are available immediately and throughout the day for support and consultation;
 4. be alert for extreme signs of grief and difficulty dealing with suicide. These individuals should receive additional opportunities for consultation and support.

A referral of said person should be made to the school psychologist or counselor.

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Letter to Parents:

The same day, a letter containing accurate information about the suicide and school response activities will be sent home with the students. In addition, a prepared brochure describing warning signs of suicidal thinking and other related information will be included. A telephone hotline may be established and a public meeting may be held if determined necessary.

Identify At Risk Students:

- A. The suicide victim's closest friends and other at risk students will be identified for in-school supportive counseling. These students will be monitored closely and their parent(s) or guardian will be contacted concerning the event.
- B. It must be stressed that teacher and student feedback regarding those in need of support is elicited.

Communication with Building Principals:

The building principals will be in communication with each other regarding the incident. The principals from the other buildings will call faculty meetings to provide accurate information.

All staff members should be alert for extreme signs of grief or difficulty dealing with the suicide. If a staff member feels there is need for consultation or support, a referral should immediately be made to the school psychologist or counselor.

Follow-up Services:

Follow-up counseling and support will be given to students and/or staff as needed during the days/weeks following the suicides.

Kelson v City of Springfield, 767 F2d 651 (9th Cir. 1985)
118.295, Wis. Stats.

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