

CHAPTER FOUR

SUICIDE

[Suicide - Threat or Attempt](#)

[Suicide - Actual](#)

SUICIDE – THREAT OR ATTEMPT

1. **PURPOSE:** To develop a crisis response to possible suicide threat or attempt.

2. WHAT TRIGGERS THE INTERVENTION PROCESS?

- Suicidal ideation in writing or artwork
- Notes between students that mention or hint at suicide
- Giving away valued possessions
- Overhearing someone speak of anything having to do with killing themselves
- Having another student come tell you about it
- Student talking about death, not being here
- Previous attempt coupled with current behaviors
- Student making actual threat or attempt
- Inquiries about donations of bodily organs
- Planning a funeral
- Excessive crying which interferes with performance particularly if the student will not tell what is wrong
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Self-mutilation such as cutting/carving; head-banging
- Parent or guardian calls and says that any of the above is occurring
- Daredevil or risk-taking behaviors.

3. PROCEDURES:

A. Identify appropriate procedures to protect the health, safety, and welfare of students.

1. Insure safety of student: someone must remain with student.
2. If student has made actual attempt please follow procedures in medical emergency chapter as appropriate.
3. Notify local administrator and/or Building Crisis Intervention Specialist.
4. Arrange for an appropriate local individual to do an immediate, preliminary evaluation. This person must be a counselor, psychologist, social worker, or mental health worker. There is someone available from each intermediate unit to provide these evaluations any school day on an emergency basis.
5. Local administrator or designee signs Crisis Log noting agreement or disagreement with recommendations.

6. Contact parent or guardian and follow recommendations from the evaluation. Recommendations may include any of those listed on the model Psychologist/Counselor Procedure for Students At Risk for Suicide ([see Attachment A](#)).
7. Give parent or guardian letter stating recommendations and/or requirements for returning to school ([see Attachment B](#)).
8. Have parent or guardian sign Release Form or take it with them, whichever is appropriate. Sample is included; please put this on your school letterhead (see [Attachment C](#)).
9. Copies of information given to parents and release form should be given to local administrator to file with Crisis Log.

B. Who does what?

1. _____ will remain with student.
2. Local administrator or designee _____ will be notified.
3. _____ will call _____ to do the evaluation and state that it is an emergency.
4. Local administrator or designee _____ will contact the parent or guardian after the preliminary evaluation.
5. _____ will give written recommendation and/or requirements for returning to school.
6. _____ will file crisis log and copies of written recommendation given to parent or guardian and release form.
7. _____ will be responsible for follow-up and will be the contact for the outside therapist if applicable.

C. When do you respond?

IMMEDIATELY - AS SOON AS CONCERN IS NOTED.

D. What will the follow-up be?

1. The Crisis Log will be completed by the counselor/psychologist/mental health worker and a copy given to the local administrator ([see Attachment D](#)).
2. Local administrator or designee _____ will see that the recommendations are carried out and will be the school contact with the outside therapist if applicable.

E. Additional Resources

1. Risk Factors for Suicide, ([see Attachment E](#)).
2. Star-Center manual, *Postvention Standards Guidelines: A Guide for a School's Response in the Aftermath of a Sudden Death, Revised 1/98*. This manual is available from Mary Anne Frederick, STAR-Center, School Community Outreach, 3811 O'Hara Street, Pittsburg

SUICIDE - ACTUAL

1. PURPOSE: To develop a crisis response to student suicide.

2. WHAT TRIGGERS THE INTERVENTION PROCESS? Death or student with rumor or factual report of student suicide.

3. PROCEDURES:

A. Identify appropriate procedures to protect the health, safety, and welfare of students.

1. For suicide on campus first proceed as follows:

If death occurs on the campus:

1. *Secure Area (disturb as little as possible; limit access until police arrive)*
2. *Contact local medical resource person*
3. *Contact administration*
4. *Call 911 (ambulance and police)*
5. *Continue to hold classes*
6. *Separate all witnesses until police arrive (To the extent possible, witnesses should not speak with each other or anyone else)*

2. Local administrator or Crisis Intervention Specialist _____ coordinates the response. Some schools prefer to appoint two people to work together. This person or team will serve as the contact person/coordinator.
3. _____ contacts parent or guardian of deceased student to confirm death and provide family with information of available assistance.
4. _____ contacts police and coroner to confirm details.
5. This situation activates the Crisis Team. The members of the Crisis Team should be identified in advance by the local administrator. The Crisis Team may include the principal, crisis intervention coordinator, pastor, teacher, counselor, psychologist, nurse, or whoever may be helpful in your particular situation.

6. The local administrator or designee informs the staff. Specify how this will be done if the information comes in during the school day. If the information is received after the school day, the phone chain can be used to notify staff and to set up an emergency faculty meeting for the following morning before school.
7. Assign school staff to monitor halls during class changes and restrooms through the day.
8. At the faculty meeting, staff will be informed of the plan for debriefing students on the death and of the location of the crisis center. They will be asked:
 - To allow students to express their feelings regarding the death;
 - To allow the school day to continue as normal, but suggest that activities such as tests and special presentations be postponed;
 - To provide the names of the victim's closest friends who will need support;
 - To provide profile of deceased, including a listing of any school and community groups with which the student may have been involved.
9. Assign school staff to monitor halls during class changes and restrooms through the day.
10. The Crisis Team will decide when to tell the students. Keep in mind that usually when the Administration knows, students do, too. Students are to be given the available, confirmed, factual information. This may be done over the public address system, or by having all faculty read a prepared statement in their homerooms. **The students should be informed while in their individual classrooms, not at an assembly.** Students who are known to be at high risk may be assembled together and told separately from their classmates.
11. An in-school crisis center should be established. When the Crisis Team meets to plan how to address the crisis, additional counseling resources should be contacted so that there are people on hand in the morning to work with both the faculty and the students.
12. All students who wish to speak to someone should be processed through a central location. Logs must be kept of all student contacts. Hotline numbers and other resources should be available to all counselors to give to students.
13. A letter will be given to all students to take home to their parent or guardian stating:
 - that there was a death of a student;
 - the school response (i.e., counseling available);
 - information about memorial services (if available);
 - information about grieving;
 - local crises telephone numbers.

- See sample letter, [Attachment F](#).
14. Parents or guardians of severely affected students will be notified to prepare them for their child's arrival at home.
 15. _____ will inform feeder schools, other area schools, and organizations with which the student was involved.
 16. The local administrator or designee will identify someone to manage contacts with the press. All press inquiries should be directed to one person. Diocesan schools should follow the Diocesan media policy.
 17. The local administrator or designee will appoint someone to follow deceased student's schedule to identify high-risk students.
 18. Within the school community, the Crisis Team will identify at-risk students, friends, family of the deceased (plan to contact them individually).
 19. There should be a brief faculty meeting at the end of day to assess how things went and to hear faculty concerns. Following the faculty meeting, the Crisis Team will meet and identify students who need help and those who need follow-up.
 20. There should be faculty present at memorial services. Students who wish to attend services held during school hours will need written permission from their parent or guardian. Elementary students need to be accompanied by their parent or guardian; Parents or guardians of high school students should be encouraged to attend with their children.
 21. Pending direction from the police, the personal effects of the student should not be touched. Student's personal effects should never be removed in the presence of other children. These should be gathered ASAP when the children are not in school.
 22. The local administrator and/or pastor will visit the bereaved family.
 23. To avoid the possible danger of imitation, do not memorialize suicide. For example, do not have trees planted or plaques put up with the student's name on them. Do not leave blank photo spots in the yearbook. It would be appropriate to have books donated in memory of the student.
 24. The name of the deceased should not be released outside of the school community until family members have been informed.

B. Who does what?

1. _____ will call parent or guardian of the deceased.
2. _____ will call police/coroner for details.

3. Informing the teachers:

If they are to be told during the school day, it will be done by the local administrator or designee. If they are to be told outside the school day, _____ will initiate the phone chain to set the time for the faculty meeting.

4. _____ will prepare information for students. Students will be informed by _____.

5. _____ will call local agencies (i.e. Catholic Charities, County Crisis, MH/MR) to alert them to the situation. The local agencies to be called are:

6. Agency phone numbers, to be provided to students who come to the in-school crisis center, are as follows:

7. The following people/organizations will be called to provide counselors/psychologists to be on hand to see students who come to the in-school crisis center (this may include Intermediate Unit crisis response teams, Catholic Charities):

(list organization, phone number, and contact person)

8. _____ will contact the funeral home for information regarding services.

9. The letter to go home to parents or guardians will be prepared by _____.
10. The press contact person will be _____.
11. _____ will follow the deceased student's schedule.
12. Faculty presence at the services will be coordinated by _____.
13. Substitute teachers (may be needed for faculty members who are unable to teach their classes or who need a break; for faculty who attend services) will be arranged by _____.
14. _____ will inform feeder schools if applicable and area schools.

C. When do you respond?

As soon as rumor or factual report of student suicide is made.

D. What will the follow-up be?

- Needs of the school community should be determined by the Crisis Response Team
- The Team should be responsible for arranging the necessary follow-up response
- A faculty debriefing is recommended.

E. Additional Resources

1. [Attachment E](#), Risk factors for Suicide
2. Star- Center manual, *Postvention Standards Guidelines: A Guide for a School's Response in the Aftermath of a Sudden Death, Revised 1/98*. This manual is available from Mary Anne Frederick, STAR-Center, School and Community Outreach, 3811 O'Hara Street, Pittsburgh, PA.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

- <http://www.save.org>
- <http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/syouth.html>
- <http://www.naspcenter.org/principals/aftersuicide.html>
- <http://www.sprc.org>
- <http://www.yellowribbon.org>

ATTACHMENT A

Model Procedure

CIU 20 NPSS PSYCHOLOGIST/COUNSELOR PROCEDURE FOR STUDENTS AT RISK FOR SUICIDE

The following courses of action will be taken in the event a psychologist or counselor is called in to evaluate a student for suicide risk. Additionally, the psychologist or counselor is to be in contact with NPSS supervisors to keep them informed of the situation and recommendations.

The psychologist or counselor meets with the student and does an assessment which may result in any one of the following courses of action.

1. The student is not judged to be at immediate risk. If it is thought that counseling may be beneficial, the parent or guardian will be notified of this recommendation and resources for counseling will be provided.
2. The student is judged not to be in immediate danger of suicide, but due to emotional distress, counseling is deemed necessary. It is recommended that the student be seen by a therapist and that the appointment be confirmed by the school within a week. The parent or guardian is called in to pick up the student and a letter of agreement to seek services is signed along with the appropriate releases of information. Counseling resources are given to the parent or guardian and assistance is given in making an initial appointment if appropriate. The student must bring a letter from the therapist with the therapist's recommendations for treatment (e.g. once-a-week therapy) as a condition of continued enrollment. This letter is to be given to the local administrator or designee the next time the student is in school following the appointment. Continued enrollment will be contingent on participation in the recommended treatment.
3. The student is judged not to be in immediate danger of suicide, but due to emotional distress, counseling is deemed necessary. It is recommended that the student be seen by a therapist before returning to school. The parent or guardian is called in to pick up the student and a letter of agreement to seek services is signed along with the appropriate releases of information. Counseling resources are given to the parent or guardian and assistance is given in making an initial appointment if appropriate. The student must bring a letter from the therapist with the therapist's recommendations for treatment (e.g. once a week therapy) as a prerequisite to returning to school. Continued enrollment will be contingent on participation in the recommended treatment.

4. The student is judged to be at immediate risk of suicide and a psychiatric evaluation is necessary. The evaluation may be facilitated in one of four ways.
 - a. The parent or guardian is notified of the situation. The student is transported to the hospital by the parent or guardian or school personnel. If transportation is provided by the parent or guardian, the psychologist/counselor and one person designated by the school will accompany or follow the parent or guardian to the hospital in order to support the student and parent or guardian through the process and to ensure that the evaluation is done.
 - b. It is thought that it would be unsafe to transport the student as listed in option A. The parents or guardians are notified and the county crisis agency is contacted to do an emergency evaluation at the school.
 - c. If the parent or guardian chooses not to seek immediate professional help, the school will seek "Involuntary Treatment" for a student presenting "a clear and present danger" in accordance with the Mental Health Act of 1976 (Section 302). The psychologist/counselor should call Children and Youth as well as Crisis Intervention - Emergency Services.
 - d. The student is taken to the psychiatrist's office. Note: This is most appropriate if the student and/or family is already under the care of the psychiatrist and the psychiatrist is available. The parent or guardian transports the student to the psychiatrist and signs releases so that information may be given to the school by the psychiatrist. The appointment is to be confirmed by the school before the student leaves. The student must bring a letter from the psychiatrist stating that it is safe for the student to return and giving recommendations for treatment as a prerequisite for returning to school.

NOTE: If any of the options under #3 do not result in hospitalization, the student is then required to see a therapist (who may be the treating psychiatrist) with the appropriate releases signed. Continued enrollment is contingent upon following through with the recommended treatment. The student must have a confirmed therapy appointment within a week.

* * * * *

This procedure was developed as a model by Colonial Intermediate Unit #20 NonPublic School Services staff in conjunction with the Diocese of Allentown Department of Education and approved by the Crisis Manual Committee as a model that could be easily utilized in other areas.

Procedure for Students at Risk for Suicide

The following courses of action will be taken in the event a psychologist or counselor is called in to evaluate a student for suicide risk.

ATTACHMENT B

INFORMATION FOR PARENT OR GUARDIANS OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN EVALUATED AT SCHOOL DUE TO CONCERN ABOUT RISK OF SUICIDE

School personnel to circle the appropriate instructions.

1. Counseling is recommended for your child. Referral information will be provided at your request.
2. Your child must have a therapy appointment, confirmed by the school within a week. Releases of information must be signed so that information may be shared between the school and the therapist. Continued enrollment is contingent upon following through with the recommended treatment.
3. Your child must see a therapist before returning to school. Your child will not be allowed back to school until this appointment has taken place. You will need to bring a note from the therapist stating the therapist's recommendations for treatment. Continued enrollment of your child is contingent upon following the recommended treatment schedule.
4. Your child must receive a psychiatric evaluation prior to returning to school due to concerns that your child may be in imminent danger of harming him/herself. If this evaluation results in hospitalization, the following applies:
 - A Release of information must be signed so that a school representative can talk to the treatment team.
 - Arrangements will be made with your child's teacher(s) to provide assignments or the time your child is in the hospital.
 - Upon return to school a meeting will be held. Continued enrollment will be contingent upon following the discharge instructions from the hospital. Release forms for information will be signed so that such information may be exchanged between your child's therapists and the school.

If this evaluation does not result in hospitalization, your child will need, in order to return to school, a note from the psychiatrist stating that it is safe for the child to return to school, as well as his/her recommendations for treatment.

ATTACHMENT C
(School Letterhead)

**PARENT OR GUARDIAN AGREEMENT AND RELEASE OF INFORMATION
FORM**

I, _____ will obtain professional help for my son/daughter, _____, from _____, an appropriate mental health agency/facility/professional.

I understand that I must obtain this professional help (*school to check one*)

_____ within 24 hours

_____ as soon as possible, with appointment confirmed by school within a week.

I authorize permission for the exchange of information between the above-named agency/facility/professional and School.

School indicates appropriate choice below:

_____ I understand that I must have the appointment confirmed by the school within a week in order for my child's continued enrollment.

_____ I understand that my child will not be allowed to return to school until this appointment has taken place.

Parent or Guardian Signature

Date

Student Signature

Date

ATTACHMENT D

CRISIS LOG

Name of Student: _____

School: _____

Name of Evaluator: _____

Nature of Crisis: _____

Recommendation: _____

School Administrator Signature: _____

Accepted: _____

Declined: _____

Steps Taken: _____

Follow-up monitoring to be done by: _____

Date: _____ Evaluator Signature: _____

ATTACHMENT E

RISK FACTORS FOR SUICIDE

Depression

Signs of depression may include:

- Changes in sleep patterns
- Difficulty concentrating
- Appetite changes
- Difficulty with peers, social isolation
- Sadness and irritability
- Decreased academic performance
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, helplessness
- No longer enjoys previously pleasurable activities
- Disruptive behavior – angry reactions, fighting, acting out,

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Previous Suicide Attempts

Behaviors

- Writing or talking about death and dying
- Giving away prized possessions
- Writing a will, suicide, or good-bye note
- Telling someone
- Expresses sudden euphoria following depression

Availability of firearms

Exposure

- Exposure to TV and news stories on suicide
- Suicide of family member or classmate

Family Problems

Disciplinary Actions

A pending disciplinary crisis can contribute to suicidal behavior. It is recommended that discipline should occur as soon as possible after misbehavior.

ATTACHMENT F

SAMPLE PARENT OR GUARDIAN LETTER

Dear Parent or Guardian.

On (date), (Student's name), a student at _____ School died (by suicide, tragically). Students were informed of this loss today in school and counselors were available from _____ (the Intermediate Unit, the Catholic Charities) to talk with students.

Whenever there is a death of a young person other students often experience strong emotions, even if they did not know the deceased well. This is a difficult issue for adolescents and we suggest that you talk to your children about their feelings. Your children may show signs of stress including difficulty sleeping or excessive sleep, difficulty concentrating, irritability, guilt, worries, thoughts of death and dying, use of alcohol or other drugs and risk taking behavior. Common grief reactions include shock, sadness, fear, shame, anger and guilt. If you are concerned about how your child is handling this loss you can contact _____ at the school at _____. The crisis numbers for our area are: (list numbers for all of the counties served by your school). Additionally the Catholic Charities is aware of this situation and the number for them is _____. We will continue to have counselors available to talk to students in school for the next several days.

The funeral arrangements are as follows:

Written excuses will be required for students who want to attend the funeral. We recommend that any students attending the funeral be accompanied by an adult.

Our prayers are with the _____ family at this time. On behalf of (name of school), I have extended our sincere condolences to the _____ family.

Sincerely,

Principal