

NEW HORIZONS CHARTER ACADEMY

Suicide Prevention & Postvention Policy

Purpose

The New Horizons Charter Academy, 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-age Youth, and to address barriers to learning has adopted this policy for suicide prevention. This policy outlines administrative procedures for intervening with suicidal and self-injurious students and offer guidelines to school site crisis teams in the aftermath of a student death by suicide.

Purpose

In 2015, LAUSD's Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated that: over 30% of high school students reported a prolonged sense of sadness or hopelessness every day for two or more continuous weeks; over 22% of middle school and 14% of high school students seriously considered attempting suicide; and 9.1% of middle school and 8.4% of high school students actually attempted suicide. Suicide is a serious public health problem that takes an enormous toll on families, students, employees and communities. Suicide prevention involves the collective efforts of families/caregivers, the school community, mental health practitioners, local community organizations, and related professionals to reduce the incidence of suicide through education, awareness, and services. School personnel are instrumental in helping students and their families by identifying students at-risk and linking them to school and community mental health resources.

DEFINITIONS

Self-Injury:

Self-injury is the deliberate act of harming one's own body, through means such as cutting or burning. Although self-injury often lacks suicidal intent, youth who self-injure are more likely to attempt suicide. For this reason, it is crucial that students who engage in self-injury are assessed for suicide risk. Self-injury is an unhealthy way to cope with emotional pain, intense anger or frustration.

Warning Signs

Warning signs are behaviors that signal the possible presence of suicidal thinking. They might be regarded as cries for help or invitations to intervene. Warning signs indicate the need for an adult to immediately ascertain whether the student has thoughts of suicide or self-injury. Warning signs include: suicide threat (direct or indirect); suicide notes and plans; prior suicidal behavior; making final arrangements; preoccupation with death; and changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts and/or feelings.

Staff Training & Responsibilities

All staff are responsible for safeguarding the health and safety of students. All staff are expected to exercise sound professional judgement, err on the side of caution and demonstrate extreme sensitivity throughout any crisis situation. All school personnel will 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 their designee. Any threat in any form must be treated as real and dealt with immediately. No student should be left alone, nor

confidences promised. Thus, in cases of life-threatening situations these students' confidentiality will be waived. The New Horizons Charter Academy's suicide crisis response procedures will be implemented.

School Employee Responsibilities:

All employees are expected to:

- Inform the school site administrator/designee immediately or as soon as possible of concerns, reports or behaviors relating to student suicide and self-injury.
- Adhere to the Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention (SPIP) policy.

Administrator or Designee should:

1. Respond to reports of students at risk for suicide or exhibiting self-injurious behaviors immediately or as soon as possible.
2. Monitor and follow-up to ensure that the risk has been mitigated through support and resources.
3. Ensure that the SPIP policy is implemented.
4. Provide follow-up to relevant staff such as School Operations, as needed.
5. Update Illuminate Student Information System, as needed

Prevention:

Suicide prevention involves school-wide activities and programs that enhance connectedness, contribute to a safe and nurturing environment, and strengthen protective factors that reduce risk for students. Suicide prevention includes:

- A. Promoting positive school climate by reinforcing the Discipline Foundation Policy: School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Support.
- B. Increasing staff, student and parent/guardian knowledge and awareness of risk factors and warning signs of youth suicide and self-injury.
- C. Monitoring students' emotional state and well-being, as well as engaging students by providing structure, guidance, and fair discipline.
- D. Modeling and teaching desirable skills and behavior.
- E. Promoting access to school and community resources.

Assess for Suicide Risk

1. The administrator/designee or designated school site crisis team member should gather essential background information that will help with assessing the student's risk for suicide (e.g., what the student said or did, information that prompted concern or suspicion, copies of any concerning writings, drawings, text messages, social media, or previous Illuminate history).
2. The administrator/designee or the designated school site crisis team member should meet with the student to complete a risk assessment. Based on the information gathered and assessment of the student, the assessing party should collaborate with at least one other designated school site crisis team member to determine the level of risk.
3. If the assessing party makes phone calls for consultation, these should be made in a confidential setting and not in the presence of the student of concern. The student should be supervised at all times by another designated staff member.

The privacy of all students should be protected at ALL times. Disclose information only on right to know and need to know basis.

Suicide Crisis Response Procedures

A. Suicide Threat

- a. **Definition** - A suicide threat is a verbal or nonverbal communication that the individual intends to harm him/herself with the intention to die but has not acted on the behavior.
- i. The staff member who learns of the threat will locate the individual and arrange for or provide constant adult supervision.
 - ii. The above-mentioned staff member will immediately inform the principal/designee.
 - iii. The principal/designee will involve student services/counseling staff, or other trained mental health professional in their absence.
 - iv. 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.
 - v. The principal/designee will:
 - o Contact the parent/guardian, apprise them of the situation and make recommendations. Most often it is the person conducting the interview who contacts the parent/guardian.
 - o Put all recommendations in writing to the parent/guardian.
 - o Mail the recommendations through certified mail if there is any question or doubt of the parent/guardian receiving the recommendations.
 - o Maintain a file copy of the letter in a secure and appropriate location.
 - o If the student is known to be currently in counseling, the principal/designee will attempt to inform their treatment provider of what occurred and the actions taken.
 - o If the parent refuses to cooperate, and there is any doubt regarding the child's safety, the school employee who directly witnessed the threat will pursue a 302 involuntary mental health assessment by calling *County Emergency Services* and speak with a delegate. The delegate will listen to concerns and advise on the course of action.
 - o If the county delegate authorizes a 302 mental health assessment, then the county will authorize transportation to the assessment.
 - o Principal will provide follow up and support.

B. Suicidal Act or Attempt on School Grounds or During a School-Sponsored Activity

- a. **Definition** - Suicidal act (also referred to as suicide attempt) - a potentially self-injurious behavior for which there is evidence that the person intended to kill himself/herself; a suicidal act may result in death, injuries, or no injuries.
- i. The first charter school employee on the scene must call for help from another staff member, locate the individual and follow district emergency medical procedures, such as calling 911.
 - ii. A staff member must notify the principal.
 - iii. Staff members should move all other students out of the immediate area and arrange appropriate supervision.
 - iv. Students should not be allowed to observe the scene.
 - v. Principal will involve student services personnel to assist as needed.
 - vi. Principal will contact parent/guardian and ask them to come to the school or hospital.
 - vii. Principal will inform Charter School Office, or call for assistance from the County's on-call response team (PET Team).
 - viii. Principal will document in writing all actions taken and recommendations.

- ix. if the student is known to be currently in counseling, the principal will attempt to inform their treatment provider of what occurred and the actions taken.
- x. Principal will involve the additional resources for follow-up and support.
- xi. Principal will request written documentation from any treating facilities prior to a student's return to school.
- xii. 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.
- xiii. Media representatives should be referred to the appropriate school spokesperson. School staff should make no statements to the media.

Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect:

If child abuse or neglect by a parent/guardian is suspected or there is reasonable suspicion that contacting the parent/guardian may escalate the student's current level of risk, or the parent/guardian is contacted and unwilling to respond, report the incident to the appropriate child protective services agency following the School's Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Requirements. This report should include information about the student's suicide risk level and any concerning ideations or behaviors. The reporting party must follow directives provided by the child protective services agency personnel.

Responding to Students who may be Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ)

LGBTQ youth who are targets of bias, bullying or rejection at home or at school have elevated rates of suicidality, compared to non-LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ students with rejecting families have an eight-fold increased risk for suicidal ideation than do LGBTQ students with accepting families. When working with LGBTQ youth, the following should be considered:

- A. Assess the student for suicide risk using a risk assessment tool.
- B. Do not make assumptions about a student's sexual orientation or gender identity. The risk for suicidal ideation is greatest among students who are struggling to hide or suppress their identity.
- C. Be affirming. Students who are struggling with their identity are on alert for negative or rejecting messages about sexual orientation and gender identity.
- D. Do not "out" students to anyone, including parent(s)/guardian(s). Students have the right to privacy about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

POSTVENTION: Protocol for Responding to a Student Death by Suicide

The following are general procedures for the administrator/designee in the event of a death by suicide. See Attachment L, Postvention: Protocol for Responding to a Student Death by Suicide for an abbreviated version of the protocol indicated below.

- A. Gather Pertinent Information
 - 1. Confirm cause of death is the result of suicide, if this information is available.
 - 2. The administrator/designee should designate a certificated staff member to be the point of contact with the family of the deceased. Information about the cause of death should not be disclosed to the school community until the family has consented to disclosure.

Notify on a Need to Know Basis

- 1. Charter School Operations Staff

Mobilize the School Site Crisis Team

Concerns and wishes of family members regarding disclosure of the death and cause of death should be taken into consideration when providing facts to students, staff and parents/guardians.

1. Assess the extent and degree of psychological trauma and impact to the school community.
2. Develop an action plan and assign responsibilities.
3. Establish a plan to notify staff of the death, once consent is obtained by the family of the deceased.
 - a. Notification of staff is recommended as soon as possible (e.g., optional emergency meeting before or after school).
 - b. To dispel rumors, share accurate information and all known facts about the death that the family has approved to be shared.
 - c. Emphasize that no one person or event is to blame for suicide. Suicide is complex and cannot be simplified by blaming individuals, drugs, music, school or bullying.
 - d. Allow staff to express their own reactions and grief; identify anyone who may need additional support and provide resources.
4. Establish a plan to notify students of the death, once consent is obtained from the family of the deceased.
 - a. Discuss plan for notification of students in small group settings, such as the classroom. Do not notify students using a public announcement system.
 - b. Provide staff with a script of information to be shared with the students, recommendations for responding to possible student reactions and questions, and activities to help students process the information (e.g., writing, drawing, or referral to crisis counselor).
 - c. Review student support plan, making sure to clarify procedures and locations for crisis counseling.
5. Establish a plan to notify other parents/guardians of the death, once consent is obtained from the family of the deceased. Consult with Charter School Operations when preparing the death notification letter for parents/guardians.
6. Define triage procedures for students and staff who may need additional support in coping with the death.
 - a. including: Identify a lead school site crisis response staff member to assist with coordination of crisis counseling and support services.
 - b. Identify locations on campus to provide crisis counseling to students, staff and parents/guardians.
 - c. Request substitute teachers.
 - d. Maintain sign-in sheets and documentation on individuals serviced for follow-up.
 - e. Provide students, staff or parents/guardians with after-hours resource numbers such as the 24/7 Suicide Prevention Crisis Line (877) 727-4747.
 - f. Request crisis counseling support from Charter School Director of Operations.
7. Refer students or staff who require a higher level of care for additional services such as School Mental Health, a community mental health provider, or their health care provider. Indicators of students and staff in need of additional support or referral may include the following:
 - a. Persons with close connections to the deceased (e.g., close friends, siblings, relatives, teacher).
 - b. Persons who experienced a loss over the past six months to a year, experienced a traumatic event, witnessed acts of violence, or have a loved one who has died by suicide.
 - c. Persons who appear emotionally over-controlled (e.g., a student who was very close to the deceased but who is exhibiting no emotional reaction to the loss) or those who are angry when majority are expressing sadness.
 - d. Persons unable to control crying.
 - e. Persons with multiple traumatic experiences. These individuals may have strong reactions that require additional assistance.

D. Document The administrator/designee shall maintain records and documentation of actions taken at the school by completing an incident report in Illuminate SIS.

E. Monitor and Manage

1. The administrator/designee, with support from the school crisis team, should monitor and manage the situation as it develops to determine follow up actions.
2. Maintain consistent communication with appropriate parties.
3. Update all actions taken at the school in

Illuminate. F. Important Considerations

1. Memorials - Memorials or dedications to a student who has died by suicide should not glamorize or romanticize the student or the death. If students initiate a memorial, the administrator/designee should offer guidelines for a meaningful, safe approach to acknowledge the loss. Some considerations for memorials include:

- a. Memorials should not be disruptive to the daily school routine.
- b. Monitor memorials for content.
- c. Placement of memorials should be time limited. For example, they may be kept in place until the funeral services, after which the memorial items may be offered to the family upon review of appropriateness of items by administrator/designee.

2. Social Networking - Students may often turn to social networking as a way to communicate information about the death; this information may be accurate or rumored. Many also use social networking as an opportunity to express their thoughts about the death and about their own feelings regarding suicide. Some considerations in regard to social networking include:

- a. Encourage parents/guardians to monitor internet postings regarding the death, including the deceased's personal profile or social media.
- b. Social networking sites may contain rumors, derogatory messages about the deceased or other students. Such messages may need to be addressed. In some situations, postings may warrant notification to parents/guardians or law enforcement.

3. Suicide Contagion Suicide contagion is a process by which the exposure to suicide or suicidal behaviors of one or more may influence others to attempt or die by suicide. Some considerations for preventing suicide contagion are:

- a. Identify students who may be at an increased risk for suicide, including those who have a reported history of attempts, are dealing with known stressful life events, witnessed the death, are friends with or related to the deceased.
- b. Refer student for mental health services..
- c. Monitor media coverage. Consult and work with the Charter School Director of Operations for dissemination of information, as needed.

4. School Culture and Events It is important to acknowledge that the school community may experience a heightened sense of loss in the aftermath of a death by suicide when significant events transpire that the deceased student would have been a part of, such as culmination, prom or graduation. Depending on the impact, such triggering events may require planning for additional considerations and resources.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All student matters are confidential and may not be shared, except with those persons who need to know. Personnel with the need to know shall not re-disclose student information without appropriate legal

authorization. Information sharing should be within the confines of the Charter School's reporting procedures and investigative process.