

# WPSD Suicide Prevention and Postvention Policy

## Purpose

### 1. Suicide Prevention and Postvention

The Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf 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 aged youth, and to address barriers to learning, hereby adopts this policy. This policy corresponds with and supports other federal, state and local efforts to provide youth with prevention education, early identification and intervention, and access to all local resources to promote health and prevent personal harm or injury.

### 2. Prevention Education

Students will receive age appropriate lessons in their classrooms through health education on the importance of safe and healthy choices, as well as help seeking strategies for self or others. Students are taught not to make promises of confidence when they are concerned about a peer or significant other. Lessons will contain information on comprehensive health and wellness, including emotional, behavioral and social skills development. Lessons are taught by health and physical education teachers, community service providers and Counseling and Evaluation staff. Students who are in need of intervention will be referred to the Counseling and Evaluation department for screening and recommendations.

### 3. Staff Training and Responsibilities

All staff members are responsible for safeguarding the health and safety of students. All staff are expected to exercise sound professional judgment, err on the side of caution and demonstrate extreme sensitivity throughout any crisis situation. All school personnel should be informed of the signs of youth depression/suicide. **Staff will receive four hours of suicide prevention training every five years.**

Any staff member who is originally made aware of any threat or witnesses any attempt towards self-harm, that is written, drawn, spoken or threatened, will immediately notify the principal, dean, or their designee, and the director, who will notify the CEO and COO. 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 a student's confidentiality will be waived. WPSD's suicide crisis response procedures will be implemented.

## 4. Suicide Crisis Response Procedures

### Suicide Threat

**Definition** – A suicide threat is a verbal or non-verbal communication that the individual intends to harm him/herself with the intention to die but has not acted on the behavior.

- a. The staff member who learns of the threat will locate the individual and arrange for or provide constant adult supervision.
- b. The above-mentioned staff member will immediately inform the principal, dean/designee.
- c. The principal, dean/designee will involve counseling and evaluation staff, director, and school nurse or other trained mental health professional in their absence. The director will notify the CEO and COO.
- d. The appropriate staff or approved agency provider will determine risk and intervention needed by interviewing the student, and gathering appropriate supportive documentation from teachers, residential supervisors, or others who witnessed the threat.
- e. The principal, dean/designee will:
  - 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.
  - Put all recommendations in writing to the parent/guardian. [This may be through certified mail, email delivery confirmation, a parent/signature "sign off" of recommendations sent home to be returned the next day or other approved communication procedure.]
  - Mail the recommendation through certified mail if there is any question or doubt of the parent/guardian receiving the recommendations.
  - Maintain a file copy of the letter in a secure and appropriate location.
- f. If the student is known to be currently in counseling, the principal, dean/designee will attempt to inform the school counselor or treatment provider of what occurred and the actions taken.
- g. 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 **RESOLVE Crisis Network 1-888-796-8226** and ask for a delegate. The delegate will listen to concerns and advise on the course

of action. If a 302 involuntary mental health assessment is granted, the first-hand witness will need to be the petitioner, with support from appropriate WPSD staff [school psychologist, school counselor, principal, deans, and director].

- h. If the county delegate authorizes a 302 mental health assessment, then the county will authorize transportation to the assessment. [Each county/state may have different procedures regarding transportation of an individual in need of a 302 mental health assessment. In some cases transportation is provided by the parent, local police or EMS. Ideally consult with your local county delegate prior to the need for a petition.] If school security/resource officers should transport the student, then one school employee should drive and another should be seated next to the student. Do not drive the student in personal vehicles. Do not leave the student alone at any time. Depending on the level of the student's distress, the 302 petitioner (the employee who learned firsthand of the threat) may need to travel in a separate vehicle.
- i. Involve the Counseling and Evaluation staff for follow-up and support.

**Note:** If a threat is made during an after-school program, and no school personnel are available, call RESOLVE Crisis Network 1-888-796-8226 or 1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-273-TALK for help. Inform the dean/principal, and director of the incident and actions taken. The director will notify the CEO and COO. See attached after hours protocol.

### **Suicidal Act or Attempt on School Grounds or During a School-Sponsored Activity**

**Definition:** - Suicidal act (also referred to as suicide attempt) – a potentially self-injurious behavior for which there is evidence that the person probably intended to kill himself or herself; a suicidal act may result in death, injuries, or no injuries.

The first WPSD employee on the scene must call for help from another staff member, locate the individual and follow WPSD's emergency medical procedures, such as calling 911.

- a. A staff member must notify the director, principal, dean/designee, who will notify the CEO and COO.
- b. Staff members should move all other students out of the immediate area and arrange appropriate supervision. Students should not be allowed to observe the scene.
- c. Director, principal, dean/designee, CEO and COO will involve counseling and evaluation staff to assist as needed.
- d. Director, principal, dean/designee will contact parent/guardian and ask

them to come to the school or hospital.

- e. Director, principal, dean/designee will inform CEO's . COO's and Director's Office, or call for assistance from the **RESOLVE Crisis Network 1-888-796-8226**.
- f. Director, principal dean/designee will document in writing all actions taken and recommendations.
- g. If the student is known to be currently in counseling, the principal/designee will attempt to inform their school counselor or treatment provider of what occurred and the actions taken.
- h. Director, principal, dean/designee will involve the Counseling and Evaluation staff for follow-up and support.
- i. Director, principal, dean/designee will request written documentation from any treating facilities prior to a student's return to school.
- j. Counseling and Evaluation will promptly follow up with any students or staff who might have witnessed the attempt, and contact their parents/guardians. Counseling and evaluation staff will provide supportive counseling and document all actions taken. Guidelines are available in the STAR-Center's Postvention Standard's Manual.
- k. Media representatives should be referred to the appropriate school spokesperson [e.g., CEO, COO, Director, or HR]. School staff should make no statements to the media.

### **Suicide Act or Attempt Not on School Grounds or During a School-Sponsored Activity but Reported to a School Employee**

Follow the procedures outlined under Suicide Threat.

### **Suicide of a Student or Employee on School Grounds or During a School- Sponsored Activity**

**Definition** - Suicide – death caused self-directed injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior.

**Note:** The coroner's or medical examiner's office must first confirm that the death was a suicide before any school official may state this as the cause of death. Schools must adhere to the wishes of the family in this regard and respect their right to privacy and confidentiality.

When a sudden unexplained death of a student or staff member occurs, the principal, dean/designee will confer with the Director, CEO and COO, and promptly implement crisis response procedures as outlined in WPSD's Crisis Management Plan. These actions may include the following:

- a. The first WPSD employee on the scene must call for help from another staff member, locate the individual and follow WPSD emergency

- medical procedures, such as calling 911.
- b. A staff member must notify the director, principal, dean/designee, who will notify the CEO and COO.
  - c. Staff members should move all other students out of the immediate area and arrange appropriate supervision. Students should not be allowed to observe the scene.
  - d. Director, principal, dean/designee will involve counseling and evaluation personnel to assist as needed.
  - e. Director, principal, dean/designee will contact parent/guardian and ask them to come to the school or hospital.
  - f. Director, principal, dean/designee will inform Director, CEO, and COO, and call for assistance from the RESOLVE Crisis Network 1-888-796-8226 or STAR Center Outreach (412) 246-5619 (between 8:30AM-5:00PM).
  - g. Director, principal, dean/designee will document in writing all actions taken and recommendations.

Refer to the *STAR-Center's Postvention Standard's Manual*, for a detailed outline of suicide postvention (procedures to support schools following a sudden death).

The principal/dean or his/her designee will:

- a. Immediately notify, regardless of the day or time, the CEO, COO, and Director.
- b. Verify and obtain as much factual information as possible via school security, the parent/guardian, or others who may have the facts depending on circumstances.
- c. Assemble your response team using school-based and community resources; use the procedures outlined in the Crisis Management Plan, and insure that everyone is informed of what occurred in a timely manner.
- d. Do not describe the death as a suicide with the general public, parents, staff or students unless you have written confirmation from the coroner or medical examiner. Decisions about whether to share the coroner's findings should be made in accordance with the guidelines outlined in *STAR-Center's Postvention Standards Manual*.
- e. Promptly collect and safeguard the student's belongings from desk or locker, any student work or photo or staff belongings from his/her desk (in the event of a staff death). Consult with family members and determine a mutually agreeable date and time in private, to return these belongings.
- f. Inform the faculty that a sudden death has occurred using written communication if school has already begun, followed by a staff meeting at the conclusion of the day. If the death occurred in the

evening, convene a staff meeting prior to the start of school the next day. Outline procedures that will be followed per the Crisis Management Plan.

- g. Designate space for all postvention activities.
- h. Once obtained, provide funeral arrangements and related details to students, staff via Main Office and parents via written communication.
- i. Refer staff to district's EAP (Employee Assistance Program) for additional support.
- j. Prepare and send a parent information letter home with students following WPSD's protocol and guidelines in the *STAR-Center's Postvention Standards Manual*.
- k. Prioritize classrooms and students who will need immediate attention and connect them with the response team or other appropriate resources as determined by counseling and evaluation staff.
- l. Refer media requests to WPSD spokesperson.
- m. Do not disclose any information or details to the media.
- n. Meet with the response team at the end of the day or days during crisis management activities to insure the exchange of important information, as well as, to insure communication and further planning of activities.
- o. Check in periodically with the family, staff, and students to insure that everyone is supported as much as feasible with the context of the school setting.
- p. Thank those who assisted in the postvention. *Don't forget to include the faculty, ancillary staff, crisis team and any outside agency or community folks.*

## **5. Actions to Avoid**

- a. Do not announce the death of anyone over the public address system.
- b. Do not hold an assembly program or bring large groups of students together in one place to discuss suicide.
- c. Avoid canceling school, classes or pre-planned activities unless absolutely necessary; students find comfort in following their normal routine when they are under stress, within reason. Discuss with CEO prior to proceeding with any cancellations.

## **6. Memorials**

It is recognized that grieving individuals need a variety of opportunities to personally express their emotions and reactions to this type of death. Recommendations and ideas for a memorial should be taken into consideration and discussed with the counseling and evaluation staff, director, CEO, COO and the response team prior to being implemented. Memorials must be carefully and

tastefully planned, considering a broad range of responses. A variety of activities may in fact occur to celebrate positive remembrances, and these expressions often vary. Refer to the *STAR-Center's Postvention Standards Manual*, for additional considerations regarding memorials, graduation activities and anniversary dates.