Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention Protocol
Suicide Prevention

All Henry County Schools employees shall receive annual training on youth suicide prevention. The training will include warning signs to identify students who may be at-risk for suicide and where to refer a potentially suicidal student. Each school will identify personnel (in most cases, school counselors and school social workers), that are trained annually to carry out the suicide intervention protocol when at-risk students are identified.

**Know the facts:**

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among persons aged 15-24 and third leading cause of death for children 10-14 years
- In a 2011 nationally-representative sample of youth in grades 9-12:
  - 15.8% of students reported that they had seriously considered attempting suicide during the 12 months preceding the survey
  - 12.8% of students reported that they made a plan about how they would attempt suicide during the 12 months preceding the survey
  - 7.8% of students reported that they had attempted suicide one or more times during the 12 months preceding the survey

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Youth risk behavior surveillance-United States, 2011 Available from www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6104.pdf](www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6104.pdf)

**Identify Students Who May be at Risk for Suicide:**

You may notice problems facing your students that may put them at risk for suicide. There are a large number of risk factors for suicide. Some of the most significant risk factors are:

- Prior suicide attempt(s) or hospitalizations
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Mood and anxiety disorders, e.g., depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Suicide risk is usually greater among people with more than one risk factor. For individuals who are already at risk, a “triggering” event causing shame or despair may make them more likely to attempt suicide. These events may include problems in school (academic and/or discipline), family problems or abuse, relationship problems or break-ups, bullying, and legal difficulties. It is critical that we reach out to students that may be experiencing difficulties and let them know that we are here to support them. Make referrals to school counselors or school social workers if you are aware of a student that may be in need of additional support.

(Adapted from Rodgers, 2011 and SPRC, 2008)

Developing meaningful relationships with each one of your students and knowing what to do when presented with this critical situation are the most important things that you can do as an educator to prevent suicide.
Surrounding each student with encouragement, care, and a sense of belonging is critical to ensuring a safe and supportive environment.

**IMMEDIATE RISK**

**Look for Signs of Immediate Risk for Suicide**

Some behaviors may indicate a person is at immediate risk for suicide. These three behaviors should prompt you to take action right away:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

**Take Immediate Action**

If you encounter a student that is exhibiting signs of immediate risk, take the following steps:

1. Ensure constant supervision of the student.
2. Escort the student to see the designated school contact or administrator; if an escort is not possible, call for the designated person to retrieve the student from your location.
3. Provide all information regarding the concerns identified about the student and any other helpful information to the designated school contact.

**SERIOUS RISK**

**Look for signs of Serious Risk for Suicide**

Other behaviors may indicate a serious risk—especially if the behavior is new, has increased, and/or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change:

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated, and/or behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

(Adapted from National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, [n.d.])
Take Immediate Action

If you encounter a student that is exhibiting signs of serious risk, take the following steps:

1. Immediately call or make a verbal contact with the designated school contact or administrator to arrange for the student to be assessed.
2. Provide all information regarding the concerns identified about the student and any other helpful information to the designated school contact.

Suicide Intervention

When a student is identified by a staff member, peer, community member, or through self-report(s) as potentially suicidal, the student will be seen by a school counselor, school social worker, or other designee trained in the suicide protocol for Henry County Schools. If one of these individuals is not available, a school administrator will designate someone to fill this role.

STEP 1: STABILIZE

A. School staff will continuously supervise the student to ensure safety. Under no circumstances should a suicidal youth be left alone.
B. Immediately observe the area to determine if there are any dangerous objects or instruments close at hand.
C. Take the student to a private, non-threatening place away from other students.

STEP 2: ASSESS RISK

- Talk calmly with the student to assess risk of self-harm. There are no prescribed steps to be taken with a student during the interview process. Clinical and professional judgement should be utilized in directing the interview.
  - The Interviewing Suicidal Students document provides a listing of various questions to be considered for use in the student interview

STEP 3: DETERMINE SERVICES

- If the student is in imminent danger, has made a suicide attempt at school, or will not relinquish dangerous instruments, follow the Extreme Risk Procedure
- If the student expresses active suicidal thoughts with an identified plan, but danger is not imminent or accessible, follow the Severe Risk Procedure
- If the student expresses active suicidal thoughts, but has no identified plan, follow the Moderate Risk Procedure
STEP 4: RE-ENTRY/FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURE

- A designated staff member will coordinate with school personnel, the parent or guardian, and the student to determine what supports are needed for the student at school.

**Extreme Risk Procedure:**
To be used if the student is in imminent danger, has made a suicide attempt at school, or will not relinquish dangerous instruments.

- Call 911
- Calm the student by talking reassuringly until emergency responders arrive
- Try to protect the student from self-harm; try to have student disengage from self-harming behaviors and relinquish any dangerous objects
- Call the parents or guardians and inform them of the actions taken
- If parents or guardians are uncooperative, or if the student’s distress is the result of abuse, neglect, or exploitation by a parent or guardian, contact the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS)

**Severe Risk Procedure:**
To be used if the student expresses active suicidal thoughts with an identified plan, but danger is not imminent or accessible.

- Call the parents or guardians and communicate the nature of the situation
- Provide resources to assist parents/guardians in scheduling an assessment with a mental health provider. If requested by the parent/guardian, assist in making the initial call to the mental health provider
- Ask the parent to transport the child to the assessment
- If parents refuse to transport the student or if unable to contact the parents or guardians, call 911
- If parents or guardians are uncooperative, or if the student’s distress is the result of abuse, neglect, or exploitation by a parent or guardian, contact the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS)

**Moderate Risk Procedure:**
To be used if the student expresses active suicidal thoughts, but has no identified plan.

- Call the parents or guardians and explain the nature of the situation
- Refer them to a mental health provider
- Continue to demonstrate genuine concern for the student
Interviewing Suicidal Students

It can be difficult to begin a conversation with students regarding suicidal thoughts or actions. The following section is intended to provide some examples of language you may want to use. Remember to reassure and encourage students through this process.

*Adapted from Youth Suicide: A Survival Guide for Schools and Suicide and the School: A Practical Guide to Suicide Prevention

**Interviewing Suicidal Students**

It can be difficult to begin a conversation with students regarding suicidal thoughts or actions. The following section is intended to provide some examples of language you may want to use. Remember to reassure and encourage students through this process.

*Adapted from Youth Suicide: A Survival Guide for Schools and Suicide and the School: A Practical Guide to Suicide Prevention

**Introduce the topic (two examples):**

- Now, I am going to ask you a few questions about suicide.
- I have a few questions to ask you about suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

**Note that the questions below are brief and straightforward. They are designed to help determine if the person 1) is having suicidal thoughts/ideas, 2) has a plan to do so, and 3) has access to the means.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewing Children</th>
<th>Interviewing Adolescents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is death?</td>
<td>Have you thought about killing yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever thought of how you might die? Tell me about it.</td>
<td>Are you thinking about killing yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever hurt yourself on purpose?</td>
<td>If yes, do you have a plan, or how would you do it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a way to carry out your plan?</td>
<td>Have you ever tried to hurt yourself before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happens after you die?</td>
<td>Do you think you might try to hurt yourself today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When would you kill yourself?</td>
<td>Have you thought of ways you might hurt yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever told anyone about your thoughts or plans?</td>
<td>Do you have access to pills or weapons (or other methods)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will killing yourself help?</td>
<td>Can you tell me about the suicidal thoughts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o For example, what brings them on?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o How strong are they? How often do you have them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What else can you do instead of killing yourself?
- Have you ever tried alcohol or drugs?
- How can I help you?

- How long do they last? When was the last time?
- Who really needs to know that you feel this way?
- Who knows about your thoughts and plans?
- How can I help you?

Other questions to consider:
- Have you ever used alcohol or drugs to ease your pain?
- Are you currently taking any medications or had any medication changes?
- Have there been any unusual or major changes in your life recently?
- Do you think things are getting worse, better, or staying the same?
- Have you seen any specialists or counselors lately?

Suicide Postvention Guidelines

The Henry County Schools First Responders On Site Team (FROST) will be activated for any school experiencing a student death or other critical event requiring additional school support.

A suicide death in a school community requires implementing a coordinated response to assist staff, students, and families. Major goals of postvention activities are to support students and staff, decrease the risk of another suicide, and to restore an environment focused on education. A meeting with the FROST team should take place immediately after the basic facts about the death have been obtained.

STEP 1: Official Fact Gathering

The Principal, a FROST member, or other designated staff should contact the SRO in order to verify the death and get the facts surrounding the death. Facts are important for school staff to know in order to raise awareness for and prevent imitation behaviors.

STEP 2: Parental Communication *to be initiated ONLY after Law Enforcement has completed death notification

Contact with the parent/guardian should be made in person or by phone call by the designated building administrator, FROST member, and/or other designated personnel. The administrator or designated personnel will offer support to the family, letting them know specifically those services which the school can offer to any siblings in the school system, and referral information for the services that may be needed outside of the school setting. Ascertain any information that the family wants to make known, such as funeral arrangements, visitations, etc.

STEP 3: Parental Permission

Parental/family permission is not required to release information related to the death, since a death is public information. However, the death MUST have officially been ruled a suicide for these procedures to be followed. When this is not the case, general FROST procedures for critical events should be used, and with acknowledgment that the cause of death is unknown.

STEP 4: Notification

Notify the following:
A. Superintendent
B. Executive Officer
C. Student Services Department
D. Schools attended by siblings
STEP 5: Preparation for Communication

The Principal, or other designee, will work with FROST to notify staff through memo or meeting of the necessary facts obtained regarding the death. If occurring overnight or on the weekend, the Principal should activate the calling tree as appropriate to schedule a meeting with staff prior to students arriving in the building. Write a statement for teachers to share with their class. This statement should only include basic facts of the death and the availability of student support services.

STEP 6: Staff Meeting

A. Inform staff about the facts known up to this point.
B. Allow time for staff to ask questions and express feelings.
C. Review planned in-class discussion formats and disclosure guidelines for talking with students. Prepare staff for student reactions.
D. Provide the prepared statement that will be read by the teacher or FROST member to notify students about the critical event.
E. Alert staff of possible contagion effect and advise to watch for at-risk students.
F. Compile a list of all students that are close to the deceased.
G. Compile a list of all staff members who had contact with the deceased.
H. Compile/Update a list of students who may be at-risk of suicide.
I. Remind staff about risk factors and warning signs for adolescent suicide.
J. Provide information regarding counseling/support opportunities for students and staff.

STEP 7: Student Communication and Support

A. Do not use the name of the deceased on walkie-talkie or radio devices.
B. Students should receive the prepared information in their classes from their teacher or member of FROST.
C. School-wide announcements and assemblies should be avoided.
D. FROST will coordinate with the school team to set up appropriate processes and locations to conduct individual and group counseling for students.
E. FROST will assist schools in providing appropriate suicide prevention resources to students and parents.
F. Ongoing identification, monitoring, and support to students that may be at-risk.

STEP 8: Monitor Social Media

Assign someone to monitor social media. Student increasingly utilize social media as a means to commemorate those that have died. They might continue to post messages to a deceased person’s site, create hashtags specific to a critical event, or even create a new site or account for this purpose. Schools personnel should speak with students to gain information about what is posted. The goal is not to police, but to maintain a general level of awareness.

STEP 10: Parent Notification of Students in School

The Principal or designee should consult with FROST and the District’s Communication Office for support on developing an appropriate parent communication from the school that includes facts about the death, what the school is doing to support students, warning signs of suicidal behavior, and a list of resources available.
STEP 11: Participate in/Advise on Appropriate Memorialization in Immediate Aftermath

Schools should avoid formal memorials such as a page in a yearbook, planting a tree, or placing a plaque to memorialize a death by suicide. This is consistent with general recommendations for memorialization. Informal, individualized responses that are meaningful to the students should be chosen instead. Students may wish to implement school based suicide prevention activities, activities related to student mental health, or a community service initiative. Monitor spontaneous memorial activity near lockers, school gathering places or parking spaces.

Other Actions to be considered:

1. Consider plans for providing ongoing, longer term counseling support for students and all faculty and staff.
Henry County School System
Self-Harm Threat
Emergency Conference Summary

I, or we, ________________________________, the parent(s)/guardian(s)/custodian(s) of __________________________, were involved in a conference with school personnel on ______________________________. We were notified that our child had made self-harm or suicidal threats. We were also provided with a list of available community services.

I give permission for school personnel to disclose information regarding my child’s self-harm or suicidal threat to mental health and medical professionals who may evaluate or treat my child in the future. In addition, I have been made aware that if the school determines that my student’s behavior is a threat to self, and that if I do not follow through with intervention, a referral to the Department of Family and Children Services may be considered.

________________________________________________
Parent or Legal Guardian

________________________________________________
Parent or Legal Guardian

________________________________________________
School Personnel/Title

________________________________________________
School Administrator

________________________________________________
Today’s Date
References


SAMHSA Suicide Safe App

This document was adapted from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, available at http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/Teachers.pdf
Suicide Prevention Resource Center web: http://www.sprc.org • e-mail: info@sprc.org • phone: 877-GET-SPRC (438-7772)