

REGULATION 5350

MOORESTOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT CRISIS RESPONSE GUIDE

CRISIS INTERVENTION/SUICIDE PREVENTION

The following procedures are established for guidance of staff members in recognizing the pupil who contemplates suicide, in responding to threatened or attempted suicide, and in preventing contagion when a pupil commits suicide. Because a prompt response may be essential to a pupil's life, it is imperative that school staff act on information in a timely manner.

Recognition of Potential Suicide

All school personnel, both teaching and support staff members, will be alert to any sign(s) that a pupil may be contemplating suicide. Such signs include, but are not necessarily limited to, a pupil's:

1. Overt suggestion, regardless of its context, that s/he is considering or has considered suicide or has worked out the details of a suicide attempt;
2. Evidence of preparation of a will, intention to dispose of his/her possessions or otherwise get his/her life "in order";
3. Obsession with death or afterlife;
4. Possession of a weapon or other means of suicide or obsession with such means;
5. Sense of hopelessness or unrelieved sadness;
6. Lethargy or despondency, or, conversely, a tendency to behave more impulsively or aggressively than usual;
7. Drop in academic achievement, decreased energy and effort, inability to focus on studies;
8. Isolation from others by loss of friends, withdrawal from friends, lack of companionship, or family disintegration;
9. Preoccupation with nonexistent physical ills;
10. Loss of weight, appetite and/or sleep;
11. Substance abuse;
12. Loss of economic resources.

Response to Potential Suicide

Level 1: Observation of behaviors or warning signs that indicate a student may be at risk to engage in a suicidal act.

Any indication of a potential suicide, whether personally witnessed or received by report from another, will be taken seriously and reported to the school principal or designee immediately.

1. The principal or designee will immediately inform the mental health provider (school psychologist, school social worker, SAC, guidance counselor, or other appropriate staff member such as the nurse) about the suicide concerns. Two of these staff members will jointly investigate the matter promptly to determine the extent of the problem.
2. If the judgment of the staff member is that there is serious risk of bodily harm, Level 2 procedures noted below should be implemented.
3. The staff members conducting the investigation will inform the building administrator of the outcome of the student interview.
4. Even if the risk of bodily harm is not imminent, the student's parent/guardian will be contacted by phone immediately following the student interview in order to communicate the information and concerns. The communication might include information regarding various types of mental health professionals/agencies with whom the family may consult.

5. If the student is receiving outpatient mental health services, consent to release/obtain information/communication with the outpatient mental health care provider may be requested from the parent/guardian.
6. Documentation of the school's actions on behalf of the student will be completed by one of the response team members who conducted the investigation (**Form 1**-Confidential Intervention form). The completed Confidential Intervention form will be forwarded to the school principal, guidance services administrator, superintendent and director of special services.
7. Follow-up will occur within at least one month to document the disposition and to provide any needed strategies. (**Form 2** - Intervention Follow-up Form). Referral to the Intervention and Referral Services team (I & RS) will be considered. The Intervention Follow-up form will be distributed to the principal, guidance services administrator, superintendent and director of special services. In the case of a classified student, the involved staff will work collaboratively with the student's case manager.

Level 2: Student has stated or written about intent to engage in a suicidal act.

1. School staff member will notify the principal or designee that a student has indicated verbally or in writing an intent to engage in a suicidal act.
2. The principal or designee will immediately have the school psychologist or school social worker and the SAC, guidance counselor or nurse meet with the student to determine the extent of the problem. Two of these staff members will jointly investigate the matter promptly, one of which needs to be a school psychologist or school social worker.
3. The student is to be kept under continuous adult supervision and not sent home until the following steps are completed.
 - Based on student interview and other pertinent information gathered in investigating the concern, the school psychologist or school social worker, along with the SAC, guidance counselor, or school nurse, will determine the need for a crisis evaluation to be conducted by SCIP.
 - If crisis evaluation is deemed warranted, parent will be contacted and advised of need to report immediately to the school.
 - Contact SCIP and request crisis evaluator report to the school, unless parent is able to secure same-day appointment with private, licensed mental health professional.
 - Upon completion of crisis evaluation by SCIP or private, licensed mental health professional, obtain copy of discharge instructions to ensure that child does not pose an imminent threat to self or others requiring hospitalization and, therefore, may return to school. If parent is taking student to SCIP or to a private, licensed mental health professional, provide Form 3. If parent takes student to a private, licensed mental health professional instead of SCIP, it is at their own expense.
 - The discharge instructions or mental health professional's note must be submitted to and reviewed by the principal or his/her designee along with the school psychologist or school social worker prior to the student's return to school. Re-entry notes will be kept on file in the school health office.
 - The parent will be asked to sign a release of information permitting the school district to receive and provide information to the outside mental health professional as needed.

- If after reasonable attempts to reach the parent/guardian and emergency contacts, or if the student's parent refuses to follow through on obtaining an emergency mental health assessment, the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP & P) will be contacted to provide for the safety of the student. The local police department can assist in transporting the student only if the parent will be present at SCIP to provide consent for the evaluation. The local police department may also assist in transporting the student for the crisis evaluation in conjunction with a DCP & P intervention.
4. If crisis evaluation is deemed not warranted, the student's parent/guardian will be contacted by phone immediately following the student interview in order to communicate the information and concerns. The communication might include information regarding mental health professionals/agencies with whom the family may consult. Request for parent to sign release of information form allowing communication with private therapist should be made as needed.
 5. The staff members conducting the investigation will inform the building administrator of the outcome of the intervention by completing the Confidential Intervention **Form 1**.
 6. Those involved in the student assessment and other staff members as appropriate, will develop a monitoring and intervention plan for the student upon return to the school, complete **Form 2** and distribute to principal, superintendent and director of student services. If the student begins outpatient, mental health treatment, a guidance counselor will follow-up with the parent to monitor the student's status. Referral to the I & RS team will be considered. In the case of a classified student, the guidance counselor will work collaboratively with the student's case manager.

Level 3: Student has attempted a suicidal act in school.

1. A school staff member will immediately notify the building principal and school nurse who will decide whether or not medical attention is needed and if the police need to be summoned in order to assist the student.
2. The principal or designee will notify a parent of the incident and actions to be taken. The parent will be requested to report immediately to the treatment facility or school. In addition to medical treatment, an emergency psychiatric screening should be completed.
3. A school psychologist or school social worker, and SAC and guidance counselor will be notified of the incident and all actions taken.
4. Decisions as to further intervention by school staff will be based on recommendations of medical and mental health services personnel from the treating facility.
5. The principal or designee will follow-up on the family response to the situation and ascertain that the student has undergone a mental health evaluation and that the student and family have followed through on the recommended treatment plan.
6. Documentation of the school's actions on behalf of this student will be forwarded to the school principal, who will notify the director of student services and the superintendent. (**Form 1**).
7. Prior to the student's return to school, the response team must receive a written notice from a mental health professional stating that it is safe for the student to return to school. Re-entry notes will be kept on file in the school nurse's office.
8. Upon re-entry to school, the school psychologist or school social worker, and SAC, and guidance counselor will meet with the parents, school principal, and nurse to develop a school-based intervention plan that includes periodic monitoring by a guidance counselor (**Form 2**). Referral to the I & RS team will be considered. In the case of a classified student, the guidance counselor will work collaboratively with the student's case manager.

9. Report attempted suicide, in accordance with *N.J.S.A. 30:9A-24 Protocol for Reporting Youth Suicide Attempt or Completion*. Report must be entered online in the *Youth Suicide Reporting Form* - <http://www.nj.gov/dcf/adolescent/prevention/suicidereportingform.html>.

Prevention of Suicide Contagion

1. The superintendent and principal will be promptly informed when a pupil of this district commits suicide.
2. The principal will assemble teaching staff members prior to the opening of school to provide them with accurate information, plans for the school day, and guidelines for handling the concerns of pupils.
3. The principal will assemble the school crisis team, which should include a school psychologist or school social worker to assist in dealing with the general school situation and any individual problems that may arise.
4. The principal will take precautions to minimize the risk of contagion in cases of suicide by doing the following:
 - a. Compile a list of all students who were close to the deceased;
 - b. Compile a list of all school staff members who had contact with the deceased;
 - c. Compile a list of all students considered at-risk for possible suicidal ideation;
 - d. Review planned school response during subsequent school days and weeks, including policy regarding contacts with the news media;
 - e. Review planned small group (in-class) disclosure to students of relevant facts and develop a suggested discussion format;
 - f. Review procedures for making student referrals from classes to designated support persons/stations;
 - g. Meet with all students in small groups (classrooms) only. Reorient students to ongoing classroom activities and dismiss students in accordance with pre-planned protocol.
 - h. Reschedule any immediately impending stressful academic exercises/tests if possible; and
 - i. Initiate survivor group counseling sessions for students who were closest to deceased, for other concerned/troubled students, and for staff members in need.
5. With the intent of minimizing contagion and responding to all deaths in a uniform manner, avoid giving the suicide prominence by public announcement, flying the flag at half-staff, planning school-side assemblies, or similar expressions of grief or remembrance. School will not be closed in order to permit pupils and staff to attend a funeral or memorial. Teachers will respond to the needs of pupils with as little interruption of the educational program as possible.
6. The district's Crisis Team, Superintendent, and Principal will review all memorialization activities within 21 school days of the request.
7. Pupils will be provided with accurate information and will be given the opportunity to discuss their feelings of loss and their memories of the victim, both good and bad, without penalty.
8. All school personnel will be especially alert to signs of contemplated suicide among the victim's peers.
9. Teaching staff, under the direction of the Principal, will attempt to prevent social contagion by:
 - a. Preventing glorification or romanticizing of the suicide which may lead to copycat behaviors;
 - b. Encouraging memorialization activities that focus on prevention and education;
 - c. Helping pupils recognize that suicide is irreversible and permanent, and does not truly resolve problems;

- d. Encouraging pupils to report fellow students who make remarks that suggest s/he is considering suicide to a teaching staff member;
 - e. Discussing ways of handling depression and anxiety without resorting to self-destruction.
10. Pupils who were close to the victim and their family will be offered special counseling services at the school and notified of available community mental health services.
 11. Inform local hot line and mental health center of events at the school so they can be prepared to meet student needs.
 12. Avoid convening a large parent meeting. Communicate with other students' parents, if necessary, through the telephone and written notice. Review school/community resources they may wish to use and remind parents of their children's special needs during this time.
 13. Contact the County Superintendent and administrators in surrounding districts since the aftermath of tragedy also affects students and staff in their schools.
 14. Report completed suicide, in accordance with *N.J.S.A. 30:9A-24* Protocol for Reporting Youth Suicide Attempt or Completion. Report must be entered online in the Youth Suicide Reporting Form - <http://www.nj.gov/dcf/adolescent/prevention/suicidereportingform.html>.