

Suicide Prevention Policy

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Persons Responsible: JS and SS School Psychologists

Suicide prevention policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide the school staff with the appropriate guidelines, in order to prevent, assess the risk of, intervene in, and respond to suicide. The central aim is to promote and protect the health and well-being of all pupils.

2. The Junior and Senior school statement

This school community is aware that:

- *Suicide is the leading cause among young people. Perhaps, one third of all suicides occur among young people.*
- *It has an ethical responsibility to prevent and protect students from deaths by suicide.*
- *We want to ensure that all the children and young people of our school are safe and that our students, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, carers, governors and other stakeholders are aware of that.*

The Junior and Senior school acknowledges that:

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS ARE COMMON

Suicidal thoughts are common among young people.

SUICIDE IS COMPLEX

We believe that every suicide is a tragedy. There are a number of contributory factors surrounding a suicide and the reasons are often complex and individual to that person. However, we believe that there are lessons that may be learned from each death that may help prevent future deaths.

STIGMA INHIBITS LEARNING – STIGMA CAN KILL

We recognise that the stigma surrounding suicide and mental illness can be both a barrier to help seeking and a barrier to offering help. The Junior and Senior school is committed to tackling suicide stigma. In our language and in our working relationships, we will promote open, sensitive talk that does not stigmatise and perpetuate taboos. This will include avoiding the use of language which perpetuates unhelpful notions that suicide is criminal, sinful, or selfish.

We know that unhelpful myths and misconceptions surrounding suicide can inhibit young people in seeking and finding appropriate help when it is most needed.

SUICIDE IS OUR BUSINESS, TOO

As a school community, we recognise that pupils may seek out someone whom they trust with their concerns and worries. We want to play our part in supporting any pupil who may have thoughts of suicide.

SAFETY IS VERY IMPORTANT

We know that pupils who are having thoughts of suicide may or may not also be behaving in a way that puts their life in danger (suicide behaviours).

School children experiencing suicidal thoughts are potentially at risk of acting on these thoughts. Those who are already engaging in suicide behaviours are also clearly at risk of death or harm. The Junior and Senior school wants to work with our pupils who may be thinking about suicide, or acting on their thoughts of suicide. We want to support them, sometimes working in partnership with family, caregivers and other professionals where this may enhance suicide safety.

SUICIDE IS A DIFFICULT THING TO TALK ABOUT

We know that a child or young person who is suicidal may find it very difficult to make their feelings known and speak openly about suicide. We will equip adults with the skills to identify when a pupil may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. These adults will be trained to keep our young people suicide-safe.

TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE DOES NOT CREATE OR WORSEN RISK

We will provide our pupils with opportunities to speak openly about their worries with people who are ready, willing and able to support them. We want to make it possible for school children and young people, and those who support them at our school, to do so safely. This will be in a way that leads to support and help where this is needed. We will do all we can to refrain from acting in a way that stops a pupil seeking the help they need when they are struggling with thoughts of suicide.

a) Our Team and its Responsibilities

Our governors and management team will be clear about how we will respond in the event of a suicide. Each member of our named response team will have a defined responsibility within our plan including leadership, family liaison and any communications with external agencies, including the media.

We will have a clear picture of who has received general suicide awareness education and commit to this being refreshed periodically (at least every three years). We will identify a team of people who are trained in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). This team will be drawn from across the whole school community, not just from one department.

We will have a clear policy about how staff should work together where thoughts of suicide or suicide behaviours are known among our young people. We will manage the sharing of information in a way that enhances safety.

b) Ongoing Support and Development of our Policy and Practice

Our Governors and Management Team will keep our practice up to date by maintaining contact with best practice and on-going training.

3. The language around suicide

The language used around suicide is of paramount importance. The staff should use language that promotes awareness, sensitivity, and empathy around suicide. Below you can see some examples of helpful versus unhelpful language around suicide:

Helpful language	Unhelpful language
Took their own life	Successful suicide
Killed themselves	Committed suicide
Ended their life	Unsuccessful/failed suicide
Died by suicide	Attention seeking

For further information please visit

<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/toolkitfinal.pdf> (pp. 17-18)

4. Warning signs

- Giving away possessions
- Self-harm
- Direct and indirect statements about the intention to end their lives
- Talking constantly about death
- Hopelessness
- Withdrawal/loss of interest
- Suicide notes and plans
- Lack of interest in appearance
- Irritability
- Disturbed sleep
- Weight loss

5. Procedure to follow

a) How to ask about suicide

Directly and specifically

“Are you thinking about suicide?”, “It sounds like you’re thinking about suicide, is that right?”, “Are you telling me you want to kill yourself/end your life/die/die by suicide?”, “Sometimes, when people are feeling the way you are they think about suicide. Is that what you’re thinking about?”, “Have these thoughts and feelings led you to the point of thinking of harming yourself?”.

Some students may not be familiar with the word “suicide”. In this case use phrases like:

“When you say you don’t want to be here anymore, do you mean that you want to be dead forever?”.

“Suicide means hurting ourselves on purpose so we die and are dead forever, is that what you are thinking about?”.

b) In case the students have thoughts of suicide continue the conversation with an empathetic stance towards them.

Use phrases like the following:

“You’ve shown a lot of strength in telling me this. I want to help you find support.”

“There is hope. There is help available and we can find it together.”

“Things must be so painful for you to feel like there is no way out. I want to listen and help.”

- Don't promise confidentiality to the child and explain them that you need to share this with others for their safety.
- Follow the safeguarding policy.
 - Complete the Cause for Concern form
 - Inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Parents are informed by the Designate Safeguarding Lead or a member from the Management team. Based on the risk assessment done by the School psychologist, parents might be advised to:
 - Take the students for evaluation by an external professional (e.g. Child psychiatrist, Clinical psychologist)
 - Ensure safety at home (limiting access to lethal means, such as guns, medication, knives or other sharp objects etc.)

c) In case the student has been engaged in a suicidal attempt:

- Take actions to keep the student safe. Take them to a safe space in school (e.g. the School psychologist's office)
- If there is an imminent danger call the Emergencies
- Inform the Designate Safeguarding Lead or a member from the Management team
- Inform the student's parents or legal guardians
- Do not leave the student alone
 - If there's an injury call the school's nurse

d) Self-harm

Self-harm is defined as any behaviour where an individual causes intentionally harm or potential harm to themselves. Usually, the individual uses this type of behaviour in order to cope with difficult emotions. It can be categorized as either nonsuicidal or suicidal. A person who engages in self-harming behaviour doesn't mean that they necessarily have the intention for suicide, however they are more likely to attempt suicide. Therefore, self-harm should be treated like any other concern, by investigating with the student and if a potential risk for suicide raises you should ask them directly. Some self-harming behaviours are: Cutting, burning, non-lethal overdoses, etc.

6. Procedure to follow upon a student's return to school, after they have engaged in suicide behaviour

- Before the student's return to school meet with them and their parents or guardians
- Explore with them whether support is provided and what kind of support could be provided in the school (e.g. weekly meetings with the School psychologist). Include the student by asking them what they need.
- Create with the student a safety plan, something they will be willing to agree to and follow.
- A helpful safety plan might include:
 - Helplines numbers that are available 24/7

- 1466 – Helpline by «Hope For Children» CRC Policy Center for the children of Cyprus
- 112- European emergency number
- 22406600- Social Welfare Services
- Safety contacts: People that the student feels safe with and they can contact when they find it difficult to keep themselves safe. This should include a person from the staff for when they are at school.
- Regular meetings with the School psychologist
- Regular check-ins with the student regarding their needs and the safety plan (The safety plan is subject to changes).

7. After a child's suicide

a) Telling the staff

- Invite all the staff members to the meeting
- The Management team share the news with the staff. Before the inquest by the coroner, you might say that the person appears to have died by suicide.
- If the facts are unclear yet, say that the cause of death is still being determined and will be shared at a later point.
- As soon as possible, make sure that the standard home-school communication is terminated (e.g., sending school trip information to home).
- Have support in place for staff by the School psychologist, counsellor, and other professionals outside of school.
- Please advise Appendix 4 from the school's Bereavement policy

b) Telling the students

- Communicate the same information to all students (Tell that the student appears to have died by suicide).
- This can be done in small groups, year groups or classes.
- Do not talk about the method. This can lead to intrusion into grief procedure and possibly imitation of the behaviour by vulnerable students.
- You might give students and staff some time off to be with their families and guardians.
- Provide the space and time to students for expressing their emotions, sharing coping strategies with each other, and asking questions. Include mental health professionals from the school and outside of school. The Educational psychology services from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth could be invited to support both the staff and students.
- Debrief with the staff at the end of the day and provide the space and time for self-reflection. Discuss any concerns might arise for individual students.
- Keep monitoring the students and their well-being.
- Use phrases like:
 - " This is so sad and awful. It is ok to be so upset/confused/angry."

- "Is there anything I can do to help you?"
- "I can't imagine what you are going through, but I wanted to let you know that I'm here if you'd like to talk."
- "We are all so sad and shocked. Would you like to tell me about how you're feeling?"
- Avoid phrases like:
 - "They are in a better place"
 - "They took the easy way out"
 - "They are at peace now"
- Please advise Appendix 5-9 from the school's Bereavement policy

c) Dealing with the media

- Journalists and other media enquiries should be referred to a designated spokesperson.
- It is pertinent to let students and staff know that they should not respond to journalists.
- Have a prepared and approved statement for utilizing when announcements are made on behalf of the school
- Liaising with the family of the student before responding to the media
- Please advise Section 3.4 from the school's Bereavement policy

8. Resources

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). 2022. Preventing Suicide: Guidelines for Administrators and Crisis Teams.

Papyrus. (2018). Building Suicide-Safer Schools and Colleges: A Guide for Teachers and Staff.