

## Rationale:

School counselors report multiple challenges when implementing district-required suicide risk assessments or screenings, including:

- Requirements are paperwork-centered vs. student-centered.
- Extensive protocols are nearly impossible to implement with fidelity in a school setting.
- Students may have:
  - | denial
  - | rationalization
  - | intellectualization
- Students may employ conscious defenses that lead to inaccurate information, including:
  - |

### View the School Counselor's Ethical Responsibility

[ASCA Ethical Standards A.9 – Serious and Foreseeable Harm to Self and Others](#)

# Suicide Information Conversation Guide

(Adapted from Salem-Keizer Public Schools)

## Suicide Questionnaire

The suicide informational questionnaire is a guide for having a conversation with a student, not an interview. The priority is to connect with the student and the student's immediate concerns and needs. Always consult with a knowledgeable colleague when making decisions about how best to support a student; if at all possible, avoid working in isolation. Involve supportive family members who are available in the household to help ensure safety.

MOST IMPORTANT IS TO DIRECTLY ASK THE STUDENT ABOUT SUICIDE, ACCESS TO MEANS, AND SAFETY AND SUPPORT PLANNING BETWEEN THE STUDENT AND PEOPLE IN THE STUDENT'S LIFE. If that is the only information that emerges from the conversation, that is enough to start.

### Information to be Collected:

School and district staff should use an existing information system or school platform that complies with school district confidentiality standards, if possible, to collect information, including:

- Student name and ID number, grade level, gender and race/ethnicity
- Why the student was referred
- Risk and protective factors

### Student Suicide Conversation:

- Ask questions through open-ended inquiry to any student who may be a threat to self.
- Do not ask the student to read and complete the questions alone. Have a conversation with the student about any incident of self-harm or perceived threat of suicidal ideation. The intent is to connect with the student, as opposed to merely having the student answer questions.
- Connect with the student, assure them they did not do anything wrong and describe

# Student Conversation

<p><b>Document the student’s description of the problem (i.e., school, home, friends, recent withdrawal, depression, etc.)</b></p>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there people or things stressing you, harming you (bullying, harassment, family issues, a sense of loss or failure, pregnancy, gang issues, schoolwork) or that are threats to you?</li> <li>• Have you experienced any recent changes, such as difficulty sleeping, changes in your appetite, withdrawing from your friends or family, or a lack of interest in your preferred activities?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Have you been thinking about dying by suicide?</b></p>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you ever had thoughts about wishing you were dead or could go to sleep and not wake up?</li> <li>• Do you wish you weren’t alive anymore?</li> <li>• Have you had thoughts about killing yourself in the past few weeks?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>If yes, how do you envision dying? Do you have any intention to carry out your plan?</b></p>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you decided how or when you would kill yourself? Have you planned out how you would do it? <u>If yes, when?</u> <u>What is your plan?</u></li> <li>• Do you have access to any of the things in your plan?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>What makes you happy? What are you looking forward to in the future?</b></p>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is going well?</li> <li>• Are there supportive people at home?</li> <li>• How about your teachers?</li> <li>• Are you in touch with your friends?</li> <li>• What do you like to do in your free time?</li> <li>• What activities, organizations, community, religion, etc., are you involved in?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Who are people you feel comfortable reaching out to if you are having a hard time? [Collect names and phone numbers, if possible.]</b></p>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which adults do you know who you can trust and talk to and are available? What are their names and phone numbers?</li> <li>• Are there other people in your life, such as friends, siblings or relatives who are supportive and/or helpful distractions? How do you contact them? (Do not collect minors’ names and phone numbers.)</li> </ul>	

# Parent/Guardian Conversation

When there is concern about suicide risk, informing a parent/guardian is an integral part of the process. Parents/guardians are key partners in supporting students who are experiencing suicidal ideation, providing crucial information and connecting the student to outside resources. Every effort should be made to partner with the parents/guardians regarding their student.

## Nonnegotiable:

Call parents/guardians and/or child protective services if applicable. Do not minimize the situation.

**AVOID ASSESSING OR QUANTIFYING LEVEL OF RISK WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS, PARTICULARLY THE URGE TO COMFORT OR ASSURE PARENTS/GUARDIANS THE STUDENT IS LOW-RISK.** Focus on the facts and behavior unique to the situation, avoiding assumptions. Ensure the conversation is in the parents'/guardians' primary language if possible.

## Other considerations:

- Students may be concerned about their parents/guardians hearing of this ideation for a variety of reasons. (Parents/guardians may have a negative experience with formalized mental health interventions. Parents/guardians may treat the student differently after hearing of this information. Parents/guardians may not know the student's gender identity, etc.)
- For older students concerned about their parents/guardians being notified, it is essential to give students as much control as possible in how that conversation is to happen.  
Example: *Wha o ld be hel f l fo me o kno abo o a en slg a dians befo e l alk i h hem? Do o an o be on he call hen l alk i h hem so o can hea ha lsa ? Do o an o lead he con e sa ion? Who do o conside he mos s o i e ad l in o ho sehold?*
- The parents/guardians may feel overwhelmed by this information and/or may not be interested in talking about formalized services at this time. If they do not appear to be taking the concern seriously, make a note to reach out to them again soon. It is important the family understands your school district's protocol (if applicable) if a student expresses suicidality and if/when the district is required to notify child protective services.
- To be culturally responsive, it is essential to understand and incorporate relevant cultural factors while avoiding stereotypes. Be open-minded and engaging.
- Establish rapport before launching into questions, including mentioning a couple of facts about the student that indicate you know the student beyond this incident.
- Depending on the conversation, it might be more effective to have an initial and/or follow-up conversation in person.
- Emphasize to parents/guardians that peer reports should be considered reputable sources. Discuss with parents/guardians that peer reports may contain information that a student is unlikely to report to an adult because students often confide in peers rather than adults regarding personal or sensitive information.

<b>Summarize the student conversation with the parents/guardians.</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this surprising to you, or have you had some similar concerns? Please explain.</li> </ul>	
<b>Has your child ever mentioned thoughts of suicide or dying? If so, when and how often? Is there a history of self-harm or suicide?</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you noticed any experiences, expressions of feelings or behaviors that occur specifically when the student starts thinking/talking about suicide?</li> <li>• How do you feel your child is doing? Have you had concerns about your child's mental health?</li> </ul>	
<b>Have you noticed any changes in behavior, sleep patterns, engagement or stress levels? Any major life changes or stressful events?</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some people experience sleeplessness or irritation when they are feeling emotional distress or suicidality. Some people feel disconnected or hopeless. Some have trouble getting out of bed or getting dressed. Have you noticed any warning signs in this regard?</li> <li>• How has the past year been for your family and your student? Sometimes even small life changes can affect one's ability to cope.</li> </ul>	
<b>Talk through access to lethal means and safety proofing the home.</b>	<b>Notes</b>



## Step 2: Parent/Guardian Conversation

When there is a concern about suicidality, informing a parent/guardian is an essential part of the process. (If a student expresses that the suicidal ideation is a result of abuse or neglect, consult with your team, including your administrator, to make a decision about how to proceed.)

Parent/guardian (Full name of individual contacted) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize the student conversation with parent/guardian. Note their responses. Share other sources of information including peer reports, teacher reports/observations, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_

Has your child ever mentioned thoughts of suicide or dying? If so, when and how often? Is there a history of self-harm? (discuss)

\_\_\_\_\_

Is there any history of death by suicide of a family member or friend? If so, explain.

\_\_\_\_\_

What concerns about drugs and alcohol do you have, if any?

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Step 3: Student Support Plan**

This is an opportunity to synthesize the information collected thus far. Creating a plan for how to respond when notified of suicidal ideation is a way for school counselors, in collaboration with other school-based mental health staff and school administrators, to support students experiencing suicidal ideation.

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