



Suicide Prevention & Response Policy

I. PREVENTION

A. Employee Professional Development

All Providence Hall Charter School (PHCS) employees will receive annual professional development on risk factors, warning signs, protective factors, response procedures, referrals, postvention, and resources regarding youth suicide prevention.

B. Youth Suicide Prevention Programming

Developmentally-appropriate, student-centered education materials will be integrated into all health classes and schoolwide suicide prevention curriculum.

The content of these age-appropriate materials will address

1. Bullying and cyberbullying, as those terms are defined in Utah State code 53G-9-601
2. Prevention of youth suicide
 - a. the importance of safe and healthy choices and coping strategies
 - b. how to recognize risk factors and warning signs of mental disorders and suicide in oneself and others
 - c. help-seeking strategies for oneself or others, including how to engage school resources and refer friends for help
3. Increased risk of suicide among youth who are not accepted by family for any reason, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth

C. Publication and Distribution

This policy will be distributed annually and published on the PHCS website.

II. ASSESSMENT & REFERRAL

- A. When a student is identified as potentially suicidal, (e.g., verbalizes about suicide, presents overt risk factors such as agitation or intoxication, the act of self-harm occurs) or a student self-refers, the student will be seen by a PHCS employed mental health professional within the same school day to assess risk and facilitate referral. If there is no PHCS employed mental health professional available, an administrator will fill this role until a PHCS employed mental health professional is available.
- B. The PHCS employed mental health professional or administrator will contact the student's parent/guardian, maintain a record using the *Record of Parent/Guardian Notification of Student Threat or Incident* form, and assist the family with referral resources, as needed. The PHCS employed mental health professional documents all meetings with the student and communication with parents/guardians regarding suicidality.
- C. A PHCS employed mental health professional will utilize the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) to assess suicidality.
- D. For students at-risk:
 1. A PHCS employed mental health professional will develop a written safety plan with the student, discussing their warning signs, reasons for living, coping skills, social supports, and emergency/crisis resources (i.e. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255, Crisis Text Line text "HOME" to 741-741, or 9-1-1).
 2. An administrator will be made aware of the situation as soon as reasonably possible.
 3. If necessary, a parent/guardian will be required to pick the student up from school, or release the student into the care of another adult at the parent's/guardian's request.
 - a. If a parent/guardian is unable or unwilling to pick up the student from school, or the school is unable to contact a parent/guardian, then the PHCS



employed mental health professional calls the UNI Crisis Line at (801) 587-3000.

- b. The PHCS employed mental health professional follows the recommendations of the UNI Crisis Team.
- c. If the UNI Crisis Team recommends that the student be hospitalized, the PHCS employed mental health professional may call Herriman Police or Unified Fire and emergency response (801) 743-7200 or 9-1-1.
4. If necessary, the student will remain under adult line-of-sight supervision while on school facilities. PHCS cannot be responsible for how precautions are followed outside of PHCS.
5. In some situations, (i.e. parent/guardian is home but has no transportation), a minimum of two PHCS employees, or a School Resource Officer may choose to transport a student to the student's home using a personal vehicle; however, it is never a requirement for a PHCS employee to transport a student.
6. The PHCS employed mental health professional or administrator is permitted to call 9-1-1 at any point.

III. IN-SCHOOL SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

In the case of an in-school suicide attempt, the health and safety of the student is paramount. In these situations:

- A. First aid will be rendered until professional medical treatment and/or transportation can be received, following district emergency medical procedures.
- B. A designated PHCS employee will supervise the student to ensure his/her safety.
- C. PHCS employees will move all other students out of the immediate area as soon as possible.
- D. The PHCS employed mental health professional or administrator contacts the student's parent/guardian and maintains a record using the *Record of Parent/Guardian Notification of Student Threat or Incident* form.
- E. PHCS employees will notify a school administrator as soon as possible regarding in-school suicide attempts.
- F. PHCS will engage the crisis team to assess whether additional steps should be taken to ensure student safety and well-being.

IV. OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

If a PHCS employee becomes aware of a suicide attempt by a student that is in progress in an out-of-school location, the employee will

- A. Call the police and/or emergency medical services, such as 911.
- B. Inform the school administrator.
- C. If the student contacts a PHCS employee and expresses suicidal ideation, the employee should maintain contact with the student (either in person, online, or on the phone). The employee should then enlist the assistance of another person to contact the police while maintaining verbal engagement with the student.

V. RE-ENTRY PROCEDURE

For a student returning to school after a mental health crisis (e.g., suicide attempt or psychiatric hospitalization), a PHCS employed mental health professional, administrator, or designee meets with the student's parent/guardian, and if appropriate, with the student, to discuss re-entry and appropriate next steps to ensure the student's readiness for return to PHCS.



- A. A PHCS employed mental health professional or other designee will be identified to coordinate with the student, his/her parent/guardian, and any outside mental health care providers.
- B. The student's parent/guardian must provide documentation from a mental health care provider that the student has undergone examination and that s(he) is no longer a danger to themselves or others.
- C. The designated PHCS employee will periodically check in with the returning student to help the student readjust to the PHCS community and address any ongoing concerns.

VI. PARENT/GUARDIAN NOTIFICATION & INVOLVEMENT

- A. In accordance with 53G-9-604 of Utah State code, Providence Hall Charter School (PHCS) will notify parents/guardians as follows:
 - 1. notify a parent/guardian if the parent's/guardian's student threatens to commit suicide
 - 2. notify the parents/guardians of each student involved in an incident of bullying, cyber-bullying, hazing, abusive conduct, or retaliation of the incident involving each parent's/guardian's student.
- B. In situations where a student is assessed at risk for suicide or has made a suicide attempt, the student's parent/guardian will be informed as soon as possible by a PHCS employed mental health professional, administrator, or designee. A record of this communication will be maintained using the *Record of Parent/Guardian Notification of Student Threat or Incident* form.
- C. If the student has exhibited any kind of suicidal behavior, the parent/guardian will be informed of "means restriction," limiting the student's access to mechanisms for carrying out a suicide attempt.
- D. PHCS may request a release of information from the student's parent/guardian to communicate with outside mental health care providers regarding their student.

VII. POSTVENTION

The crisis team lead (PHCS social worker) assembles and activates the school crisis team to navigate postvention strategies and implement a coordinated crisis response in order to effectively navigate the situation.

A. Development and Implementation of an Action Plan

The crisis team meets as soon as reasonably possible to collaboratively develop an action plan to guide the school response following a death by suicide.

B. The action plan may include the following steps

1. Verify Death

The crisis team may need to confirm the death and determine the cause of death through communication with a coroner's office, local hospital, the student's parent/guardian, or police department. Even when a case is perceived as being an obvious instance of suicide, it should not be labeled as such until after a cause of death ruling has been made. If the cause of death has been confirmed as suicide, but the parent/guardian will not permit the cause of death to be disclosed, PHCS will not share the cause of death, but will use the opportunity to discuss suicide prevention with students.

- a. Accurate information is important. Verify the information (e.g., from family members and/or local authorities).
- b. Find out what the family would like shared and what has already been reported by the media and/or authorities.



2. **Assess Situation**

The crisis team meets to prepare the postvention response, to consider how severely the death is likely to affect other students, and to determine which students are most likely to be affected. The crisis team also considers how recently other traumatic events have occurred within the school community and the time of year of the suicide. If the death occurred during a school vacation, the need for or scale of postvention activities may be reduced.

- a. Determine if additional supports (e.g., grief counselors, community mental health providers) may be needed.
- b. Identify other students who may have similar names so as not to confuse that student, their family, or friends. It may be necessary to call that student and prepare them for any potential misunderstandings.

3. **Share Information**

If a death has been verified, the crisis team notifies appropriate PHCS personnel, students, and parents/parents. Before the death is officially classified as a suicide by the coroner's office, the death can and should be shared with employees, students, and parents/guardians with an acknowledgement that its cause is unknown. Employees will be informed that a sudden death has occurred, preferably in a confidential meeting held before school, following the meeting agenda guidelines. It may also be helpful for a meeting to be held after school to debrief and come together as a team.

- a. Notify employees before students when possible.
 - i. A statement for employees will be prepared and sent to notify them of the situation prior to a formal meeting.
- b. An employee who is familiar with the students will share a prepared statement for students in-person at a designated time.
 - i. Information shared with students should be delivered by an employee students are familiar with. If prior arrangements were made to have a substitute, or an employee is uncomfortable or unable to share the information, an administrator or a member of the crisis team should step in to share the information with those students.
- c. Prepare a statement for parents/guardians to notify them of the situation as soon as reasonably possible.
 - i. If the death occurred outside of school hours, it may be helpful to notify parents/guardians prior to the upcoming school day to allow parents/guardians to share information with their students and offer support outside of school.

4. **Maintain Normalcy**

While it is essential to provide additional support and recognize the tender emotions taking place throughout the school, school employees should seek to maintain an environment focused on normal education activities as much as reasonably possible.

- a. Maintain regular school hours and schedule.
- b. Ensure that students follow established dismissal procedures.
- c. Call on School Resource Officers to assist parents/guardians and others who may come to the school.
- d. Keep the media off of school grounds.

5. **Avoid Suicide Contagion**

It should be explained in the VII 3 meeting described above that one purpose of trying to identify and give services to other high risk students is to prevent another death. The crisis team works with employees to identify students who are most



likely to be significantly affected by the death. In the meeting, the crisis team reviews suicide warning signs and procedures for reporting students who generate concern.

6. **Initiate Grief/ Support Services**

Students identified as being more likely to be affected by the death will be assessed by a PHCS employed mental health professional to determine the level of support needed. The crisis team coordinates support services for students and employees in need of individual and small group counseling, as needed. In concert with parents/guardians, crisis team members will refer to community mental health care providers to ensure a smooth transition from the crisis intervention phase to meeting underlying or ongoing mental health needs.

- a. Designate areas for crisis counseling to be held for both employees and students. If possible, invite outside mental health support services for employees.
- b. A designated PHCS employee will be assigned to follow the deceased student's schedule to monitor peer reactions and answer questions.
- c. If possible, the administrator will arrange for several substitute teachers or "floaters" from other schools to be on hand in the building in case teachers need to take time out of their classrooms.
- d. Tissues and water will be provided throughout the building and food arrangements will be made available for employees and crisis counselors.
- e. Pay attention to students who are having particular difficulty, including those who may be congregating in hallways and bathrooms, and encourage them to talk with counselors or other appropriate school personnel.
- f. It is important for PHCS administrators to communicate with other school administrators in the area. Often siblings or close friends attend other schools or the student may have recently relocated to the present school.

7. **Develop Memorial Plans**

- a. PHCS should not create on-campus physical memorials (e.g. photos, flowers), funeral services, or fly the flag at half-mast because it may sensationalize the death and encourage suicide contagion.
- b. PHCS should not be canceled for the funeral.
- c. Any school-based memorials (e.g., small gatherings) will include a focus on how to prevent future suicides and prevention resources available.

8. **Handling Students Belongings**

School desks and lockers may serve as uncomfortable reminders of the deceased student.

- a. Talk to family members to identify a time for returning all personal belongings to the family.
- b. Ideally, this can be done after school hours and all belongings can be collected and made available in the front office so that family members are not required to clean out desks, lockers, etc., especially during school hours when other students may be present.
- c. Have a member of the school crisis team available for the family when they arrive as this will likely be an emotional time for them.
- d. Newsletters and other school communications can also serve as traumatic reminders of the death; be sure that the name of the deceased is removed from any mailing lists, phone trees, etc.

9. **Ongoing Monitoring**

It is important to continue to monitor those impacted by the death. Maintain a close eye on students at risk.



- a. There will be events that may trigger the return of intense emotions such as special school events (e.g., homecoming, parent day, graduation) or special dates (e.g., birthday, death anniversary).
- b. Let students, families, and employees know that supportive services will be available as needed, especially at these times.

C. External Communication

1. The administrator or designee will be the sole media spokesperson.
2. Employees and students will refer all inquiries from the media directly to the spokesperson.
3. All media inquires should be informed of the link between certain kinds of suicide-related media coverage and increases in suicide deaths.
4. If necessary, the spokesperson will prepare a statement for the media including the facts of the death, postvention plans, and available resources. The statement will not include confidential information, speculation about victim motivation, means of suicide, or personal family information.
If a suicide is to be reported by news media, the spokesperson should encourage reporters not to make it a front-page story, not to use pictures of the suicide victim, not to use the word suicide in the caption of the story, not to describe the method of suicide, and not to use the phrase "suicide epidemic" – as this may elevate the risk of suicide contagion. They should also be encouraged not to link bullying to suicide and not to speculate about the reason for suicide. Media should be asked to offer the community information on suicide risk factors, warning signs, and resources available.
5. The media spokesperson oversees the school's use of social media.