



THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSE TO

A

THREAT OF SUICIDE

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As with any critical incident which might affect a school, education and preparation of staff and students in suicide prevention is the recommended procedure. All school staff should be well versed in the risk factors as well as the immediate indicators that a student might be considering suicide. While teachers will likely be the first to notice that a student is at risk, there should be a clear understanding of the referral process to those on staff, likely guidance counsellors, who are trained to refer suicidal students to appropriate mental health professionals.

Research indicates that students are most likely to confide their suicidal thoughts to a friend more readily than to an adult. It is advisable, then, to offer positive mental health information to students, as well, so that they are able to recognize the signs of distress in their friends and know how to respond if a friend does seem to be at risk of suicide. Breaking the "code of silence" that often exists among students can save a life!

If a student is identified as distressed, an assessment of degree of suicidal risk should be done by a trained professional. Factors that are considered in such an assessment include:

- Prior history of suicidal behaviour/ideation
- A plan for completion of suicide
- Access to the means to carry out the plan
- Method by which the plan was communicated

If a student is assessed to be at high risk of suicide, the following steps should be taken:

- Do not leave the student alone. Remain with them in a safe and visible place until help can be obtained, and remove any weapons/pills/etc.
- Contract with the student that they will not hurt themselves; explain that you will obtain help for them
- Contact parents.
- Contact local Mental Health, Social Services, police or hospital immediately.
- If parents are unavailable to drive the student to a place of help, either have persons from the school designated to do so, or request assistance from the police.
- Maintain contact with the student and family during the crisis.
- Follow up with the student's class to ensure that they are able to reconnect with the student when s/he returns to school.

If a student is assessed to be at low to moderate risk of suicide, the following steps are recommended:

- Inform parents of the concern.
- Assist parents in arranging for intervention for the student, including medical assistance and counselling.
- Maintain contact with the student to monitor progress.

Suicide is a long-term solution to a short-term problem. It is not about wanting to die so much as it is about running out of solutions to problems that seem overwhelming. Teens are one of the highest risk groups for suicidal behaviour. Education and understanding can bring us a long way towards improving and saving lives.