

Policy

STUDENT SUICIDE

The Ventnor Board of Education recognizes that depression and self-destructive behaviors are concerns of increasing severity among children and adolescents. A student who is experiencing severe stress cannot benefit fully from the educational programs provided by the Ventnor Schools when he/she may be at risk for hurting himself/ herself, or others. Therefore, the Board directs all school personnel to be alert to the student who exhibits behavioral warning signs of potential self-destruction or who threatens or attempts suicide.

A school-based Intervention Team in each building shall be established and may include, but is not limited to, Guidance Counselor(s), School Social Worker, School Psychologist, Principal, Supervisor of Special Services, and the School Nurse. When a medical emergency occurs, the student will be escorted to the Nurse's office and/or Emergency Medical Services (911) will be summoned.

All reports of any signs from another student, classmate, or staff member shall be taken seriously and reported immediately to the School Principal and Supervisor of Special Services who will consult with an Intervention Team Member to determine further action. If further action is warranted, two members of the Intervention Team(s) will interview the student together to gather relevant information to determine an appropriate screening of risk, use of interventions for student stability, and/or recommendations for out-of-school mental health services. The student's parent/guardian shall be sought for immediate intervention which may include providing mental health resources for the parent, implementing "Crisis Exclusion" for the student from school until a written Medical/Mental Health Clearance form re-entry is received, and/or encouraging the parent/guardian to follow up with communication between school and any outside agencies. The parent/guardian will sign a "Parent Acknowledgment Form" of such school interventions.

In the event that the parent/guardian is unavailable, objects to the recommendations, or indicates an unwillingness to cooperate in the best interests of the student, School Administration may contact Emergency Medical Services (911), and/or a member of the school-based Intervention Team, in consultation with a School Administrator, may contact the New Jersey Division of Child protective Services to request further intervention on the student's behalf.

Documentation and follow up of student interventions will follow in an appropriate and timely manner.

The Superintendent shall prepare and disseminate procedures for the guidance of staff members in recognizing the behavioral warning signs of potential self-destruction in students or those who threaten or attempt suicide. Procedures ("Action Plan") shall be developed in cases of a "Traumatic Loss" due to a completed suicide, homicide, or sudden death.

First Reading: October 22, 2014

Second Reading/Adoption: November 19, 2014

SUDDEN TRAUMATIC LOSS: ACTION PLAN---PROCEDURES

Suicide (& Homicide-see # 6 **)

I. Superintendent of Schools: (or designee)Activate Phone Tree to: Principals, Administrators, & Intervention Team Members1. Gather Facts and Confirm Death from Ventnor Police Chief

a. Meet with Principals, Administrators, & Crisis Intervention Teams to discuss:

1. extent of crisis (who, what, where, when, how)
2. determine need for out-of-district support (e.g., Schools, Mental Health Agencies). Make contact to determine/assign personnel to Care Stations
3. identify location and personnel for Care Stations [School Staff (secretaries, cafeteria/custodial, bus driver), Victim's Friends, Students].
4. organize/synthesize: facts, support services, school procedures, Care Stations, news release, and *Designated Statement* to students, school staff and parents (see *Sample Announcement*)
5. maintain school routine/schedule without justifiable change, i.e., Staff/Students need: Support, Control, & Structure

2. Activate News Media Procedures:

- a. designate spokesperson (Superintendent of Schools)
- b. prepare the same *Designated Statement* that is presented to school staff, students, parents, and media (see *Sample Announcement*). Distribute via mail boxes, e-mail, and school website (<http://www.vecenj.org/board.html>)
- c. Superintendent arranges press conference to inform/educate media on supports given in/out of school, facts, and requests to control and limit media access to school grounds and students. Distribute *Media Guidelines* (refer to website).
- d. control/limit all written material distributed by all school employees.
- e. identify news media office\interview rooms, e.g., Superintendent's Office (away from student population).

3. Distribute School Supports and Facts (see # 2b):

- a. Ventnor Police/Fire Depts.
- b. Ventnor School Board of Education Members
- c. County Education Office
- d. Atlantic City High School
- e. School Districts contacted for additional support

4. Hold Initial Emergency School Staff Meeting as soon as possible to:
 - a. read *Designated Statement* (# 2b)
 - b. encourage ventilation and validation of feelings (grief, anger, denial, etc.).
 - c. identify location of Care Stations for School Staff, Victim's Friends, & Students
 - d. distribute *Designated Statement* (see *Sample Announcement*) through mail boxes or e-mail to staff to read to their students.
 - e. distribute support materials for staff on how to handle students reactions (see *Staff Guidelines; Sudden Death, Suicide, or Homicide*).
- f. adhere to usual routine and structure for the day. Do not have modified days, cancellation of classes, or general PA announcements:
 1. allow the desk and chair of the deceased to remain in class for no more than three days. This decision will be made by the Superintendent of Schools, Principal, Supervisor of Special Services, Teachers of the deceased, and Chair of the Intervention Team.
 - g. emphasize News Media Procedures to All School Employees.
 - h. "NO SOCIAL MEDIA CONTACTS"
5. Action Plan to be Implemented within 24 hrs. of crisis, and not to exceed 48 hrs., except for follow-up which should be weekly for 4 weeks.
- ** 6. Incidents Involving Homicide: Action Plan to be implemented during or after 48 hr. (see # 1-5 above)
 - a. *Designated Statement* (# 2b) needs to include assurances of physical/emotional safety and protection of students, staff, and parents. For example, what the school is doing to protect its community (e.g., increased security, denied access, Care Stations, cooperation with Ventnor Police & Prosecutors office).
 - b. coordinate conflict resolutions strategies between opposing groups with Outside Agencies (e.g., Law Enforcement) in a neutral location.

II. Intervention Team Assignments/Liaisons: **Overseen by Supervisor of Special Services

1. School Staff "Case Manager": Principal/School Nurse/Administrators
2. Victim's Family "Case Manager": School Social Worker or Guidance Counselor
3. Victim's Friends "Case Manager": School Psychologist or School Social Worker & Guidance Counselor(s)

4. Students "Case Manager": School Guidance Counselor(s) & School Psychologist or School Social Worker
5. Care Stations in School: (** two Intervention Team members together for "Friends" & "Students"*)
 - a. School Staff: determined by Superintendent, Principal, Supervisor of Special Services & Chair of Intervention Team
 - b. Victim's Friends: determined by Superintendent, Principal, & Chair of Intervention Team
 - c. Students: determined by Superintendent, Principal(s), & Chair of Intervention Team

SUPPORT SERVICES: TARGET POPULATIONS

III. School Staff (Superintendent, Principal, and Designee for taking minutes)

1. Emergency Staff briefing to:
 - a. disclose all facts and read *Designated Statement(# 2b)*
 - b. allow time for immediate staff reactions
 - c. compile list of all students who were close to the deceased
 - d. compile list of all school staff members who had contact with the deceased
 - e. update or compile lists of all students considered at-risk for possible suicidal ideation or attempts
 - f. review Action Plan for upcoming 4 weeks. Include procedures regarding contacts with news media (see I-2)
 - g. review instructions for Secretaries, Principals concerning location\personnel for Care Stations and distribution of information (see Media Procedures)
 - h. review planned small group (in-class) disclosure to students of relevant facts & location of Care Stations. Handout *Staff Guidelines (Death, Suicide, Homicide), and Student Staff Response to (Suicide, Homicide)*. Only *Sample Announcement* to be read to students by teachers in their classroom.
 - i. review procedures for making student referrals to designated Care Stations
 - j. disseminate location for School "Staff Care Stations"
 - k. NO contacts through SOCIAL MEDIA by staff
 - l. Consideration to block cell phone use within building

IV. Victim(s) Family: (Case Manager, School Social Worker or Guidance Counselor)

1. Identify Family Members; cousins, step-family, (go to home, if appropriate)
2. Provide Family Support;
 - a. give support, identify friends
 - b. referral to outside agencies
 - c. cope with media, funeral arrangements, phone calls, police, etc.
 - d. clarify who can come to funeral (students, faculty), per Family's wishes
3. Contact Parents of Immediate Friends to:
 - a. give referral to mental health agencies
 - b. facts (Designated Statement) and safety/protection assurances offered by school
 - c. where appropriate gain parent consent for counseling and/or sharing information with outside Mental Health and/or Police Agencies (see Resources For Parents)
 - d. give support in grieving process
 - e. give parent packet\strategies for helping children (see *Parent Guidelines*)
 - f. identify parents at risk and refer to Family Case Manager
 - g. implement follow up monitoring of at risk Friends
4. Family Case Manager; liaison between School & Home
5. Assist in Care Stations

V. Victim(s) Friends: (Case Manager, Guidance Counselor, and School Psychologist or Social Worker)

1. Follows Victim(s) Daily Schedule for next two days to:
 - a. give facts (*Sample Announcement*) and refer students to Care Stations
 - b. allow ventilation and validation of emotions, deal with safety issues, answer questions (see *Crisis Care Team Guidelines*)
 - c. identify students at risk and refer to appropriate Care Stations
 - d. discuss memorialization, if appropriate
 - e. victims desk, belongings are to be kept intact, until memorial, funeral, and or contributions are made within 48 hrs. If appropriate belongings can be given to family
2. Identify Immediate Friends and significant others

- a. separate from student body and refer to Care Stations
- b. Refer Victim's Friends names to Social Worker (see IV, #3)

3. Assist in Care Stations

VI. Students: (Case Manager, School Guidance Counselor(s), and Psychologist or School Social Worker)

1. Follows Victim(s) Daily Schedule for next two days to:
 - a. give facts (*Sample Announcement*) and refer students to Care Stations
 - b. allow ventilation and validation of emotions, deal with safety issues, answer questions (see *Crisis Care Team Guidelines*)
 - c. identify students at risk and refer to appropriate Care Stations
 - d. discuss memorialization, if appropriate
 - e. victims desk, belongings are to be kept intact, until memorial, funeral, and or contributions are made within 48 hrs. If appropriate belongings can be given to family
 - f. distribute *Designated Statement, Parent Guidelines, and Resources for Parents* to students to bring home, to selected students and all in Care Stations
 - g. Identify immediate Friends & significant others to Care Stations.
2. Student Care Station Staff will:
 - a. give facts (*Designated Statement*)
 - b. allow ventilation and validation of emotions; "Support, Control, & Structure"
 - c. follow small group counseling guidelines (see *Crisis Care Team Guidelines*)
 - d. identify students at most risk and make outside referrals
 - e. discuss memorizations, if appropriate

VII. Care Stations: (Locations and assignments to be determined, suggestions below)

1. School Staff: Principal, Supervisor of Special Services, Nurse, Guidance Counselor
2. Victim's Friends: Guidance Counselor and School Psychologist or School Social Worker together
3. Students: Guidance Counselor and School Psychologist or School Social Worker together

4. Victim's Family and Relatives (off-site): School Social Worker or Guidance Counselor

VIII. Personnel involved:

1. Superintendent of Schools: oversees all School/Crisis operations
2. Principals: maintain daily school operations and supports to Staff
3. Intervention Team: assigned to Care Stations, "Case Manager" roles
4. Secretaries: instructed to read *Designated Statement* and assurances to those that call. All inquiries to Care Stations are forwarded to Administrator (see #5) to screen calls and refer to appropriate mental health supports.
5. Administrator (other) will receive inquiries, screen calls, and refer to mental health supports. This Administrator's responsibility is to ensure uninterrupted communication between school, students, and home.

IX. Miscellaneous Precautions:

1. No general PA announcements over intercoms. Statements/Announcement to be read to students in class and distributed via staff mail boxes and e-mail.
2. Notices to be sent home via students should be read to students before distributed, and may be posted on the Ventnor Web site (www.vecnj.org/board.html)
3. Memorial and any arrangements for condolences should be one time event, not prolonged or precedent setting and is in accordance with the wishes of the victim's Family. The focus should be on prevention and education not memorialization (e.g., no flags at 1/2 mass, or planting of trees).
4. Attendance at funeral to be determined by Victim's Family and communicated to Intervention Team by "Family Case Manager"
5. Adhere to regular daily school schedule as much as possible: Support, Control, & Structure

6. Crisis Action Plan implemented within 24 hr. of crisis, not to exceed 48 hr. thereafter, except for follow-up
7. Follow-up monitoring for high-risk Students/Friends/Families
8. All communication to: Students, Media, Police, Parents, School Staff will be determined, screened, and distributed by the Superintendent of Schools
9. Reschedule any immediate stressful academic exercises\tests.
10. Avoid large group assemblies or similar expressions of grief or remembrance:
 - a. no public address system announcements.
 - b. no flying flag at half-staff.
 - c. no special memorials.
11. Arrange Parent Meeting by grade, i.e., 1-4, and 5-8: (if need be)
 - a. disclose facts (*Designated Statement*) and subsequent steps taken by school to Support, Control, & Structure the community
 - b. review school\community resources to be utilized
 - c. remind parents of their children's special needs during this time, and distribute *Parent Guidelines, Helping Parents with Trauma*
 - d. grade level Intervention team Members can facilitate these meeting
12. Superintendent, Principal(s), other Administrators, and Intervention Team meet daily for first 72 hrs.
13. Superintendent, Principal, other Administrators, Intervention Team, and Staff debrief 1-2 weeks after crisis
14. Superintendent will provide food and liquids for the Intervention Team Members to ensure cognitive alertness and hydration throughout the day. This will end 72 hrs. after incident.

*** See Appendices for "Designated Statement, Sample Announcement, Media Guidelines, Staff Guidelines (Death, Suicide, Homicide), Student Staff Responses (Suicide, Homicide), Crisis Care Team Guidelines, Parent Guidelines, Helping Parents with Trauma*

*****CRISIS PHONE NUMBERS*****

Immediate Medical Emergency, (911): Contact Police with immediate risk for self-injury.

Psychiatric Intervention Program (PIP), 609-344-1118: Suicide or psychiatric emergency screening to assess need for mental health interventions. Parent/Guardian must accompany child to the emergency room at the Atlantic City Medical Center- City Division.

Immediate Youth Crisis, Value Option/ Mobile Response Services, 1-877-652-7624: Provides emergency face to face in-home crisis counseling for emotional or behavioral challenges.

Child Abuse or Neglect: Division of Youth & Family Services (DYFS), 1-877-652-2873 or 1-877-NJ Abuse).

Family Crisis Intervention Program, Atlantic County, 609-645-5861: Parent-teen conflict, running away, truancy, substance abuse services or other dangerous behaviors, if not already linked with other agencies. Non-Emergency Help-Line dial 2-1-1.

PARENT ACKNOWLEDGMENT STATEMENT

The Ventnor Public Schools support the efforts of Parents, School Staff, and mental health professionals by communicating with and working together to help students and their families cope with various difficulties they may be experiencing, by:

- 1) Providing you with Mental Health Resources and Crisis Phone numbers for you to contact and initiate services.**
- 2) Requiring you to provide the school with a written "Medical/Mental Health clearance" from a mental health professional, allowing your child to return to school; if requested; **YES NO.****
- 3) Encouraging you to contact the school to discuss any follow-up supports or services your child may need. Communicating between the school, home, and outside mental health professionals is critically important in helping you, your family, and your child.**

Please acknowledge our efforts by signing below:

Parent/Guardian	Date	School Staff	Date
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Ms. J. Polise, Lafayette Elementary Guidance Counselor: 487-7900, ext. 5300
 Mrs. J. Holmstrom, Middle School Guidance Counselor: 487-7900, ext. 5040
 Mrs. F. Kirschenbaum, School Social Worker, 487-7900, ext. 5050
 Dr. P. Kosten, School Psychologist, 487-7900, ext. 5180