

# Hortonville Area School District

**Title:** Suicide Prevention

**Date Adopted:** 8/10/87

**Policy No.** 5034

**Date Revised:** 6/23/03

**Page 1 of 1**

## **Policy Statement:**

The Hortonville Area School District is aware that suicide among adolescents is a growing national concern. Because of this fact, the Hortonville Area School requires that a plan for suicide prevention be documented and implemented.

## **Rationale:**

The Hortonville Area School District recognizes that adolescent students undergo stresses of development and personal growth. Adolescence is a time of discovery and of profound searching and identity formation. Some adolescents find this struggle harder than others. Some feel unequal to the challenge. Some students contemplate suicide as an alternative to the loss of control over their lives. To use suicide as a solution is a tragedy.

**Scope:** District-wide

**Responsibility:** District Administrator

## **Implementation:**

- A. Prevention: The Hortonville Area School District will:
  - 1. Promote faculty awareness of depression and the warning signs of suicidal behavior.
  - 2. Provide information about youth suicide to parents.
  - 3. Promote the Suicide Prevention Program for students as an integral part of the curriculum.
  - 4. Examine strategies and alternatives to alleviate school-related stress for students.
- B. Intervention: The establishment of a uniform protocol by the District to respond to a potentially suicidal student.
- C. Implement the "Crisis Management Plan".
- D. Postvention: The establishment of a uniform plan of response to disseminate facts, and to allow for structured expression of grieving within the daily activity of the school. (This uniform plan will also be implemented in the event of any sudden death of a student or staff person.)
- E. Responsibilities: The prevention, intervention and postvention plans will be implemented by the Crisis Intervention Team which is composed of principals all building administrators, school counselors, school nurse, district administrator, school psychologists and selected peer helpers.

**Associated Information:** Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention Plan  
Attachments A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H

President Rick Lautenschlager

Date 6/23/03

Clerk Walmer Hoewisch

Date 6/23/03

## **SUICIDE PREVENTION, INTERVENTION AND POSTVENTION PLAN**

- I. Youth Suicide Prevention Program
  - A. The procedures for referral, intervention and postvention will be printed in the faculty handbook.
  - B. Parent Program
    1. Information about suicide will be provided for parents upon request
    2. Community resources will be identified for parents upon request
  - C. Student Program
    1. The K-12 curriculum focuses on making healthy choices and having a positive attitude.
    2. Special small group presentations will be made to students as needed.
- II. Intervention Guidelines (For use at time of suicide attempt, suicide threat or potential suicidal behavior)
  - A. Emergency Situation – Student Suicide Attempt (during school hours or at a school sponsored activity)
    1. The student will remain with a responsible adult at all times.
    2. The supervising staff member will:
      - a. obtain appropriate medical assistance
        1. if the incident occurs at school, the School Nurse will be contacted
        2. at a school function, emergency medical assistance may be sought or a local physician contacted
      - b. contact a school administrator
      - c. call a parent(s) or guardian(s) to inform them of the situation; if parents or guardians cannot be reached, call one of the people listed on the student's emergency procedure card.
    3. If medical assistance is not required, the student will be released to his/her parent(s) or guardian(s). The student will not be allowed to go home alone.
    4. The school administrator will notify the Crisis Intervention Team leader.
      - a. The team leader will call a Crisis Team meeting as soon as possible.
      - b. The team will use the Postvention Guidelines as reference for determining further action.
  - B. Crisis Situation – Student Suicide Threat
    1. Teachers, students or other concerned persons should notify a counselor of a possible suicide threat and make arrangements to have the student remain with a responsible adult.
    2. The counselor, with another trained team member, will immediately assess the degree of potential suicidal risk.
    3. The parent(s) or guardian(s) will be notified. Along with supportive help, a list of mental health agencies may be given to the parent(s) or guardian(s) and it will be strongly recommended that they seek appropriate professional help. The student will not be allowed to go home alone. The student will be released to the parent(s) or guardian(s) or if necessary, law enforcement will be called.
    4. The two team members will document and file the sequence of events. All documentation, information and materials obtained or disclosed during implementation of this practice will be confidential and accordingly filed with the school psychologist.

5. The Crisis Team leader will be notified to call a team meeting to determine the appropriate action.
  6. The referring person will be informed of the results of the Crisis Team meeting.
- C. Non-Crisis Situation – Potential Suicidal Behavior
1. Teachers, students or other concerned persons should notify a school counselor if a student has exhibited symptoms which may be interpreted as potentially suicidal.
  2. The counselor will consult with another team member to assess the degree of suicidal risk.
  3. As a result of the consultation, the Crisis Intervention Team may be asked to meet.
  4. The counselor will make notes about the situation. This information will not become part of the student's permanent records.
  5. The referring person will be informed of the results of the consultation and/or Crisis Team meeting.

### III. Postvention Guidelines

- A. Notify appropriate school principal of attempt or death. (Note: Cooperation with be sought from agencies such as local police, county sheriff and rescue squad to notify the school district as soon as possible. School personnel and students will also be encouraged to notify the principal if they are aware of such a situation. In the event that the appropriate school principal is unavailable, any of the school administrators should be contacted.)
- B. The Crisis Team Leader will be the school principal. (Note: Principal will be responsible for all contact with the news media.)
- C. Principal will verify authenticity of the report of someone's attempt or death.
- D. Principal will notify the Crisis Intervention Team as soon as possible. (Note: The "team" consists of principal, guidance counselors, school nurse, district administrator, school psychologist and selected Peer Counselors. The two assistant principals will be on stand by. If a situation develops after school hours, a telephone tree will be set in process so each member will be informed.)
- E. Crisis Intervention Team will meet as soon as possible to determine appropriate action (which may include contact with the family, how to notify staff and students K-12, contact with parents of close friends of the person involved.)
- F. If a situation develops after school hours, a faculty meeting will be called at 8:00 a.m. (Note: The purpose of this meeting will be to present the facts to the staff and prepare for what will take place during the day. If this is not possible, i.e. if a situation occurs during school hours, each teacher will be notified at the same time as their students.)
- G. When necessary, designated Peer Counselors will monitor halls and school grounds to identify distressed students and escort them to designated locations.
- H. When necessary, a Crisis Team member, accompanied by a Peer Counselor, will visit each classroom. (All classrooms will be visited by the end of a designated class period. See guidelines for classroom visits.)
- I. Close friends and siblings who may need counseling will be identified.
- J. Towards the end of the day, the Crisis Team will meet to plan for the following day.
- K. After school is dismissed, the Crisis Team will meet with the faculty to listen to faculty concerns and give information about plans for the following day.

- L. Crisis Team will meet again to see if any changes need to be made regarding the plans for the next day.
- M. At 8:00 a.m. the following day..... if necessary, the Crisis Team will again meet with faculty to update them on any new development.
- N. Repeat steps K-M as necessary.
- O. Follow up – informal staffing(s) as needed with all school personnel who come in frequent contact with the student who has attempted suicide (or with siblings, relatives or best friends of someone who has committed suicide.)

#### IV. Guidelines Regarding Classroom Visits

- A. A Crisis Team member, accompanied by a Peer Counselor, will visit each classroom. (All classrooms will be visited by the end of the designated class period.)
- B. These two people will:
  - 1. tell the students what has occurred and give them the facts of the situation within the limits of confidentiality. (see attached forms)
  - 2. encourage students who need to deal with their feelings to go to designated locations guidance office and/or administrative offices. **Note:** Mental health professionals, school staff and peer counselors will be available. Peer Counselors should not attempt to counsel students, but rather offer supportive listening and insist that the student see a mental health professional before they go back to class.

ATTACHMENT B

**WHAT TO SAY ON CLASSROOM VISITS IN CASE OF SUICIDE OR SUDDEN DEATH**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and this is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm  
the \_\_\_\_\_.  
(position)

We're hear to inform you that \_\_\_\_\_ has committed suicide. He/she  
died as a result of \_\_\_\_\_. The funeral is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. Please be aware that you need  
written parent permission presented to the Office before you will be excused from school to  
attend the funeral.

*or . . .* when we know the detail of funeral arrangements you will be notified.

Most people who commit suicide have been depressed for some time and have been struggling  
with a variety of problems. There is usually no one specific reason why suicide occurs.

Those of you who knew \_\_\_\_\_ may find yourself struggling  
with your feelings. You may find yourself asking things like . . . .

*"What could I have done?"*

*"What should I have done?"*

*"If only I had done such and such, this may not have happened."*

You need to realize that no person causes or forces another to commit suicide. No matter what  
happened before \_\_\_\_\_'s death, it was  
\_\_\_\_\_ 's choice to do what he/she did.

It's important for people to talk about their feelings and ask questions at a time like this.

However, we need to make this announcement in other classrooms: *"We cannot stay to talk with  
you now. Help is available \_\_\_\_\_ .*

*(state where)*

*all day today. Feel free to stop by.*

**PEER HELPER:** *If you want to go now I will go with you. If you choose to go later, your  
teacher will ask someone else in the class to accompany you and then return to class. If you  
become very emotional and/or have trouble dealing with your feelings, this is not the time for  
you to go off by yourself and leave school. Room \_\_\_\_\_ is also available for you to sort out your  
feelings by yourself.*

ATTACHMENT C

**WHAT TO SAY ON CLASSROOM VISITS IN CASE OF ATTEMPTED SUICIDE**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and this is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm  
the \_\_\_\_\_.

(position)

We're hear to inform you that \_\_\_\_\_ has attempted suicide. He/she  
is \_\_\_\_\_.

(state what condition they are in and facts as appropriate)

It is best for \_\_\_\_\_ not to have any phone calls or visitors now. He/She needs as  
much rest as he/she can get.

Most people who attempt suicide have been depressed for some time and have been struggling  
with a variety of problems. There is usually no one specific reason why someone attempts  
suicide.

Those of you who know \_\_\_\_\_ may find yourself struggling  
with your feelings. You may find yourself asking things like . . . . .

*"What could I have done?"*

*"What should I have done?"*

*"If only I had done such and such, this may not have happened."*

You need to realize that no person causes or forces another to attempt suicide. No matter what  
happened before \_\_\_\_\_'s death, it was \_\_\_\_\_'s  
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teacher will ask someone else in the class to accompany you and then return to class. If you  
become very emotional and/or have trouble dealing with your feelings, this is not the time for you  
to go off by yourself and leave school. Room \_\_\_\_\_ is also available for you to sort out your  
feelings by yourself.*

ATTACHMENT D  
**PLAN FOR STUDENT RE-ENTERING SCHOOL**

**AFTER THE SUICIDE ATTEMPT CRISIS HAS PASSED:**

1. Parents will be contacted again regarding school support services available for family.
2. A re-entry meeting will be scheduled with parent(s) and student before the student returns to classes. Release of information forms should be obtained at this time.
3. A specific plan of support for the student will be established at this meeting.
4. A specific plan for academic “catch-up” will be established at this meeting.
5. Written records of the staffing with all recommendations will be maintained by the student’s counselor.

ATTACHMENT E  
**ACTION PLAN FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION**

The first step in suicide prevention is recognizing the warning signs. One sign alone does not mean that a person is necessarily suicidal. Several signs at one time, however, may mean that the person is seeking help. The following is a list of suicidal warning signs for adolescents/children:

**Suicidal Warning Signs**

1. Sudden withdrawal from social contacts, interests and activities.
2. Depressed mood, pervasive sadness.
3. Significant decline in or neglect of school work frequently coupled with expression of helplessness and apathy.
4. Sense of failure, inappropriate or excessive feelings of shame, guilt, hopelessness, worthlessness.
5. Recent loss of a loved one or even a pet.
6. Family disruptions such as divorce or other changes.
7. Previous suicide attempts or gestures.
8. Verbal warnings such as: "I'm going to kill myself." or "I wish I were dead."
9. Marked self-abuse through alcohol and/or other drug use.
10. Self-mutilation or attempts to hurt oneself physically.
11. Frequent references to death and dying; listening to mournful records; decline in fear of death.
12. Giving away one's personal possessions; packing one's belongings; giving up on important activities.
13. Purchases of the means to commit suicide; i.e. rope, gun, pills, etc.
14. A sudden lifting of sadness, depression or withdrawal which may indicate that the decision to commit suicide has been made.
15. Running away.
16. History of abuse, i.e. family or school harassment.

**Suicide Intervention**

1. Refer suspected suicidal behavior to guidance and/or administration immediately.
2. Do not let the student out of your sight and assure the student you are there for support.
3. In the case of a life threatening situation, get help immediately, take the student to guidance.
4. Counselor will notify the parent/guardian immediately and human services.
5. If the student is resistant to parents being involved or school personnel are concerned that the parents/guardians are ill equipped to handle the situation, human services should be contacted immediately.
6. A written record of all action taken by school personnel must be kept.
7. Never allow yourself to be sworn to secrecy by the suicidal student.
8. Don't be shocked at what the student tells you, be supportive and listen, never make light of the situation.
9. Be direct. Talk openly and freely and ask direct questions about the student's intentions. Try to determine if the student has a plan for suicide (how, where, when). The more detailed the plan, the greater the risk.
10. Don't try to counsel the student yourself, get help.

In the event the suicide occurs:

11. Identify close friends of the suicide victim for closer monitoring.
12. Remind staff about preventing the media from interviewing students, direct all media interests to administration.
13. Provide information regarding arrangements for staff and students to attend the funeral, where memorials can be sent, condolences, etc.
14. Get accurate information to staff and students as soon as possible. (Follow Sudden Death Plan)

## GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO A STUDENT'S DEATH

1. React to the student's death. Share your reactions with the class.
2. Let the students talk and write about their feelings.
3. Listen to what students have to say. It is important not to shut off discussion.
4. If the student died of an illness and it is appropriate to do so, discuss the illness. This is especially useful for younger children who may need to separate the illness of the child who died from any medical problems his or her classmates experience.
5. Never tell young children, "God took Sally away because He loves her.", because children will wonder if it's a good idea to be loved by God. Likewise, don't say, "Sally went to sleep." You may create a class of children afraid to go to sleep.
6. A "regular" day may be too hard for grieving students. Offer choices of activities, such as letters, journals and discussions.
7. If the students want to, let them write sympathy notes to the parents or to a student who has suffered a loss. Provide an address or offer to deliver them.
8. If acceptable to the affected family, make sure that funeral times are well publicized, perhaps including ideas on funeral etiquette.
9. If applicable, share any cultural information related to the meaning of death and death observances that will help students understand and respond comfortably to affected family members.
10. Talk with students about their concerns regarding "what to say" to other bereaved students and the family of the deceased. Emphasize that trying to avoid grieving individuals or being overly solicitous to them will not help. Students should be themselves and share their caring feelings and support. Point out the need to resume normal relationships.
11. Remember that your class may remain quiet and depressed for some time after the death (perhaps even a month), and that some students may begin to act out noisily and physically as a method of dealing with their feelings.

ATTACHMENT G  
**HORTONVILLE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**246 N. OLK ST.**  
**HORTONVILLE, WI 54944-0070**

**DISTRICT CRISIS TEAM CHECKLIST**  
(ATTACHMENT A)

Listed below is a checklist that contains critical questions to be answered each time the District Crisis Team meets. The facilitator of the meeting is responsible to see that each question is addressed. It is suggested that a recorder be assigned to help the facilitator document answers to the checklist.

1. **Verify Facts:**

- a. What happened? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. When did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. Where did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. Who was involved? Name/parents/grade/school/address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. **Affected Parted**

- a. What schools do/did the involved attend? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. Relatives in school \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. Friends \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. Staff (including former teachers) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. It is important to cross check address for neighbors. Who is going to do it?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. **Family Communication**

a. What information from the family do we have at this point? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. Is there a need to contact a family for more information? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

c. If yes, who needs to be contacted? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d. What information is needed? Does the family have any requests of the school?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e. Who will make the contact? \_\_\_\_\_

4. **Outside Resource Need** (list what District personnel will make contact)

a. School Counselors?

b. EAP Counselors?

c. Crisis Intervention Services?

d. Police?

e. Clergy?

f. Media to publicize available counseling services?

5. **Communication**

a. District Media Contact(s). What information will be relayed and by whom?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. Each building's needs are unique. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each building to write and disseminate a statement of facts using information on this document.

c. Which buildings will hold informative pre-school faculty meetings?

HES

GES

HMS

GMS

HHS

d. On an as needed basis, all buildings are encouraged to hold a debriefing meeting at the end of the day.

6. **Other Needs**

Is there a need to assign any District staff to responsibilities other than what they would normally do? If so, who and what?



