

January 2, 2017

Willits Charter School and Willits Elementary Charter School Policy on Suicide Prevention and Related Mental Health Promotion

(Approved by the Charter School Association of Willits on 1/10/17. Adapted from “The Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Toolkit for Schools” from the Palo Alto Unified School District)

The Charter School Association of Willits recognizes that suicide is a major cause of death among youth and should be taken seriously. In order to attempt to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students and families, the School Directors or designees shall develop preventive strategies and intervention procedures.

The School Directors or designees shall involve school health professionals, school counselors, administrators, other staff, parents/guardians, students, local health agencies and professionals, and community organizations in planning, implementing, and evaluating charter schools’ strategies for suicide prevention and intervention.

Prevention and Instruction

Suicide prevention strategies shall include, but not be limited to, efforts to promote a positive school climate that enhances students’ feelings of connectedness with the school and is characterized by caring staff and harmonious interrelationships among students.

The school’s instructional and student support program shall promote the healthy mental, emotional, and social development of students including, but not limited to, the development of problem solving skills, coping skills, and resilience.

The Directors or designee may offer parents/guardians education or information which describes the severity of the youth suicide problem, the schools’ suicide prevention efforts, risk factors and warning signs of suicide, basic steps for helping suicidal youth, reducing the stigma of mental illness, and/or school and community resources that can help youth in crisis.

Staff Development

Suicide prevention training for appropriate staff shall be designed to help staff identify and find help for students at risk of suicide. The training shall be offered in cooperation with school and/or district staff and one or more community mental health agencies and may include information on:

1. Research identifying risk factors, such as previous suicide attempt(s), history of depression or mental illness, substance use problems, family history of suicide or violence, feelings of

isolation, interpersonal' conflicts, a recent severe stressor or loss, family instability, and other factors.

2. Warning signs that may indicate suicidal intentions, including changes in students' appearance, personality, or behavior.
3. Research based instructional strategies for promoting mental and emotional health and, if age-appropriate, teaching a suicide prevention curriculum.
4. School, district, and community resources and services for students and families in crisis and ways to access them.
5. School and/or district procedures for intervening when a student attempts, threatens, or discloses the desire to die by suicide.

Intervention

Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions, he/she shall promptly notify the School Director. The School Director or counselor shall then notify the student's parents/guardians as soon as possible and may refer the student to mental health resources in the school or community.

Students shall be encouraged through the education program and in school activities to notify a teacher, school Director, counselor, or other adult when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's suicidal intentions.

The School Directors or designees shall establish crisis intervention procedures to ensure student safety and appropriate communications in the event that a suicide occurs or an attempt is made by a member of the student body or staff on campus or at a school sponsored activity.

Prevention and Instruction

The School's suicide prevention curriculum shall be designed to help students to:

1. Identify and analyze signs of depression and self-destructive behaviors and understand how feelings of depression, loss, isolation, inadequacy, and anxiety can lead to thoughts of suicide.

2. Identify alternatives to suicide and develop coping and resiliency skills.
3. Learn to share feelings and get help when friends are showing signs of suicidal intent.
4. Identify community crisis intervention resources where help is available and recognize that there is no stigma associated with seeking mental health, substance abuse, gender identity, or other support services.

Staff Development

1. Inservice suicide prevention training will be conducted in order for the school staff to learn to recognize the warning signs of suicidal crisis, to understand how to help suicidal youths, and to identify community resources. Appropriate staff will learn to identify potentially suicidal students, to take preventative precautions, and to report suicide threats to the appropriate authorities. Training may be done through a certified online program provided by the school (Keenan).
2. Staff shall promptly report suicidal threats or statements to the School Director or a trained school counselor or psychologist, who shall promptly report threats or statements to the student's parents/guardians and/or the student's therapist and take appropriate action until the parent or guardian arrives.

Intervention

Immediate Intervention for a Suicide Threat or Attempt

When a suicide attempt or threat is reported, the School Director or designee shall:

Ensure the student's physical safety by one of the following, as appropriate:

1. Securing immediate medical treatment if a suicide attempt has occurred.
2. Securing law enforcement and/or other emergency assistance if a suicidal act is being actively threatened.
3. Keeping the student under continuous adult supervision until the parent/guardian and/or appropriate support agent or agency can be contacted and has the opportunity to intervene.

4. THE STUDENT MUST NOT BE LEFT ALONE.

5. Designate specific individuals to be promptly contacted, including the school counselor, psychologist, Director, and/or the student's parent/guardian, and as necessary, local law enforcement of mental health agencies.

6. Document the incident in writing as soon as feasible.
7. Follow up with the parent/guardian and student in a timely manner to provide referrals to appropriate services as needed.
8. Provide access to counselors or other appropriate personnel to listen to and support students and staff who are directly or indirectly involved with the incident at the school.
9. Provide an opportunity for all who respond to the incident to debrief, evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used, and to make recommendations for future actions.
10. Document the steps taken in the student's record.
11. Develop an effective plan for reintegration of the student into school following the crisis.

Intervention after a Death Suggested to be Suicide

When a tragedy occurs and a student dies, the Director or designee shall:

1. Contact the local Superintendent and/or District Office Staff of other schools to remind them to identify and provide counseling to any student who might have known or been connected in any way with the student who died.
2. Call an emergency staff meeting to relay known information and formulate appropriate procedures for supporting students, staff, and parents. The death should not be called a suicide. This is a legal determination that can only be made by the coroner's office. It should be referred to as a death or a tragic death.
3. Talk with students who were in class with the student by going to that classroom.
4. Contact other students who might know the student in direct, one to one conversations.
5. Provide counseling support to students. Contact additional psychologists/counselors to increase the available support. Have a place available for students to go to and walk around campus to be available for any student needing support. Counselors should follow the student's schedule and be available to assist the students and teachers in those classes. Students must be allowed to grieve but there should be no large group gatherings such as an assembly. Students should not be allowed to congregate in groups without adult supervision. Identify any students who might be at risk and call them in to talk.
6. Contact the family to express condolences and to let them know what the school is doing. Ask when the family would like the student's personal items returned to them. The student's locker should be cleaned out and contents returned to the parent at an appropriate time.

7. Designate a spokesperson who will respond to questions and inquiries from the media and work with the media to ensure responsible reporting (see American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Guidelines).

8. School will be conducted as usual to the greatest extent possible. In no case should school be cancelled.

9. Prepare a note to send home to parents indicating that a tragic death has occurred and that post-intervention procedures and counseling has begun.

10. Schedule a parent meeting as soon as possible to help parents deal with the issue and to advise them how to help students.