

## **800 Suicide Policy**

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia recognizes its part in the total community's responsibility for responding to behaviors associated with suicide ideations. We initiate responsible leadership in establishing intervention and Post-intervention procedures in coordination with Safe-2-Say practices, Mandated Reporter and Safe Environment protocols. Archdiocesan staff and community resources will be available to the school for additional resources.

It is Archdiocesan belief that students identified as at-risk of self-harm should receive the appropriate help as quickly as possible. The primary responsibilities of school personnel working with students dealing with a mental health disorder or suicidal thoughts are support, parental contact, and referral. In these circumstances, confidentiality will be waived in life threatening situations.

### **800.1 Procedure For a Response to a Student Suicide Threat**

A teacher who becomes aware of suicidal ideation must view the situation with seriousness. Such information must be reported to the Principal, School Nurse, and Counselor immediately.

Immediate Procedures:

- Student must not be left alone.
- Communication to Principal, nurse, counselor or Crisis Team .
- Assess the level of risk by collecting and documenting all pertinent information about the student, including an interview with the student.
- Notify parent or guardian immediately. If unable to contact parent or guardian, call Mental Health Crisis Unit.
- Mental Health Assessment is required and subsequently discussed with parent/guardian.
- Steps initiated for "safety plan" with student if recommended by mental health professional.

Follow-Up Procedures:

- Confirmation of assessment by Building/Administrator or Core Team.
- Monitor student by School Counselor and/or Core Team.
- If parents do not comply with mental health recommendations after assessment, School Core Team will meet with parent and student and encourage compliance.
- School staff members who are likely to interact with the student should be verbally notified to be alert for indicators.

### **800.2 Procedure For a Response to a Student Suicide Attempt**

In the event of a student attempting suicide during the school day or on school grounds, the following procedures will be followed:

Immediate Procedures:

- Immediately call the school nurse for first aid services.

- Ambulance services will be called, if needed-call 911
- Notify Building Administrator-who will notify:
  - Parent or Guardian
  - Superintendent, and, if needed:
  - Police
  - Crisis Team, if assistance is beneficial
  - Mental Health Crisis Unit
- Someone will stay with the student at all times.
- Principal will direct staff to move student classes to another location so the situation may be handled as efficiently as possible.
- The student is to be taken to appropriate medical facility.
- Principals will notify Secretary for elementary Education or Superintendent, Communications Office
- Principal/Designee will complete an incident report form.

#### Follow-Up Procedures:

- The student must have a mental health assessment prior to readmission to school.
- Teachers and other school personnel should be encouraged to discuss their concerns about the student and re-admission to school with the Principal or members of the Core Team.
- Contact with the student's parents should be maintained in order to extend support, encourage parental involvement, and monitor progress.
- If parent of student does not comply with mental health recommendation within five days, matter is referred to Principal and Core Team.
- Faculty will be given information as necessary to refer affected students to support personnel.
- Media representatives will not be permitted to contact or speak to students regarding a suicide attempt.

### **800.3 Procedure for a Response to a Suicide Attempt Outside of School**

#### Immediate Procedures:

- Principal/Designee will verify the validity of the report.
- Contact, Family, Police Safe-2 say when appropriate.

#### Follow-Up Procedures:

- Once verified, a mental health assessment will be requested through the Crisis Team prior to readmission.
- Decisions of types of support needed for the student to attend school prior to the assessment will be made by the Principal and the Core Team.
- Periodic checks should be made on the student's progress and well-being by the Core Team.
- Contact with the student's parents should be maintained.
- Request release information if referral initiated by the family.

#### **800.4 Procedure for a Suicide Attempt on a School Bus**

- The bus driver will communicate the incident to the Bus Contractor/School Authority immediately or call 911 if able.
- The Bus Contractor/School authority will contact:
  - Police
  - Ambulance, if any
  - Principal or Superintendent
  - Send bus to return passengers to school
- Principal will notify:
  - Superintendent
  - Parent/Guardian
  - Mental Health
- Core Team will assist students upon arrival to school
- Bus driver will give oral report to Superintendent at the earliest practical moment and a written report within 24 hours.

#### **800.5 Procedure to Respond to a Suicide**

If a suicide does occur, it is our intent to provide support for students, parents, and members of the school staff. We would hope that by establishing procedures, they will serve as guidelines to support decision making at a critical and possibly confusing time.

Immediate Procedures:

- Principal will verify the report.
- Principal notifies the Secretary for Elementary Education/Superintendent who will inform the Auxiliary Bishop.
- Principal will inform Crisis Team, Teachers, Counselors, and Nurses.
- If grief counselors are needed, school should contact County Crisis team, the pastor and when appropriate outside agencies.
- If police wish to question students, call parents of those students to notify them and ask if they wish to be present for this questioning, or have administration present at the questioning.
- Principal or designee will consult with parents as to what information they will allow you to release.
- Principal or designee will consult with parents of deceased student to find out the names of students who were close to the deceased and will need special attention.
- The pastor of the student should be notified.
- Principal will draft an announcement to be made to the students. Sample letters are located in the appendix of this document.
- Announcement will be made to the students. This must be a simultaneous announcement to prevent students texting others the news. This announcement should begin with prayer and the reading of a prepared statement. Presenters of this statement should not take questions.
- An announcement to parents, priests, pastoral center, and school should be drafted and approved by the Managing Director of Communication and Superintendent. Once approved, the announcement can be sent by email.
- If this occurs at the high school level and there are student drivers who wish to leave the school after the announcement, parents must be contacted to ensure they know and approve of their child leaving the building at a non-dismissal time.
- Parents may arrive to pick up their children. Have a sign-out sheet ready.

- If parents request to take children other than their own, a phone call to these children's parents must occur to verify that this is acceptable.
- Principal will call a faculty meeting to explain post-suicide procedures. See 800.6.
- All contact with the media will be by the Superintendent through the Managing Director of Communications.
- Superintendent or Principal will contact the family of the deceased to offer support.
- Support will be given to students identified as "critically distraught" by the Crisis Team . Additional counselors and support personnel will be requested from county agencies and other Catholic schools.

Action Guidelines:

- Do not demand attendance at the funeral or the funeral home.
- Crisis Team visits classroom to discuss the incident.
- Emphasize help is available and people do care.
- Emphasize no one is to blame.
- Provide small group opportunities to discuss this incident.

A death of a child to suicide is as traumatic as any other type of student death. Memorials or fundraising in a student's name are to be strongly discouraged, for it may glamorize death in the eyes of other students. It also becomes a practical problem for the school personnel who have to evaluate the appropriateness, location, and maintenance of the memorial.

**800.6 Post Suicide Guidelines**

- Try to keep to the regular schedule as much as possible.
- Avoid classroom discussions of the situation and refer students to grief counselors who are able to respond to student grief.
- Remember not all students are invested in the situation.
- Meet with Pastor to plan appropriate pastoral support to students and their family
- Any request for special meetings or recognition in memory of the student must be brought to the principal's attention for consideration before any planning or discussion is initiated.

**800.7 Professional development for staff**

- School Principal will receive a training regarding the suicide prevent policy, alert signs of suicidal ideations, the steps to take after suicidal ideations are made and how to follow through post treatment plans.
- Annually, principals will review the possible signs of suicidal ideation with staff
- All new staff, including new administrators and new teachers will participate in training related to suicide prevention.

## Appendix A

### Suggestion on speaking with students

#### Speaking To A Student About Suicide

WHILE CLINICAL ASSESSMENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TREATMENT PLANS REMAIN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PROFESSIONAL MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS, SCHOOL-BASED PERSONNEL DO HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY IN 'LOCO PARENTIS' TO TAKE PROMPT AND EFFECTIVE ACTION WHEN FACED WITH A STUDENT AT RISK FOR SUICIDE

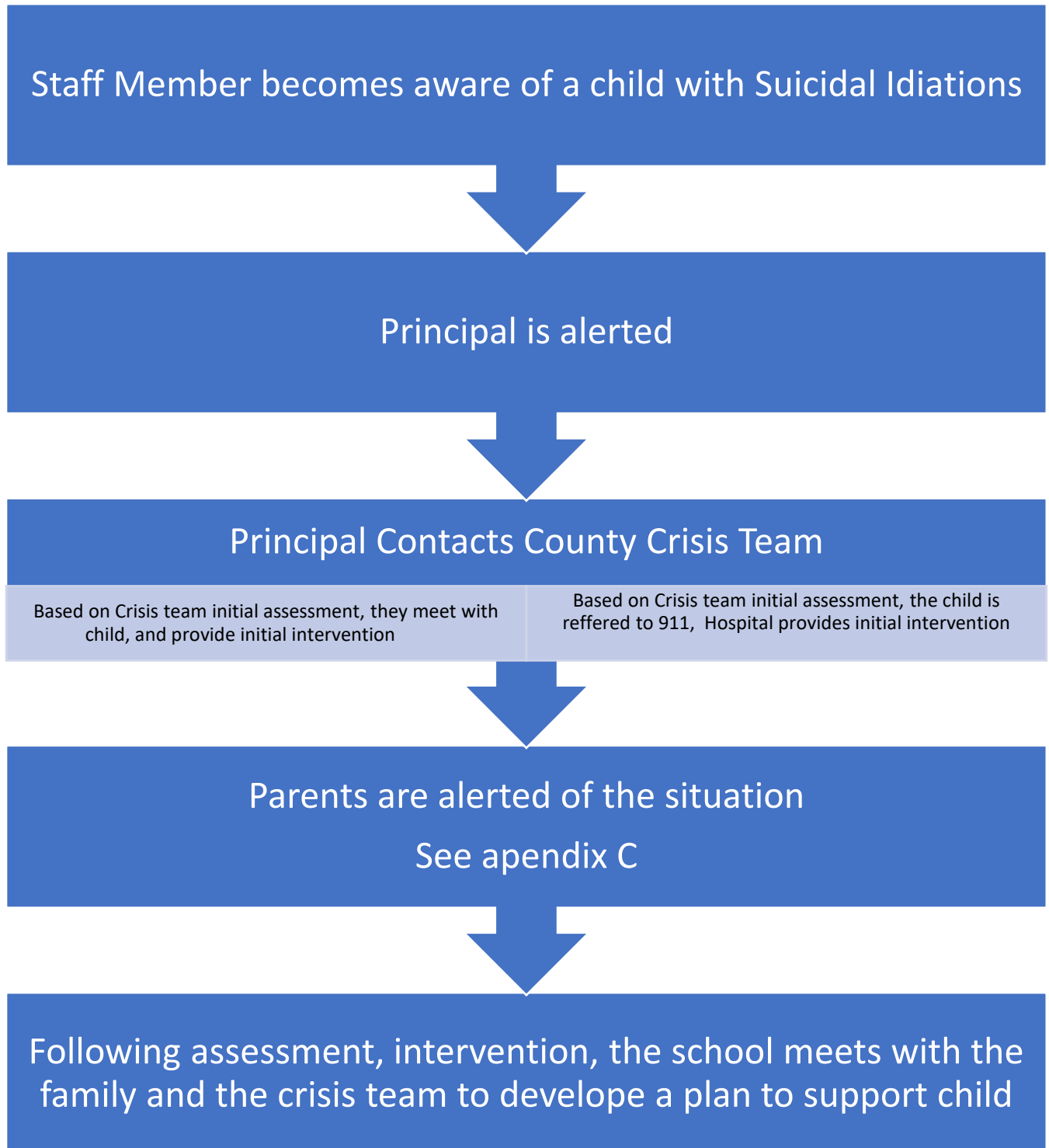
**'PROMISE PRIVACY, NOT CONFIDENTIALITY' – You should not promise confidentiality since the information may need to be shared with other authorized individuals who will respect privacy**

DO...	DON'T...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Stay calm</li><li>○ Contact the school principal, or counselor</li><li>○ Principal should contact the Crisis team</li><li>○ Take it seriously</li><li>○ Physically get at the student's level, i.e., sitting</li><li>○ Present as a person who cares</li><li>○ Establish rapport both verbally and non-verbally</li><li>○ Explore thoughts and feelings</li><li>○ Ask clear and concise questions, i.e., "Do you plan to kill yourself?"</li><li>○ Identify and prioritize immediate stressors</li><li>○ Seek assistance from colleagues</li><li>○ Contact the school principal, or counselor</li><li>○ Promise privacy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Panic!</li><li>○ Ignore the person's need to talk</li><li>○ Allow external interruptions</li><li>○ Minimize the student's distress</li><li>○ Moralize about the student's thoughts or actions</li><li>○ Focus on solving difficulties presented in the interview</li><li>○ Be reluctant to draw on the expertise of others</li><li>○ Leave the student alone</li><li>○ Promise confidentiality</li></ul>

ANY SUSPICION THAT A STUDENT MAY BE CONSIDERING SUICIDE MUST BE TREATED SERIOUSLY. WHEN THE STUDENT'S ACTIONS OR WORDS ARE CAUSE FOR CONCERN, IT IS REQUIRED THAT THE STUDENT BE INTERVIEWED AT THE MOST IMMEDIATE OPPORTUNITY. NEVER MINIMIZE WHAT A STUDENT IS SHARING AND FEELING.

## Appendix B

### Suicide Ideation Flow Chart



## Appendix C

### Talking with Parents

#### Things to Consider When Calling Parents

1. Begin by telling the student that you need to call his or her parents because you are concerned about his or her safety and because you are required to let parents know when their son/daughter is in any danger.
2. Ask for the student's input about what to expect during the phone call.
3. Explain to the student what you are going to say to the parents, and keep the student in the room with you while you make the call.
4. When you call the parents, summarize your concerns briefly and ask the parents to meet you and the student at the school. Although all situations are different, the following is a sample of how a parent telephone conversation may proceed. Understand, however, that parents will react differently and these reactions may include, denial, shock, defensiveness, self-blame, anger, becoming overwhelmed and/or grateful to name a few.

***"...this is (name), I'm calling to let you know that I have (son/daughter) here with me right now and we have just had a very sensitive conversation. We have been talking about (name's) current difficulties which seem to be very overwhelming and which have led to thoughts of self-harm. I know this must be very difficult for you to hear but (name) has experienced thoughts of suicide. As I mentioned, (name) is with me right now and I'm very pleased that he/she has opened up and shared these thoughts and feelings. It is our school Protocol to let parents know right away when we become aware of situations like this. We have contacted the Crisis team and are working with their recommendations and I would like to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss how to proceed."***

5. If the parents seem reluctant to come in, provide a little more detail.
6. If necessary, state that school protocol requires parents to come to the school to meet with staff when their child has made a statement /action regarding possible suicide. If the parents are not able to come to the school immediately, remember that safety of the student is paramount. Don't release the student back to class or let him or her sit alone without supervision by an adult.