



**Section: 500**

**Policy: 1**

**Board Approved: 12/3/20**

## **SUICIDE PREVENTION POLICY**

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The Board of Directors of Twin Ridges Home Study Charter School (“TRHS”) recognizes that suicide is a major cause of death among youth and should be taken seriously. To attempt to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students and families, the Board of Directors has developed prevention strategies and intervention procedures.

In compliance with Education Code section 215, this policy has been developed in consultation with TRHS and community stakeholders, a TRHS school psychologist, a TRHS administrator, other school staff members, parents/guardians/caregivers, students, local health agencies and professionals, law enforcement, and community organizations in planning, implementing, and evaluating TRHS’s strategies for suicide prevention and intervention. TRHS must work in conjunction with local government agencies, community-based organizations, and other community supports to identify additional resources.

To ensure the policies regarding suicide prevention are properly adopted, implemented, and updated, TRHS shall appoint an individual (or team) to serve as the suicide prevention point of contact for TRHS. This policy shall be reviewed and revised as indicated, at least annually in conjunction with the previously mentioned community stakeholders.

### **A. Staff Development**

TRHS, along with its partners, has carefully reviewed available staff training to ensure it promotes the mental health model of suicide prevention and does not encourage the use of the stress model to explain suicide.

Training shall be provided for all school staff members. It may also be provided, when appropriate, for other adults on campus (such as intermittent staff, volunteers, coaches, volunteers, interns and tutors).

Training:

- All suicide prevention trainings shall be offered under the direction of mental health professionals (e.g., school psychologist, other public entity professionals, such as psychologists or social workers) who have received advanced training specific to suicide. Staff training may be adjusted year-to-year based on previous professional development activities and emerging best practices.
- At least annually, all staff shall receive training on the risk factors and warning signs of suicide, suicide prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention.

- At a minimum, all staff shall participate in training on the core components of suicide prevention (identification of suicide risk factors and warning signs, prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention) at the beginning of their employment or annually. Core components of the general suicide prevention training shall include:
  - Suicide risk factors, warning signs, and protective factors;
  - How to talk to a student about thoughts of suicide;
  - How to respond appropriately to the youth who has suicidal thoughts. Such responses shall include constant supervision of any student judged to be at risk for suicide and an immediate referral for a suicide risk assessment.
  - Emphasis on immediately referring (same day) any student who is identified to be at risk of suicide for assessment while staying under constant monitoring by staff member.
  - Emphasis on reducing stigma associated with mental illness and that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide.
  - Reviewing the data annually to look for any patterns or trends. Data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) should be analyzed to identify school climate deficits and drive program development.
  - Information regarding groups of students judged by the school, and available research, to be at elevated risk for suicide. These groups include, but are not limited to, the following:
    - ✓ Youth affected by suicide;
    - ✓ Youth with a history of suicide ideation or attempts;
    - ✓ Youth with disabilities, mental illness, or substance abuse disorders;
    - ✓ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth;
    - ✓ Youth experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings, such as foster care;
    - ✓ Youth who have suffered traumatic experiences;
- In addition to initial orientations to the core components of suicide prevention, ongoing annual staff professional development for all staff may include the following components:
  - The impact of traumatic stress on emotional and mental health;
  - Common misconceptions about suicide;
  - School and community suicide prevention resources;
  - Appropriate messaging about suicide (correct terminology, safe messaging guidelines);
  - The factors associated with suicide (risk factors, warning signs, protective factors);
  - How to identify youth who may be at risk of suicide;
  - Appropriate ways to interact with a youth who is demonstrating emotional distress or is suicidal. Specifically, how to talk with a student about their thoughts of suicide and (based on TRHS guidelines) how to respond to such thinking; how to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide and appropriately respond and provide support based on TRHS guidelines;
  - TRHS-approved procedures for responding to suicide risk (including multi-tiered systems of support and referrals). Such procedures should emphasize that the suicidal student should be constantly supervised until a suicide risk assessment is completed;
  - TRHS-approved procedures for responding to the aftermath of suicidal behavior (suicidal behavior postvention);
  - Responding after a suicide occurs (suicide postvention);
  - Resources regarding youth suicide prevention;
  - Emphasis on stigma reduction and the fact that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide;
  - Emphasis that any student who is identified to be at risk of suicide is to be immediately referred (same day) for assessment while being constantly monitored by a staff member.

## **B. Employee Qualifications and Scope of Services**

Employees of TRHS must act only within the authorization and scope of their credential or license. While it is expected that school professionals are able to identify suicide risk factors and warning signs, and to prevent the immediate risk of a suicidal behavior, treatment of suicidal ideation is typically beyond the scope of services offered in the school setting. In addition, treatment of the mental health challenges often associated with suicidal thinking typically requires mental health resources beyond what schools are able to provide.

## **C. Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers Participation and Education**

- Parents/guardians/caregivers may be included in suicide prevention efforts. At a minimum, schools shall share this Policy with parents/guardians/caregivers by notifying them where a complete copy of the policy is available.
- This suicide prevention policy shall be prominently displayed on the TRHS Web page.
- Parents /guardians/caregivers should be invited to provide input on the development and implementation of this policy.
- All parents/guardians/caregivers may have access to suicide prevention training that addresses the following:
  - Suicide risk factors, warning signs, and protective factors;
  - How to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide;
  - How to respond appropriately to the student who has suicidal thoughts. Such responses shall include constant supervision of any student judged to be at risk for suicide and referral for an immediate suicide risk assessment.

## **D. Student Participation and Education**

Messaging about suicide has an effect on suicidal thinking and behaviors. Consequently, TRHS along with its partners has carefully reviewed and will continue to review all materials and resources used in awareness efforts to ensure they align with best practices for safe messaging about suicide. Suicide prevention strategies may include, but not be limited to, efforts to promote a positive school climate that enhances students' feelings of connectedness with TRHS and is characterized by caring staff and positive interrelationships among students.

TRHS's instructional and student support program shall promote healthy mental, emotional, and social development of students including, but not limited to, the development of problem-solving skills, coping skills, and resilience. The instruction should not use the stress model to explain suicide.

## E. Intervention and Emergency Procedures

TRHS designates the following administrator to act as the primary suicide prevention liaison:

- Executive Director

Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions, they shall promptly notify the primary designated suicide prevention liaison.

- The suicide prevention liaison shall then notify the student's parent/guardian as soon as possible if appropriate and in the best interest of the student. Determination of notification to parents/guardians/caregivers should follow a formal initial assessment to ensure that the student is not endangered by parental notification.

The suicide prevention liaison shall also refer the student to mental health resources at TRHS or in the community.

When a student is in imminent danger (has access to a gun, is on a rooftop, or in other unsafe conditions), a call shall be made to 911.

When a suicide attempt or threat is reported on campus or at a school-related activity, the suicide prevention liaison shall, at a minimum:

1. Ensure the student's physical safety by one of the following, as appropriate:
  - Securing immediate medical treatment if a suicide attempt has occurred;
  - Securing law enforcement and/or other emergency assistance if a suicidal act is being actively threatened;
  - 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.
  - Remaining calm, keeping in mind the student is overwhelmed, confused, and emotionally distressed;
  - Moving all other students out of the immediate area;
  - Not sending the student away or leaving him/her alone, even to go to the restroom;
  - Providing comfort to the student, listening and allowing the student to talk and being comfortable with moments of silence;
  - Promising privacy and help, but not promising confidentiality.
2. Document the incident in writing as soon as feasible.
3. Follow up with the parent/guardian and student in a timely manner to provide referrals to appropriate services as needed.
4. After a referral is made, TRHS shall verify with the parent/guardian that the follow up treatment has been accessed. Parents/guardians will be required to provide documentation of care for the student. If parents/guardians refuse or neglect to access treatment for a student who has been identified to be at risk for suicide, the suicide prevention liaison shall meet with the parent to identify barriers to treatment (e.g., cultural stigma, financial issues) and work to rectify the situation and build understanding of care. If follow up care is still not provided, TRHS may contact Child Protective Services.

5. Provide access to appropriate personnel to listen to and support students and staff who are directly or indirectly involved with the incident at TRHS.
6. Provide an opportunity for all who respond to the incident to debrief, evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used, and make recommendations for future actions.

In the event a suicide occurs or is attempted on any TRHS campus, the suicide prevention liaison shall follow the crisis intervention procedures contained in the TRHS Safety Plan. After consultation with the student's parent/guardian about facts that may be divulged in accordance with the laws governing confidentiality of student record information, the Executive Director or designee may provide students, parents/guardians, and staff with information, counseling, and/or referrals to community agencies as needed. TRHS staff may receive assistance from mental health professionals in determining how best to discuss the suicide or attempted suicide with students.

In the event a suicide occurs or is attempted off the TRHS campus and unrelated to school activities, the Executive Director or designee shall take the following steps to support the student:

1. Contact the parent/guardian and offer support to the family.
2. Discuss with the family how they would like TRHS to respond to the attempt while minimizing widespread rumors among teachers, staff, and students.
3. Obtain permission from the parent/guardian to share information to ensure the facts regarding the crisis are correct.
4. The suicide prevention liaison shall handle any media requests.
5. Provide care and determine appropriate support to affected students.
6. Offer to the student and parent/guardian steps for re-integrating to school. Re-integration may include obtaining a written release from the parent/guardian to speak with any health care providers; conferring with the student and parent/guardian about any specific requests on how to handle the situation; informing the student's teachers about possible days of absences; allowing accommodations for make-up work (realizing that missed assignments may add stress to the student); appropriate staff maintaining ongoing contact with the student to monitor the student's actions and mood; and working with the parent/guardian to involve the student in an aftercare plan.

## **F. Supporting Students during or after a Mental Health Crisis**

Students shall be encouraged through the education program and in TRHS activities to notify a teacher, the Executive Director, or other adult when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's suicidal intentions. TRHS staff should treat each report seriously, calmly, and with active listening and support. Staff should be non-judgmental to students and discuss with the student, and parent/guardian, about additional resources to support the student.

## **G. Responding After a Suicide Death (Postvention)**

A death by suicide in the school community (whether by a student or staff member) can have devastating consequences on the school community, including students and staff. TRHS shall follow the below action plan for responding to a suicide death, which incorporates both immediate and long-term steps and objectives:

The suicide prevention liaison shall:

- Confirm death and cause;
- Identify a staff member to contact deceased's family (within 24 hours);
- Enact the Suicide Postvention Response.

### **Postvention Response:**

- Notify all staff members (ideally in-person or via phone, not via email or mass notification).
- Coordinate an all-staff meeting, to include:
  - Notification (if not already conducted) to staff about suicide death;
  - Emotional support and resources available to staff;
  - Notification to students about suicide death and the availability of support services (if this is the protocol that is decided by administration);
  - Share information that is relevant and that which you have permission to disclose.
- Prepare staff to respond to needs of students regarding the following:
  - Review of protocols for referring students for support/assessment;
  - Talking points for staff to notify students;
  - Resources available to students (on and off campus).
- Identify students significantly affected by suicide death and other students at risk of imitative behavior;
- Identify students affected by suicide death but not at risk of imitative behavior;
- Communicate with the larger school community about the suicide death;
- Consider funeral arrangements for family and school community;
- Respond to memorial requests in a respectful and non-harmful manner; responses should be handled in a thoughtful way and their impact on other students should be considered;
- Identify media spokesperson if needed.
- Include long-term suicide postvention responses:
  - Consider important dates (i.e., anniversary of death, deceased birthday, graduation, or other significant event) and how these will be addressed
  - Support siblings, close friends, teachers, and/or students of deceased
  - Consider long-term memorials and how they may impact students who are emotionally vulnerable and at risk of suicide

