

Alpine County Unified School District Youth Suicide Prevention Plan

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Overall Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention

The Superintendent or Designee shall involve school employees, parents/guardians, students, local health agencies and professionals, law enforcement, and community organizations in planning, implementing, and evaluating the district's strategies for suicide prevention and intervention. Districts 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, the district shall appoint an individual (or team) to serve as the suicide prevention point of contact for the district.

Prevention

A. Messaging about Suicide Prevention

Messaging about suicide has an effect on suicidal thinking and behaviors. Consequently, Alpine County Unified School District along with its partners have critically 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.

B. Suicide Prevention Training and Education

The Alpine County Unified School District along with its partners has carefully reviewed available staff training to ensure it promotes the mental health model of suicide prevention. Training shall be offered to all school staff members in conjunction with other mandated trainings before the beginning of the school year.

Training:

- All staff shall receive annual training on the risk factors and warning signs of suicide, suicide prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention.
- All suicide prevention trainings shall be offered in collaboration with county and/or community mental health agencies and under the direction of suicide prevention point of contact for the district. Staff training can be adjusted year-to-year based on previous professional development activities and emerging best practices.
- At a minimum, all staff shall participate in training on the core components of suicide prevention at the beginning of the school year. Core components of the general suicide prevention training shall include:
 - Suicide risk factors, warning signs, and protective factors;
 - How to talk with 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;

- In addition to initial orientations to the core components of suicide prevention, additional professional development will be provided to staff. The suicide prevention point of contact for the district will work in collaboration with county and/or community mental health agencies to select appropriate elements not initially covered during the beginning of the year training. These elements may include areas such as:
 - 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 and additional information regarding groups of students identified by mental health professionals as having elevated risk for 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 district 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 district guidelines;
 - District-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;
 - District-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.

C. Employee Qualifications and Scope of Services

Employees of the Alpine County Unified School District and their partners must act only within the authorization and scope of their credential or license. While it is desired that school employees 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.

D. Specialized Staff Training (Assessment)

Additional professional development in suicide risk assessment and crisis intervention shall be provided to the suicide prevention point of contact for the district and/or suicide prevention liaison employed by Alpine County Unified School District.

E. Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers Participation and Education

- Alpine County Unified School District shall provide an opportunity for parents/guardians input during the development of the district's suicide prevention plan.
- This suicide prevention plan shall be displayed on the Alpine County Unified School District Web page.
- Additional information regarding suicide prevention shall also be provided to parents/guardians via the district's website. Some of the topics shall address the following items:
 - 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.

F. Student Participation and Education

The Alpine County Unified School District along with its county and community mental health agency partners will develop 7th and 8th grade curriculum that promotes the mental health model of suicide prevention and does not encourage the use of the stress model to explain suicide. Components of this curriculum will include:

- Developmentally appropriate, student-centered education about the warning signs of mental health challenges and emotional distress;

- Developmentally appropriate guidance regarding the district's suicide prevention, intervention, and referral procedures.
- The content of the education shall include:
 - Coping strategies for dealing with stress and trauma;
 - How to recognize behaviors (warning signs) and life issues (risk factors) associated with suicide and mental health issues in oneself and others;
 - Help-seeking strategies for oneself and others, including how to engage school-based and community resources and refer peers for help;
 - Emphasis on reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and the fact that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide.

Student-focused suicide prevention education can be incorporated into classroom curricula (e.g., family life lessons, science classes, and/or physical education).

The Alpine County Unified School District will support the creation and implementation of programs and/or activities on campus that raise awareness about mental wellness and suicide prevention.

Intervention, Assessment, Referral

A. Staff

Two Alpine County Unified School District staff members who have received advanced training in suicide intervention shall be designated as the primary and secondary suicide prevention liaisons. The primary liaison will also be the designated suicide prevention point of contact for the district. Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions, they shall promptly notify the primary designated suicide prevention liaison. If this primary suicide prevention liaison is unavailable, the staff shall promptly notify the secondary suicide prevention liaison.

- Under normal circumstances, the primary and/or secondary contact persons shall notify the principal or the school counselor. The principal or the school counselor shall then notify, if appropriate and in the best interest of the student, the student's parents/guardians as soon as possible and shall refer the student to mental health resources in the school or community. Determination of notification to parents/guardians should follow a formal initial assessment to ensure that the student is not endangered by parental notification.

If the student is in imminent danger (has access to a weapon or other unsafe conditions), a call shall be made to 911.

- Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions, they shall promptly notify the primary or secondary suicide prevention liaisons.
- Students experiencing a suicidal crisis shall not be left unsupervised.
- A referral process should be prominently disseminated to all staff members, so they know how to respond to a crisis and are knowledgeable about the school and community-based resources.
- The Superintendent or designee shall establish crisis intervention procedures to ensure student safety and appropriate communications if a suicide occurs or an attempt is made by a student or adult on campus or at a school-sponsored activity.

B. Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers

A referral process should be posted on the district's website, so they know how to respond to a crisis and are knowledgeable about the school and community-based resources.

C. Students

Students shall be encouraged to notify a staff member when they are experiencing emotional distress or suicidal ideation, or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's emotional distress, suicidal ideation, or attempt.

D. Parental Notification and Involvement

Alpine County Unified School District shall identify a process to ensure continuing care for the student who is experiencing emotional distress or suicidal ideation. The following steps should be followed to ensure continuity of care:

- After a referral is made for a student, school staff shall verify with the parent/guardian that follow-up treatment has been accessed. Parents/guardians will be required to provide documentation of care for the student as part of the student's re-integration plan
- If parents/guardians refuse or neglect to access treatment for a student who is experiencing emotional distress or suicidal ideation, the suicide prevention point of contact (or other appropriate school staff member) will meet with the parents/guardians to identify barriers to treatment (e.g., cultural stigma, financial issues) and work to rectify the situation and build understanding of the importance of care. If follow-up care for the student is still not provided, school staff should consider contacting Child Protective Services (CPS) to report neglect of the youth.

E. Action Plan for In-School Suicide Attempts

If a suicide attempt is made during the school day on campus, it is important to remember that the health and safety of the student and those around him/her is critical. The following steps should be implemented:

- Remain calm, remember the student is overwhelmed, confused, and emotionally distressed;
- Move all other students out of the immediate area;
- Immediately contact the administrator or suicide prevention liaison;
- Call 911 and give them as much information about any suicide note, medications taken, and access to weapons, if applicable;
- If needed, provide medical first aid until a medical professional is available;
- Parents/guardians should be contacted as soon as possible;
- Do not send the student away or leave them alone, even if they need to go to the restroom;

- Listen and prompt the student to talk;
- Review options and resources of people who can help;
- Be comfortable with moments of silence as you and the student will need time to process the situation;
- Provide comfort to the student;
- Promise help and be respectful, but do not promise confidentiality;
- Student should only be released to person who is qualified and trained to provide help.

F. Action Plan for Out-of-School Suicide Attempts

If a suicide attempt by a student is outside of Alpine County Unified School District property, it is crucial that the district guard the privacy of the student and maintain a confidential record of the actions taken to intervene, support, and protect the student. The following steps should be implemented:

- Contact the parents/guardians and offer support to the family;
- Discuss with the family how they would like the school to respond to the attempt while minimizing rumors among teachers, staff, and students;
- Obtain permission from the parents/guardians to share information to ensure the facts regarding the crisis is correct;
- The district's public information officer will handle all media requests;
- Provide care and determine appropriate support to affected students;
- Offer to the student and parents/guardians steps for re-integration to school.

G. Supporting Students after a Mental Health Crisis

It is crucial that steps are taken to help provide the mental health support for the student and to monitor their actions for any signs of suicide. The following steps should be implemented after the crisis has happened:

- Treat every threat with seriousness and approach with a calm manner; make the student a priority;
- Listen actively to the student and be non-judgmental. Let the student express his or her feelings;

- Acknowledge the feelings and do not argue with the student;
- Offer hope and let the student know they are safe and that help is provided. Do not promise confidentiality or cause stress;
- Explain calmly and get the student to a trained professional, guidance counselor, or designated staff to further support the student;
- Keep close contact with the parents/guardians and mental health professionals working with the student.

Postvention

A. Re-Entry to School After a Suicide Attempt

A student who threatened or attempted suicide is at a higher risk for suicide in the months following the crisis. Having a streamlined and well planned re-entry process ensures the safety and wellbeing of students who have previously attempted suicide and reduces the risk of another attempt. An appropriate re-entry process is an important component of suicide prevention. Involving students in planning for their return to school provides them with a sense of control, personal responsibility, and empowerment.

The following steps are part of the re-integration process:

- Obtain a written release of information signed by parents/guardians and providers;
- Confer with student and parents/guardians about any specific requests on how to handle the situation;
- Inform the student's teachers about possible days of absences;
- Allow accommodations for student to make up work (be understanding that missed assignments may add stress to student);
- Mental health professionals or trusted staff members should maintain ongoing contact to monitor student's actions and mood;
- Work with parents/guardians to involve the student in a re-integration plan.

B. Responding After a Suicide Death

A death by suicide in the school community (whether by a student or staff member) can have devastating consequences on students and staff. Therefore, it is vital that we are prepared ahead of time in the event of such a tragedy. The Alpine County Unified School District along with its county and community mental health agency partners will develop a Suicide Postvention Response Plan. Components of the plan will include both immediate and long-term steps and objectives. The Suicide Postvention Response Plan will become activated when it is determined by a staff member that a student or staff member has died by suicide;

- The Suicide Postvention Response Plan will:
 - The suicide prevention point of contact identify a staff member to contact deceased's family (preferably within 24 hours);

- Enact the Suicide Postvention Response Plan, include an initial meeting (in person or over the phone) of the district's Suicide Postvention Response Team;
- Notify all staff members (ideally in-person or via phone, not via e-mail 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;
 - Share information that is relevant and that which you have permission to disclose;
 - Coordinate support services from partnering county and community agencies for both students and staff;
- 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 and staff (both on and off campus).
- Identify students significantly affected by suicide death and other students at risk of imitating behavior;
- Identify students affected by suicide death but not at risk of imitating behavior;
- Communicate with the larger school community about the suicide death;
- Consider funeral arrangements for family and school community;
- The district's public information officer will respond to social media outlets:
 - Identify what platforms students are using to respond to suicide death
 - Identify/train staff and students to monitor social media outlets
- Include long-term suicide postvention responses:

- Respectfully decline long-term memorials due to the impact on students who are emotionally vulnerable and at risk of suicide
- 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 the deceased.

Resources

- Alpine County Behavioral Health Services: The mission of ACBHS is to provide safe, ethical and accessible services that inspire personal growth and development through strength-based behavioral health programs and supportive connections. Comprehensive mental health and substance abuse services are available to all residents of Alpine County regardless of ability to pay. <http://www.alpinecountyca.gov/Index.aspx?NID=192>
 - 24hour Crisis Line 800-318-8212
 - General Line 530-694-1816
- Text “Listen” or “Connect” to 741741
- Parents as Partners: A Suicide Prevention Guide for Parents is a booklet that contains useful information for parents/guardians who are concerned that their children may be at risk for suicide. It is available from Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE). See the SAVE Web page at <https://www.save.org/product/parents-as-partners/>
- Help & Hope for Survivors of Suicide Loss is a guide to help those during the bereavement process and who were greatly affected by the death of a suicide. See the Suicide Prevention Resource Center Web page at <http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/help-hope-survivors-suicide-loss>
- For additional information on suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, see the Mental Health Recovery Services Model Protocol Web page at http://www.mhrsonline.org/resources/suicide%5Cattempted_suicide_resources_for_schools-9/
- The School Reentry for a Student Who Has Attempted Suicide or Made Serious Suicidal Threats is a guide that will assist in school re-entry for students after an attempted suicide. See the Mental Health Recovery Services Resource Web page at http://www.mhrsonline.org/resources/suicide%5Cattempted_suicide_resources_for_schools-9/