



School Mental Health Communities of Practice

Micro-Skills to Support K-12 Students with Suicidal Feelings, Thoughts, and Behaviors

Signs and Symptoms of Suicidal Feelings, Thoughts, and Behaviors:

Being preoccupied with death, dying, or violence	Having intense sadness, helplessness, or hopelessness	Not caring about activities that used to matter
Being unable to think clearly and/or having memory and concentration problems	Having sleep disturbances (such as not sleeping or staying awake all night)	Declining school performance and/or increased absences from school
Lack of energy	Changes in sleep patterns	Changes in appetite
Alcohol and substance abuse	Increased irritability	Giving away possessions
Talking about suicide (e.g., making statements such as "I'm going to kill myself," "I wish I were dead" or "I wish I hadn't been born")	Being preoccupied with death (e.g., recurring themes of death or self-destruction in artwork or written assignments)	Doing risky or self-destructive things, such as abusing alcohol/drugs, driving recklessly, or taking unnecessary risks
Having mood swings, such as being emotionally high one day and deeply discouraged the next day	Withdrawing socially from important people (e.g., family, friends) and activities (e.g., sports, hobbies, events)	Feeling hopeless and helpless about a situation, or feeling trapped in a situation with no way out of it
Getting the means to take your own life, such as buying a gun or stockpiling pills	Saying goodbye to people as if you will never see them again	Having sudden changes in personality or being severely anxious or agitated
Getting your affairs in order (such as making final preparations)	Having scars or injuries from previous suicide attempts or self-harming behaviors	Belief that dying by suicide is the only way to end emotional pain
Self-loathing	Paranoia	Intense emotional pain
Showing despair and talking about unbearable pain	Feeling like you are a burden to other people	Having physical and/or mental illnesses/disorders
Having serious legal and/or financial problems	Having a history of traumatic experiences and/or abuse	Experiencing the death of a loved one
Experiencing the loss of a relationship and/or job	Having persistent fatigue and/or exhaustion	Neglecting physical hygiene and physical appearance

Action Steps (Micro-Skills) When You Recognize the Signs and Symptoms:

- **Educate students about how to recognize signs and symptoms in themselves and how to ask for help when they experience suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors:** It is important for students to understand the signs and symptoms associated with suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors so that they can accurately identify these concerns when they experience them. It is also important for students who experience suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors to know how to reach out for help.
 - Use universal education approaches (e.g., Tier 1) to educate groups of students about the general signs and symptoms associated with suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. These general approaches, which should be developmentally appropriate to the age/grade of the students, can occur in a general education class setting (typically facilitated by a teacher or co-facilitated by a teacher and school-based mental health professional) or in specialized social-emotional-learning sessions (typically facilitated by a school-based mental health professional). Students should be given general information about who to go to and how to receive help, should they need it.
 - Use targeted education approaches (e.g., Tier 2) to educate students at risk of experiencing suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Typically, this would entail small group sessions led by a school-based mental health professional and would include more detailed information about signs and symptoms, along with specific coping strategies that students could use to prevent and/or reduce concerns. Students should be given specific information about who to go to and how to receive help, should they need it.
 - Use individualized education approaches (e.g., Tier 3) to educate students who are known to have experienced suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Typically, this would occur through individual counseling sessions provided by a school-based mental health professional and would include student-specific information about signs and symptoms, along with student-specific strategies to mitigate those concerns. Students should be given information about additional sources of help (e.g., crisis lines, community-based providers) in case they need support at a time that their school-based mental health professional is not available. Teachers and school-based mental health professionals should regularly consult about how to best support students who have experienced suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.
- **Identify students who are experiencing suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors and assist them in getting help:** It is important to understand your school district's policies and procedures when students express suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Familiarize yourself with these policies and procedures to ensure that you are ready to act should a student express suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.



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CENTER FOR SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

- If a student attempts suicide at school, seek professional help right away (e.g., 911, nearest emergency room, suicide hotline- *following your district's emergency procedures*) and render first aid until professional medical services and/or emergency transportation can be provided.
- Follow your school district's emergency procedures. Immediately notify the principal and/or school suicide prevention coordinator regarding the incident of an in-school suicide attempt, and move all other students out of the immediate area as soon as possible.
- It is important to never leave someone who is suicidal alone. If you need to leave the student for a period of time (e.g., to make a phone call, to notify another staff member), ensure that someone else can remain with the student during the time that you are away. If no one else is available, take the student with you to make the phone or find the other staff member.
- It is important to supervise the student to ensure safety. Ensure that the student does not have access to any harmful objects.
- Should the student need someone to talk to immediately, help the student connect with a trained crisis counselor at the Crisis Text Line (text "4HOPE" to 741-741) or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK [8255]), or engage the crisis team (if available) to assess what additional steps can be taken to ensure the student's safety and well-being.
- **Use micro-skills daily in the class and school settings to support students who may be at risk of suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors:** Students who are at risk of experiencing suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors can benefit from being in a supportive class and school environment.
 - Promote emotional well-being and connectedness among all students. Positively reinforce students who treat one another with respect, dignity, and compassion. Offer opportunities for students make positive connections with one another.
 - Pay attention to warning signs of suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Students may display warning signs through their academic work, such as writing assignments or artwork. Talk with students privately about any warning signs that concern you.
 - Always take suicidal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors seriously, no matter how minor they may seem or if you think the student does not mean them. No matter what the underlying issue is, the student is communicating a concern to you. Talk with the student privately and express your concerns for their safety.
- **Advocate for students to visit a mental health professional, if needed:** If symptoms become overwhelming, it may be important for students to visit a mental health professional to help alleviate their symptoms and identify coping strategies that work for them. School professionals can share referral information with students and their families about options for mental health treatment at school or in the local community.

Suicide Prevention, Intervention, & Postvention Resources

- **After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools:**
<http://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/AfteraSuicideToolkitforSchools.pdf>
- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:** The *More than Sad* program offers prevention education for students, parents, and teachers: <https://afsp.org/our-work/education/more-than-sad/>
- **Children’s Safety Network: Youth Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention: 2017 Resource Guide:**
<https://www.childrenssafetynetwork.org/resources/youth-suicide-self-harm-prevention-2017-resource-guide>
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text “4HOPE” to 741741 to receive a response from a live, trained volunteer within 5 minutes (“Code Orange” – more severe texts – are handled in an average of 1.8 minutes). Volunteers can then help the texter move from a moment of crisis to a calmer place.
- **Kognito (Suicide Prevention Foundation):** At-risk trainings and simulations for students and school staff in elementary through high school grade levels: <https://ohio.kognito.com/>
 - Using this link allows all Ohioans to access these resources for free until 2020 – provided by the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation.
- **Mental Health First Aid:** Offers both youth and adult courses for prevention and intervention: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/take-a-course/course-types/youth/>
- **Mindpeace: Suicide, Education, Research, Advocacy (SERA):**
<http://mindpeacecincinnati.com/suicide/>
- **National Children’s Hospital Center for Suicide Prevention & Research:**
<http://www.nationwidechildrens.org/suicide-research>
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Lifeline Online Prevention Manual:**
<http://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/LifelineOnlinePostventionManual.pdf>
- **Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation:** Free training and education resources, coalition contact information, LOSS team contact information, and up-to-date statistics and news:
<http://www.ohiospf.org/>
- **Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools:**
<https://www.store.samhsa.gov/product/Preventing-Suicide-A-Toolkit-for-High-Schools/SMA12-4669>
- **Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR):** Three steps anyone can learn to help prevent suicide.
<https://qprinstitute.com/>
- **Red Flags:** Prevention and intervention: <http://www.redflags.org>
- **Signs of Suicide:** Prevention (focused on screening and identification), intervention, and postvention: <https://www.mindwise.org/what-we-offer/suicide-prevention-programs/>
- **Sandy Hook Promise:** Offers their “Know the Signs” programming for both youth and adults at no cost. Programs include Start With Hello, Say Something, Signs of Suicide, and Safety Assessment and Intervention: <http://www.sandyhookpromise.org>
- **Suicide Prevention Resource Center:** <http://www.sprc.org>