

SECTION II: INTERVENTION IN A SUICIDAL CRISIS

Intervention protocols to assist students in a crisis involving suicidal thoughts or behaviors are a critical component of both district and school responses. These protocols aid school personnel in intervening effectively with suicidal students. School administrators play a crucial role in establishing a school climate that requires key school personnel to be familiar with and responsive to a suicidal crisis in order to help prevent a youth suicide. Students of concern may be referred to counselors by staff, parents, peers, or self-referral. Intervention protocols vary based on the determined degree of suicide risk.

Key principles to remember in any crisis:

1. **Ensure that the student in crisis is safe:** Remain with the student until a Crisis Response Team (CRT) member arrives.
2. **Send someone for help:** While you remain with the student, send someone to retrieve the nearest available CRT member.
3. **Listen to the student:** Acknowledge their feelings, allow them to express their feelings, avoid giving advice or opinions, and listen for warning signs.
4. **Be direct:** Ask openly about suicide (QPR training) “Suicide is a crisis of non-communication and despair; by asking about it you allow for communication to occur and provide hope” (USF, 2003). Asking about suicide does not put the idea into a student’s mind.
5. **Be honest:** Offer hope but do not condescend or offer unrealistic assurance.
6. **Know your limits:** Involve yourself only to the level you feel comfortable. If you are uncomfortable or feel the situation is beyond your capacity to deal with, refer the student to someone in a better position to help. If you feel the student is in immediate danger, escort the student to the referral. If not, check to see that the referral was followed up on.
7. **Inform student:** At each stage, be sure the student knows what is going on. Provide Appendix B3, “Mental Health Information for Students”.
8. **Inform parents (when appropriate):** Their child is experiencing a crisis. Reassure them that he/she is currently safe. Inform them of community supports that are available to them during and after the crisis. Work with the parents to develop a plan of action for getting their child help. As needed, provide Appendix B2, “Mental Health Resources” and/or Appendices B4i, B4ii, B4iii, B4iv, and B4v “Parent Handouts”.
9. **Keep other students in a safe area:** Allow students to express their fears and concerns or feelings of responsibility or guilt. Let students know that the student in crisis is receiving help, maintain confidentiality and **keep details of the crisis to a minimum**. Let students know where they can get help. Provide Appendix B3, “Mental Health Information for Students”.
10. **Monitor:** Friends of the student and others who are potentially at-risk for suicide.
11. **Debrief:** All faculty and staff involved in the crisis are given opportunities to discuss their reactions and are offered support. Allow expression of feelings, worries, concerns, and suggestions of what was done well and what could have been done better during and following the crisis. Please refer to Attachment 2.18, “Means Restriction” and 2.19, “Suicide Contagion and Clusters”