



## **Brookhaven Innovation Academy**

### **Policy for Suicide Awareness, Prevention, Intervention and Postvention**

#### **Suicide Awareness**

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people between the ages of 10-24, and alarmingly common in youth today. Therefore, it is critically important to have a policy in place to assess the risk of, intervene in, and respond to youth suicidal behavior.

BIA will ensure the maintenance of a positive and safe school climate by:

- Fostering a feeling of connectedness between the students and the school
- Providing opportunities for students to become involved in school activities
- Ensuring an overall safe environment for all students
- Taking bullying of any nature seriously
- Setting high expectations on all staff and students to behave respectfully and kindly to one another

#### **Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention**

BIA will appoint a suicide prevention coordinator to plan and coordinate the implementation of the school's suicide prevention policy with help from the school-level Crisis Response Team.

All staff members shall report students they believe to be at risk for suicide to the school suicide prevention coordinator or a staff member the school suicide prevention coordinator has designated to act in his or her absence.

#### **Training**

All certificated school personnel shall receive annual training on youth suicide prevention using evidence-based suicide prevention programs as recognized by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center's [Best Practices Registry](#) and the [National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices](#) (NREPP).

BIA will use a multifaceted approach in which the following components are implemented in a particular sequence:

- Staff education training (prevention);
- Parent education (prevention);
- Student education (prevention);
- Screening (identification);
- Protocols for helping students at possible risk of suicide (intervention); and
- Protocols for responding to a suicide death (postvention).

#### **Suicide Screening, Assessment and Referral**

It is the responsibility of all BIA staff to ensure the safety of our scholars. When a student is identified by a staff person as potentially suicidal, (i.e., verbalizes about suicide, presents overt risk factors, student

self-refers, etc.) the student should immediately be seen by a mental health professional to assess risk and facilitate referral. If there is no mental health professional available at the school, the school suicide prevention coordinator, a school nurse, school counselor, school social worker or a school administrator should fill this role until a mental health professional can be brought in.

#### **For students with warning signs for suicide:**

- 1) School staff should continuously supervise the student to ensure his or her safety until the parents/guardians and/or mental health professional arrive. Under no circumstances should the student be left alone, sent back to class, or sent home on the bus without constant adult supervision.
- 2) The School Suicide Prevention Coordinator, principal or his/her designee, school counselor, mental health professional, the Crisis Response Team, and the main office (e.g., Principal or his/her designee) should be informed immediately.
- 3) If possible, screen the student using a screener such as the *Columbia Suicide Severity Rating BIAle*. The additional information obtained from the screener will be helpful in your conversations with family members and referral agencies.
- 4) The principal or mental health professional should contact the student's parent or guardian and should assist the family with urgent referral for professional assessment. When appropriate, this may include calling emergency services or bringing the student to the local emergency room, but in most cases will involve contacting the **Georgia Crisis and Access Line (below)** or setting up an outpatient behavioral health appointment and communicating the reason for referral to the healthcare provider.

If the student is under the age of 18 and the parent or guardian refuses to seek appropriate assistance, the school shall have the option to contact and file a neglect report with the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS). The school may also involve the appropriate law enforcement agency, if necessary.

- 5) It would be wise for a designated school staff member to ask the student's parent or guardian for written permission to discuss the student's health with outside care, if appropriate. This may be needed for follow-up with the student during and after behavioral health care has been obtained.

The **Georgia Crisis & Access Line (1-800-715-4225)** is a toll-free, confidential hotline available 24 hours a day 7 days a week from anywhere in Georgia.

#### **In-School Suicide Attempts**

In the case of an in-school suicide attempt, the health and safety of the student is paramount. In these situations:

1. Call **911**.
2. Contact Principal (or his/her designee).
3. Contact Crisis Response Team.
4. Secure the area as soon as possible and keep all students away.
5. Send notes and runners to staff members informing them that a medical emergency has occurred. Include any additional instructions (e.g., "The bell schedule will be changed and will be manually sounded at an appropriate time.")

6. Render first aid until professional medical treatment arrives.
7. Provide constant adult supervision to the student to ensure student safety.
8. Request a mental health screening for the student.
9. Notify the principal and the school suicide prevention coordinator regarding in-school suicide attempts.
10. Contact the student's parent or guardian.
11. Crisis Response Team will meet to assess whether additional steps should be taken to ensure student safety and well-being.
12. Prepare a written statement to be distributed to parents and guardians either through email or by letter.

### **Out-of-School Suicide Attempts**

If a staff member becomes aware of a suicide attempt by a student that is in progress in an out-of-school location, the staff member will:

1. Call **911**.
2. Contact the student's parent or guardian.
3. Contact the school principal or his/her designee and the suicide prevention coordinator.

### **Parental Notification and Involvement**

Parents or guardians should be contacted as soon as possible after a student has been identified as being at risk for suicide. If parent or guardian notification is delayed, the reasons for the delay shall be documented. If the principal, designee or mental health profession suspects child abuse or neglect, the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall be notified immediately. If the student is under the age of 18 and the parent/guardian refuses to contact a mental health provider, the school will have the option to contact and file a neglect report with DFCS.

### **Steps for Parental/Guardian Notification:**

1. Notify the parents/guardians about the situation and ask that they come to the school immediately.
2. When the parents/guardians arrive at the school, explain why you think their child is at risk for suicide.
3. Explain the importance of removing from the home (or locking up) firearms and other dangerous items, including over-the-counter and prescription medications and alcohol.
4. If the student is at a low or moderate suicide risk and does not need to be hospitalized, discuss available options for individual and/or family therapy. Provide the parent(s)/guardian(s) with the contact information of mental health service providers in the community. If possible, call and make an appointment while the parent(s)/guardian(s) are with you.
5. Provide the parent(s)/guardian(s) with resources to explain the risk of suicide and the role of parent(s)/guardian(s) in getting and maintaining help for their child.
6. Ask the parent(s)/guardian(s) to sign the Parent/Guardian Contact Acknowledgement Form confirming that they were notified of their child's risk and received referrals for assessment.
7. Tell the parents that you will follow up with them in a few days. If this follow-up conversation reveals that the parent has not contacted a mental health provider:
  - Stress the importance of getting the child help.
  - Discuss why they have not contacted a provider and offer to assist with the process.
8. If the student does not need to be hospitalized, release the student to the parents.

9. Document all contacts with the parent(s)/guardian(s).

### **Postvention**

A suicide death in a school community requires implementing a coordinated crisis response to assist staff, students, and families who are impacted by the death and to restore an environment focused on education.

**NOTE:** The coroner's or medical examiner's office must first confirm that the death was a suicide before any school official may state this as the cause of death. The school must adhere to the wishes of the family in this regard and respect their right to privacy and confidentiality.

- Principal will verify death.
- Principal/designee will ensure all staff know how to respond to inquiries and manage the campus for safety.
- Principal will notify the School Board and convene the CMT to implement crisis response plan that will take the appropriate actions:
  - Notify schools attended by family members of the deceased.
  - Contact and coordinate counseling sessions with external mental health professionals.
  - Reach out to and work with the family of the deceased by providing resources and supportive measures.
  - Notify all faculty and staff.
  - Promptly collect and safeguard the student's belongings from his/her desk or other storage areas, any student work or photo or staff belongings from his/her desk (in event of staff death).
  - Consult with family of deceased to determine a mutually agreeable time in private, to return the personal belongings.
  - Coordinate notifying students about the death(s).
  - Notify families of students about the death and the school's response.
  - Provide staff with guidance in talking to students.
  - Provide support to staff.
  - Identify, monitor, and support students who may be at risk.
  - Implement steps to help students with emotional regulation.
  - Participate in and/or advise on appropriate memorialization in the immediate aftermath.
  - Work with press/media.
  - Monitor social media.

### **BIA Staff will not:**

- announce the death of anyone over the public address system.
- hold an assembly program or bring large groups of students together in one place to discuss suicide.
- cancel school, classes or pre-planned activities unless absolutely necessary; students find comfort in following their normal routine when they are under stress, within reason.

### **Memorials:**

It is recognized that grieving individuals need a variety of opportunities to personally express their emotions and reactions to this type of death. Recommendations and ideas for a memorial should be taken into consideration and discussed with the school's Administration Staff and the crisis response team prior to being implemented. Memorials must be carefully and tastefully planned, considering a broad range of responses. A variety of activities may in fact occur to celebrate positive remembrances and these expressions often vary.