The School Counselor and Suicide Prevention/Awareness
(Adopted 2018)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position
School counselors work to identify behavioral and social/emotional signs of suicide risk among their students and ensure prevention methods are in place. It is the school counselor’s ethical and moral responsibility to report suspected suicide risk to legal guardians and the appropriate authorities. In acknowledging suspected suicide risk, school counselors exercise reasonable care to protect students from unforeseeable harm (ASCA, 2016).

The Rationale
According to the Center for Disease Control, in 2015 suicide was the second leading cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 35 and for youth ages 10 to 14 (2015). Overall the nation has seen a 24 percent increase in suicide completions over the past 15 years (CDC, 2015). Data from the 2015 National Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) showed that 29.9 percent, or three out of 10, U.S. high school students expressed feeling sad or hopeless almost daily for two or more weeks (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2015). In addition, 17.7 percent of students expressed suicide ideation, and 14.6 percent of students had completed plans for their suicide (CDC, 2015). These statistics are alarming and reveal that students in significant numbers experience feelings and thoughts that isolate and lead to suicidal ideation and plans. Raising awareness around suicide and implementing suicide prevention initiatives is important in reinforcing student support and safety measures.

The School Counselor’s Role
School counselors recognize the threat of suicide among adolescents and strive to create a supportive environment where suicidal thoughts are identified, and students are quickly connected to the appropriate intervention services. School counselors take the threat of suicide seriously and spend time responding to a student’s disclosure of suicidal ideation with sound crisis intervention counseling techniques (ASCA 2017). School counselors work to raise awareness of suicide and suicide ideation, train school personnel and create opportunities to identify resources available for school personnel (Desrochers & Houck, 2013).

To achieve their ethical obligation to protect students, school counselors must:

- Be informed about signs of suicidal thoughts
- Be knowledgeable about the resources available
- Always notify parents/guardians when placed on notice that a suicide is possible whether the information comes from the student’s self-report, rumors/hearsay or peer report (unless child abuse or neglect, then follow through with child or adult protective services). Gather as much information as possible to relay to parents/guardians
- Avoid quantifying suicide. If required to do a suicide assessment never negate a suicide or label a suicide as low-risk
- Prepare students, staff, colleagues and parents to recognize warning symptoms for suicidal behavior
- Refer students who demonstrate signs of suicidal thoughts to local community agencies ("13 Reasons Why, and the Role of the School Counselor to Combat Teen Suicide,” 2017)
Summary
Through the implementation of comprehensive suicide prevention/awareness, school counselors ensure students and faculty are well-prepared to address and identify the negative thoughts and experiences that could lead a student to suicide ideation.

References


