

## **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 Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2015), suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 15 and 35 and the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10 to 14. 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 (CDC, 2015). In addition, CDC (2015) reported that 17.7 percent of students expressed suicide ideation, and 14.6 percent of students had completed plans for their suicide. 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 children and adolescents and strive to create a supportive environment. School counselors do not wait for certainty but rather the notion of a potential suicide places school counselors in a position to immediately notify parents/guardians (ASCA 2017). School counselors contact parents/guardians when placed on notice that a suicide is possible through student self-report, peer report, rumors, hearsay or any other means. It is a well-known fact that students will often deny suicidal ideation to escape the gaze of adults while confiding their true intentions to their peers. School counselors provide parents/guardians with referral resources for students (Stone, 2018). In the case that the parents/guardians do not take seriously the potential threat, the school counselor makes a report to child protective service (Stone, 2018). 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 maintain current training in:

- Being informed about signs of suicidal thoughts
- Being knowledgeable about the resources available
- Preparing students, staff, colleagues and parents to recognize warning symptoms for suicidal behavior
- Referring students who demonstrate signs of suicidal thoughts to local community agencies

### **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 potentially lead a student to suicide ideation.

### **References**

American School Counselor Association. (2016). *Ethical standards for school counselors*. Retrieved from <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Ethics/EthicalStandards2016.pdf>

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Youth risk behavior surveillance system data: Adolescent and school health. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>

Desrochers J., & Houck G. (2013). Depression in children and adolescents: Guidelines for school practice: Principal leadership. Retrieved from [http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/April\\_13\\_Depression.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/April_13_Depression.pdf)

Population Reference Bureau. (2016). Suicide replaces homicide as second-leading cause of death among U.S. teenagers. Retrieved from <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2016/suicide-replaces-homicide-second-leading-cause-death-among-us-teens.aspx>

Stone, C. (2018). *Assessments and Third Party Software Alerts for Suicide Ideation*. ASCA January/February 2018.

### **Resources**

“13 Reasons Why” and the Role of the School Counselor to Combat Teen Suicide. (2017, July 2). Retrieved February 27, 2018, from <https://counseling.online.wfu.edu/blog/13-reasons-why-and-the-role-of-the-school-counselor-to-combat-teen-suicide/>