

HARVEST RIDGE COOPERATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL

SUICIDE PREVENTION POLICY

The Board of Directors of Harvest Ridge Cooperative Charter School (“HRCCS”) recognizes that suicide is a major cause of death among youth and should be taken seriously. To attempt to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students and families, the Board of Directors has developed prevention strategies and intervention procedures.

The policy has been developed in consultation with HRCCS and community stakeholders, HRCCS -employed mental health professionals, and suicide prevention experts and shall, at a minimum, address procedures relating to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.

Prevention and Instruction

Suicide prevention strategies may include, but not be limited to, efforts to promote a positive school climate that enhances students’ feelings of connectedness with HRCCS and is characterized by caring staff and harmonious interrelationships among students.

HRCCS’s instructional and student support program shall promote the healthy mental, emotional, and social development of students including, but not limited to, the development of problem-solving skills, coping skills, and resilience.

The Executive Director or designee may offer parents/guardians education or information which describes the severity of the youth suicide problem, HRCCS’s suicide prevention efforts, risk factors and warning signs of suicide, basic steps for helping suicidal youth, reducing the stigma of mental illness, and/or HRCCS and community resources that can help youth in crisis.

HRCCS’s instructional curriculum may include information about suicide prevention, as appropriate or needed, taking into consideration the grade level and age of the students. If offered or included in HRCCS’s instructional curriculum, suicide prevention instruction shall be designed to help students:

1. Identify and analyze signs of depression and self-destructive behaviors and understand how feelings of depression, loss, isolation, inadequacy, and anxiety can lead to thoughts of suicide.
2. Identify alternatives to suicide and develop coping and resiliency skills.
3. Learn to listen, be honest, share feelings, and get help when communicating with friends who show signs of suicidal intent.

4. Identify trusted adults, HRCCS resources, and/or community crisis intervention resources where youth, including those at high risk, such as youth bereaved by suicide; youth with disabilities, mental illness, or substance use disorders; youth experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings such as foster care; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth can get help and recognize that there is no stigma associated with seeking mental health, substance abuse, gender identity, or other support services.

Staff Development

Suicide prevention training for staff will be provided and be designed to help staff identify and find help for students at risk of suicide. The training may be offered under the discretion of the Executive Director and/or Board of Directors and/or in cooperation with one or more community mental health agencies and may include information on:

1. Research identifying risk factors, such as previous suicide attempt(s), history of depression or mental illness, substance abuse problems, family history of suicide or violence, feelings of isolation, interpersonal conflicts, a recent severe stressor or loss, family instability, and other factors.
2. Warning signs that may indicate suicidal intentions, including changes in students' appearance, personality, or behavior.
3. Research-based instructional strategies for teaching the suicide prevention curriculum and promoting mental and emotional health.
4. HRCCS and community resources and services for students and families in crisis and ways to access them.
5. HRCCS procedures for intervening when a student attempts, threatens, or discloses the desire to die by suicide.
6. Materials approved by HRCCS for training shall include how to identify appropriate mental health services, both at the HRCCS site and within the larger community, and when and how to refer youth and their families to those services.
7. Materials approved for training may also include programs that can be completed through self-review or suitable suicide prevention materials.

Intervention and Emergency Procedures

Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions, he/she shall promptly notify the Executive Director or designee. The Executive Director or designee shall then notify the student's parent/guardian as soon as possible and may also refer the student to mental health resources at HRCCS or in the community.

When a suicide attempt or threat is reported, the Executive Director or designee shall, at a minimum:

1. Ensure the student's physical safety by one of the following, as appropriate:
 - a. Securing immediate medical treatment if a suicide attempt has occurred;
 - b. Securing law enforcement and/or other emergency assistance if a suicidal act is being actively threatened;
 - c. Keeping the student under continuous adult supervision until the parent/guardian and/or appropriate support agent or agency can be contacted and has the opportunity to intervene.
2. Designate specific individuals to be promptly contacted, for example the HRCCS counselor, psychologist, nurse, Executive Director, and/or the student's parent/guardian, and, as necessary, local law enforcement or mental health agencies.
3. Document the incident in writing as soon as feasible.
4. Follow up with the parent/guardian and student in a timely manner to provide referrals to appropriate services as needed.
5. Provide access to counselors or other appropriate personnel to listen to and support students and staff who are directly or indirectly involved with the incident at HRCCS.
6. Provide an opportunity for all who respond to the incident to debrief, evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used, and make recommendations for future actions.

In the event a suicide occurs or is attempted on the HRCCS campus, the Executive Director or designee shall follow the crisis intervention procedures contained in HRCCS's safety plan. After consultation with the Executive Director or designee and the student's parent/guardian about facts that may be divulged in accordance with the laws governing confidentiality of student record information, the Executive Director or designee may provide students, parents/guardians, and staff with information, counseling, and/or referrals to community agencies as needed.

HRCCS staff may receive assistance from HRCCS counselors or other mental health professionals in determining how best to discuss the suicide or attempted suicide with students.

Students shall be encouraged through the education program and in HRCCS activities to notify a teacher, Principal, Executive Director, another HRCCS administrator, psychologist, HRCCS counselor, or other adult when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's suicidal intentions.

HRCCS Employees Acting Within Scope

HRCCS shall ensure that employees act only within the authorization and scope of the employee's credential or license. Nothing in this Policy shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging an HRCCS employee to diagnose or treat mental illness unless the employee is specifically licensed and employed to do so.