

Creative Arts Charter School Youth Suicide Prevention Policy

The Governing Board of Creative Arts Charter School recognizes that suicide is a leading cause of death among youth and that an even greater amount of youth consider (17 percent of high school students) and attempt suicide (over 8 percent of high school students) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).

Schools are in a unique position to identify and reach students who may be at risk for suicide. With well-trained staff; school counselors; families; and classmates, schools can teach and reinforce resiliency through socio-emotional and restorative practices and provide appropriate suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies.

This policy aims to safeguard students and staff against suicide attempts, deaths and other trauma associated with suicide, including ensuring adequate supports for students, staff, and families affected by suicide attempts and loss. Accordingly, Creative Arts Charter School will create and maintain positive school climates; hold high expectations of students; encourage caring relationships between students, staff members, and families; and foster meaningful school involvement; some of the protective factors that decrease a student’s risk for suicide.

This policy is based on research and best practices in suicide prevention, and has been adopted with the understanding that suicide prevention activities decrease suicide risk, increase help-seeking behavior, identify those at risk of suicide, and decrease suicidal behaviors. Empirical evidence refutes a common belief that talking about suicide can increase risk or “place the idea in someone’s mind.”

In an attempt to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students and families, Creative Arts Charter School has developed strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, and the identification of the mental health challenges frequently associated with suicidal thinking and behavior. These strategies shall include professional development and training for school employees who serve students in grades 6-8.

Overall Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention

The School Director shall involve school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, psychologists), administrators, other school staff members, parents/guardians/caregivers, students, local health agencies and professionals, law

enforcement, and community organizations in planning, implementing, and evaluating the School's strategies for suicide prevention and intervention.

To ensure the policies regarding suicide prevention are properly adopted, implemented, and updated, Creative Arts Charter School shall appoint an individual (or team) to serve as the suicide prevention point of contact for the School. This policy shall be reviewed and revised as indicated, no less than annually, in conjunction with the previously mentioned community stakeholders. Creative Arts Charter School's Suicide Prevention Team is made up of the following individuals: School Counselor and School Director.

Prevention

A. Messaging about Suicide Prevention

Messaging about suicide has an effect on suicidal thinking and behaviors. Consequently, Creative Arts Charter School has critically reviewed and will continue to review all materials and resources used in awareness efforts to ensure they align with best practices for safe messaging about suicide.

B. Suicide Prevention Training and Education

The Creative Arts Charter School has carefully reviewed available staff training to ensure it promotes the mental health model of suicide prevention and does not encourage the use of the stress model to explain suicide.

Training shall be provided for all school staff members and other adults on campus (including substitutes and intermittent staff, volunteers, interns, tutors, coaches, and expanded learning [afterschool] staff that support students in grade 6-8.

C. When a student is identified by a staff person as potentially suicidal, they will be immediately (same day) referred to the School Counselor for further assessment.

Training:

- At least annually, all staff shall receive training on the risk factors and warning signs of suicide, suicide prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention.
- All suicide prevention trainings shall be offered under the direction of school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, psychologists, or social workers) who have received advanced training specific to suicide and may benefit from collaboration with one or more county and/or community mental health agencies. Staff training can be

adjusted year-to-year based on previous professional development activities and emerging best practices.

- At a minimum, all Middle School staff shall participate in training on the core components of suicide prevention (identification of suicide risk factors and warning signs, prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention) at the beginning of their employment. Core components of the general suicide prevention training shall include:
 - Suicide risk factors, warning signs, and protective factors;
 - How to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide;
 - How to respond appropriately to the youth who has suicidal thoughts. Such responses shall include constant supervision of any student judged to be at risk for suicide and an immediate referral for a suicide risk assessment;
 - Emphasis on immediately referring (same day) any student who is identified to be at risk of suicide for assessment while staying under constant monitoring by staff member;
 - Emphasis on reducing stigma associated with mental illness and that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide;
 - Reviewing the data annually to look for any patterns or trends of the prevalence or occurrence of suicide ideation, attempts, or death. Data from the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (Cal-SCHLS) should also be analyzed to identify school climate deficits and drive program development. See the Cal-SCHLS Web site at <http://cal-schls.wested.org/>.
- In addition to initial orientations to the core components of suicide prevention, ongoing annual staff professional development for all staff supporting grades 6-8, should include the following components:
 - The impact of traumatic stress on emotional and mental health;
 - Common misconceptions about suicide;
 - School and community suicide prevention resources;
 - Appropriate messaging about suicide (correct terminology, safe messaging guidelines);
 - The factors associated with suicide (risk factors, warning signs, protective factors);

- How to identify youth who may be at risk of suicide;
 - Appropriate ways to interact with a youth who is demonstrating emotional distress or is suicidal. Specifically, how to talk with a student about their thoughts of suicide and how to respond to such thinking; how to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide and appropriately respond and provide support based on district guidelines;
 - Procedures for responding to suicide risk. Such procedures should emphasize that the suicidal student should be constantly supervised until a suicide risk assessment is completed;
 - Responding after a suicide occurs (suicide postvention);
 - Resources regarding youth suicide prevention;
 - Emphasis on stigma reduction and the fact that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide;
 - Emphasis that any student who is identified to be at risk of suicide is to be immediately referred (same day) for assessment while being constantly monitored by a staff member.
- The professional development also shall include additional information regarding groups of students judged by the school, and available research, to be at elevated risk for suicide. These groups include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Youth affected by suicide;
 - Youth with a history of suicide ideation or attempts;
 - Youth with disabilities, mental illness, or substance abuse disorders;
 - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth;
 - Youth experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings, such as foster care;
 - Youth who have suffered traumatic experiences;

D. Employee Qualifications and Scope of Services

Employees of the Creative Arts Charter School must act only within the authorization and scope of their credential, licensing, and training. While it is expected that school professionals

are able to identify suicide risk factors and warning signs, and to prevent the immediate risk of a suicidal behavior, treatment of suicidal ideation is typically beyond the scope of services offered in the school setting. In addition, treatment of the mental health challenges often associated with suicidal thinking typically requires mental health resources beyond what schools are able to provide. Creative Arts Charter School's focus will be on prevention and referral strategies.

E. Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers Participation and Education

- To the extent possible, parents/guardians/caregivers should be included in all suicide prevention efforts. At a minimum, schools shall share with parents/guardians/caregivers the Creative Arts Charter School suicide prevention policy and procedures.
- This suicide prevention policy shall be prominently displayed on the Creative Arts Charter School Web page and included in the parent handbook.

F. Student Participation and Education

The Creative Arts Charter School has carefully reviewed available student curricula to ensure it promotes the mental health model of suicide prevention and does not encourage the use of the stress model to explain suicide.

Under the supervision of School Director and School Counselor, students in Middle School shall:

- Receive developmentally appropriate, student-centered education about the warning signs of mental health challenges and emotional distress;
- Receive developmentally appropriate guidance regarding the district's suicide prevention, intervention, and referral procedures.
- The content of the education shall include:
 - Coping strategies for dealing with stress and trauma;
 - How to recognize behaviors (warning signs) and life issues (risk factors) associated with suicide and mental health issues in oneself and others;
 - Help-seeking strategies for oneself and others, including how to engage school-based and community resources and refer peers for help;

- Emphasis on reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and the fact that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide.
- The Creative Arts Charter School will support the creation and implementation of programs and/or activities on campus that raise awareness about mental wellness and suicide prevention.

Intervention, Assessment, Referral

A. Staff

Two Creative Arts Charter School staff members who have received advanced training in suicide intervention shall be designated as the primary and secondary suicide prevention liaisons. Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student’s suicidal intentions, they shall promptly notify the primary designated suicide prevention liaison (School Counselor). If this primary suicide prevention liaison is unavailable, the staff shall promptly notify the secondary suicide prevention liaison (School Director).

- Under normal circumstances, the primary and/or secondary contact persons shall notify the principal, another school administrator, school counselor, school psychologist if different from the primary and secondary contact persons.
- The principal, another school administrator, school counselor, school psychologist, social worker, or nurse shall then notify, if appropriate and in the best interest of the student, the student’s parents/guardians/caregivers as soon as possible and shall refer the student to mental health resources in the school or community. Determination of notification to parents/guardians/caregivers should follow a formal initial assessment to ensure that the student is not endangered by parental notification.

If the student is in imminent danger (has access to a gun, is on a rooftop, or in other unsafe conditions), a call shall be made to 911 immediately.

- Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student’s suicidal intentions, they shall promptly notify the primary or secondary suicide prevention liaisons.
- Students experiencing suicidal ideation shall not be left unsupervised.
- A referral process should be prominently disseminated to all staff members, so they know how to respond to a crisis and are knowledgeable about the school and community-based resources.

- The School Director shall establish crisis intervention procedures to ensure student safety and appropriate communications if a suicide occurs or an attempt is made by a student or adult on campus or at a school-sponsored activity.

B. Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers

A referral process should be prominently disseminated to all parents/guardians/caregivers, so they know how to respond to a crisis and are knowledgeable about the school and community-based resources.

C. Students

Students shall be encouraged to notify a staff member when they are experiencing emotional distress or suicidal ideation, or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's emotional distress, suicidal ideation, or attempt.

D. Parental Notification and Involvement

Creative Arts Charter School shall identify a process to ensure continuing care for the student identified to be at risk of suicide. The following steps should be followed to ensure continuity of care:

After a referral is made for a student, school staff shall verify with the parent/guardian/caregiver that follow-up treatment has been accessed. Parents/guardians/caregivers will be required to provide documentation of care for the student.

If parents/guardians/caregivers refuse or neglect to access treatment for a student who has been identified to be at-risk for suicide or in emotional distress, the suicide point of contact (or other appropriate school staff member) will meet with the parents/guardians/caregivers to identify barriers to treatment (e.g., cultural stigma, financial issues) and work to rectify the situation and build understanding of the importance of care. If follow-up care for the student is still not provided, school staff will contact Child Protective Services (CPS) to report neglect of the youth ((415)-558-2650 OR (800)-856-5553).

For Staff

Staff will receive professional development led by the School Counselor or a designated mental health professional on risk and protective factors, warning signs, Creative Arts Charter School crisis intervention procedures, referrals for mental health services, and resources regarding youth suicide prevention. Trainings will include the following topics:

- **Social-Emotional Professional Development**
 - All teaching staff will be trained in developmentally appropriate social-emotional curricula within the first two (2) years of employment at Creative Arts Charter School (e.g.: Responsive Classroom, Origins by Developmental Designs).

- **Identifying and Connecting Students at Risk to Mental Health Support**
 - In-person training led by the School Counselor or a designated mental health professional including: noticing the warning signs of mental health issues, speaking with a student directly when there are concerns, and connecting the student to on and off-campus mental health support. MIDDLE SCHOOL STAFF ONLY

- **Crisis Intervention Procedures Training**
 - In-person training led by the School Counselor or a designated mental health professional reviewing staff protocol for intervening in student crises and referring students for support. Response for the following crises are included in the training (as developmentally appropriate for the age group): Homelessness/Loss of housing, physical abuse, sexual abuse or assault, neglect, pregnancy, self-harm, suicidal ideation, violent threats, substance use, the impact of trauma (both complex and chronic) on mental health and development. MIDDLE SCHOOL STAFF ONLY

- **Mandated Reporter Training**
 - Training on the identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect. Training reviews in-depth signs of abuse/neglect, the process for reporting neglect and abuse, the support provided to families affected by abuse/neglect, and the legal responsibilities of mandated reporters. This training will be conducted annually. ALL STAFF

- **Safe Schools Training**
 - Online annual training, “Youth Suicide: Awareness & Prevention”. ALL STAFF

Intervention, Assessment, and Referral

Creative Arts Charter School staff members will follow the protocols outlined below following an attempted suicide:

Action Plan for In-School Suicide Attempts

If a suicide attempt is made during the school day on campus, staff will take the following steps:

- Remain calm. Remember the student may be overwhelmed, confused, and emotionally distressed;
- Move all other students out of the immediate area;
- Call 911 and give them as much information about any suicide note, medications taken, and access to weapons, if applicable;
- Immediately contact your School Counselor and/or School Psychologist and an Administrator.
- If needed and you are able to, provide medical first aid until a medical professional is available;
- Do not leave the student alone (even if they need to go to the restroom, make sure they are accompanied either by you or another adult);
- Listen to and encourage the student to talk;
- Provide comfort to the student by reviewing options for action and support and resources including crisis lines and student's identified supportive staff, peers, family;
- Be respectful;
- Promise privacy and help, but do not promise confidentiality;
- Release student only to a to a person who is qualified and trained to provide help or parent/guardian.

Action Plan for Out-of-School Suicide Attempts

If a suicide attempt made by a student is outside of Creative Arts Charter School property, it is crucial that the school respect the privacy of the student and maintain a confidential record of the actions taken to intervene, support, and protect the student. The following steps should be implemented:

- Contact the parents/guardians and offer support to the family;
- Discuss with the family how they would like the school to respond to the attempt while minimizing widespread rumors among teachers, staff, and students;
- Obtain permission from the parents/guardians to share information to ensure the facts regarding the crisis is correct;

- Designate a staff member to handle media requests and have that person contact the Creative Arts Charter School Director
- Determine and provide appropriate support to affected students;
- Offer information and education to the parent/guardian and student steps for reintegration to school.

Re-Entry After a Suicide Attempt

When a student returns to school after a mental health crisis, an Administrator and the School Counselor will meet with the student's parent/guardian and the student to discuss the process for re- entry and the student's readiness to return to school. This process will include the following:

- The School Counselor or designated Administrator will coordinate mental health services with the student, parent/guardian, and external mental health care providers.
- The parent/guardian will provide documentation from a mental health care provider with the student's discharge plan that includes the hospitalization dates and contact information of the treating clinician.
- The School Counselor or designated Administrator will meet with the leadership team and all pertinent parties to discuss the support plan for the student while maintaining confidentiality within the group.
- The School Counselor or designated Administrator will share with the student's teacher the support plan and accommodations or adjustments that should be put in place to help re-integrate the student back to school including accommodations for making up missed work.
- If needed, the School Counselor or designated Administrator will work with the School Psychologist and Special Education staff to put in place an IEP or 504 plan for the student.
- The School Counselor or designated Administrator will assess the students risk level for at least three weeks after hospitalization and will schedule periodic check-ins with the student and parent/guardian to help the student readjust to the school community and address any ongoing concerns.
- The student may engage in mental health treatment on campus if they are not being provided by an external mental health care provider, however every effort will be made to assist the student and the student's parent/guardian in accessing external mental health services.

Postvention: Responding After a Death by Suicide

A death by suicide in the school community (whether by a student or staff member) can have devastating consequences on students and staff. Therefore, it is important to be prepared ahead of time in the event of such a tragedy. This action plan incorporates both immediate and long-term steps and objectives.

Immediate Response

- Have a medical professional confirm death and cause;
- Identify a staff member to contact deceased's family (School Director or School Counselor);
- Enact the Suicide Postvention Response Plan
- Notify all staff members (ideally in-person or via phone, not via e-mail or mass notification);
- Coordinate an all-staff meeting, sharing information that is relevant and which you have permission to disclose to include:
 - Notification (if not already conducted) to staff about suicide death;
 - Emotional support and resources available to staff;
 - Notification to students about suicide death and the availability of support services;
 - Prepare staff to respond to needs of students regarding the following:
 - Review of protocols for referring students for support/assessment;
 - Talking points for staff to notify students;
 - Resources available to students (on and off campus).
- Identify students significantly affected by suicide death and other students at risk of imitative behavior;
- Identify students affected by suicide death but not at risk of imitative behavior;
- Communicate with the larger school community about the suicide death;
- Consider funeral arrangements for family and school community;
- Respond to memorial requests in respectful and non-harmful manner
 - Responses should be handled in a thoughtful way and their impact on other students should be considered;
- Contact Director to act as spokesperson skilled to cover story without the use of explicit, graphic, or dramatic content and utilize and respond to social media outlets:
 - Identify what platforms students are using to respond to suicide death
 - Identify/train staff and students to monitor social media outlets

Longer-term Response

- Consider important dates (i.e., anniversary of death, deceased birthday, graduation, or other significant event) and how these will be addressed;

- Support siblings, close friends, teachers, and/or students of deceased;
 - Consider long-term memorials and how they may impact students who are emotionally vulnerable and at risk of suicide.