



Date: March 2023

To: Public School District Administrators, Private School Administrators, and Interested Parties

From: Paul Manriquez, Assistant State Superintendent 
Division for Learning Support

Re: Notification of Youth Suicide Prevention Resources

Attached, please find the Model Notice of Suicide Prevention Resources for 2023. Wisconsin Statute sec. 115.365 requires that “Each school board and the governing body of each private school annually shall inform their professional staff of the resources available from the department and other sources regarding suicide prevention.” It also requires the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to create a model notice for schools. This notice is attached and available for download, along with many other resources, on the [DPI Youth Suicide Prevention webpage](#).

Data from the 2021 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) present concerning results regarding youth suicide in our state. When compared to 2011 YRBS data, there has been a steady decline in the students reporting positive protective factors (sense of belonging, trusted school adult, confident they can get help when needed) and an increase in many suicide indicators. From 2011 to 2021, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of high school students reporting themselves as clinically depressed (23% in 2011 and 34% in 2021). Across those same ten years, there has also been an increase in the percentage of students who report that they have made a plan for ending their lives (12% in 2011 to 15% in 2021). Finally, the 2021 percentage of female students who report attempting suicide is twice that of males (11% for females and 5% for males). You can find YRBS data from 2021 to 2009 on the [DPI YRBS webpage](#).

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, to address suicide prevention in Wisconsin schools, administers an annual Peer-to-Peer Suicide Prevention Grant Program. Any tribal, private, or public school where pupils attend high school grades is eligible to apply for the Peer-to-Peer Suicide Prevention Grant. Recipients of a grant under this program may use the grant funds of up to \$1,000 to support an existing peer-to-peer suicide prevention program or implement a new one. Grantees are highly encouraged to implement an evidenced-based program (such as Hope Squad or Sources of Strength). More information on this grant program can be found on the [DPI Peer-to-Peer Suicide Prevention Grants webpage](#).

Please share this model notice with all of your staff members; anyone who works with students must be able to recognize suicide warning signs and know how to respond quickly. Since this model notice is not covered by copyright, you can easily customize it by including resources from your school, local mental health providers, county mental health services, crisis services, or local chapters of Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA). You may also put the notice on your district letterhead, make copies, or forward it at will.

Please join me in continuing our important work in youth suicide prevention. If you have questions, please contact the Student Services/Prevention and Wellness team at dpisspw@dpi.wi.gov or (608) 266-8960

Attachment



Annual Model Notice For Youth Suicide Prevention

Spring 2023

Youth Suicide Prevention Resources are Available

To get updated information on suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention resources, visit [DPI's website](#). There are online information and training modules, a downloadable document on suicide prevention requirements in state law, a fact sheet on youth suicide, and an updated suicide prevention curriculum for students. Other resources include strategies on suicide interventions, memorial suggestions, and other pertinent topics.

Resources for emergency situations:

988

Dial for immediate assistance in a suicide or mental health crisis

HOPELINE

text "HOPELINE" to 741741 or visit

<https://www.centerforsuicideawareness.org/hopeline>

Resources for non-emergency situations:

WI Safe and Healthy Schools Training Center

www.wishschools.org

Prevent Suicide Wisconsin

www.preventsuicidewi.org

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

www.sprc.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

<https://afsp.org/>

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When youth are facing what they believe is a crisis and exhibit warning signs of suicide, be sure they are not left alone or sent home without supervision!

Know the Signs

Suicide doesn't usually happen out of the blue— most often, there are warning signs for others to see or hear. Get the **FACTs** and know the signs of suicidal thinking in your students, friends, and family members. (see *FACTs* chart on right.)

Suicide is a Complex Problem

Multiple factors are involved when someone dies by suicide. Oversimplifying the reasons someone takes their own life is not helpful. For instance, saying bullying “caused” someone to end their life is not accurate. Not all bullying victims kill themselves. Research suggests many factors contribute to suicide. These include: biological factors, precipitating factors, and triggering events. Examples of biological factors include mental illness or losing a family member to suicide. Precipitating factors include poor grades, attending an unsafe school, victimization, or family rejection. Crisis/triggering events include experiencing a major loss, humiliation or bullying, and having access to lethal means. Suicide is a complex problem that is often misunderstood when oversimplified. *From: American Association of Suicidology (AAS) webinar January 2011.*

Identifying the factors for disproportionate youth suicide risk is vital to prevention.

Mental health issues: the most common mental illness leading to suicide is depression. It is also the most treatable!

LGB youth: the [2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\) Suicide Data Summary](#) showed almost half of LGB youth seriously considered suicide and are 3.5 times more likely to attempted suicide than their non-LGB peers.

Female youth: 2021 YRBS data indicated over half of female students ages 16-17 years old experienced being so sad or hopeless every day for two weeks in a row or more that they stopped doing usual activities.

Lethal means safety can save lives.

(see www.means5matter.com and <https://besmartforkids.org/>)

Secure storage of all lethal means is a critical prevention strategy and reducing access provides the most significant reduction in youth suicide rates. Most often, youth who attempt suicide use a gun or drugs kept in the home. Do not allow youth to have unsupervised access to firearms and dangerous medications.

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SUICIDE PREVENTION WARNING SIGNS (FACTS)

FEELINGS

- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Feeling trapped – like there's no way out
- Having no sense of purpose in life

ACTIONS

- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities
- Withdrawing from friends, family, society, and typical activities
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Giving away prized possessions

CHANGES

- Decline in quality of school work
- Dramatic mood changes
- Anxiety, agitation, change of eating/sleeping habits

THREATS

- Threatening/talking about hurting self

From American Association of Suicidology



Suicide is a Complex Problem (cont'd)

What can you do if you are concerned about a student?

Teachers and other school staff are well-positioned to observe student behavior and to ACT if there is a suspicion that a student may consider self-harm. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem; but for kids, their problems can seem endless at this stage. If we get them through the crisis, there is a 90 percent chance that they will never attempt suicide. ACT stands for **Acknowledge, Care, and Tell.**

Acknowledge feelings rather than minimizing them. Telling a student to “get over it” or “move on” is not a realistic outcome when dealing with a person with depression.

“I’m sorry to hear about this. It sounds really hard.”

Show Care and Concern for the student by taking the next step.

“I’m worried about you. I don’t want anything bad to happen to you or for you to be hurt.”

Tell a member of your crisis team. They know how to work with students who have concerns like these.

“Let’s go talk with someone in the counseling office.”

These steps (Acknowledge-Care-Tell) are central components of the “Signs of Suicide” program (SOS), an evidence-based schoolwide intervention program. SOS kits for middle school and high school are available through your local CESA. The law mandates schools to educate students on suicide prevention; see the [laws handout](#) on the DPI website for further details on curriculum.



Text HOPELINE
to 741741



Common Concerns

What if I make a mistake? Can I be sued?

State law insulates all public and private school district employees and volunteers from civil liability for their acts and omissions when trying to intervene in a student’s possible suicide.

Lawmakers found it so important that adults take action when a student is suicidal that they protected those adults from any civil liability for their intervention efforts.

Does asking about suicide cause a student to attempt it? No. This issue has been thoroughly studied. By asking a student about suicidal intent, you are offering to help them. Please do your best to reach out to students. Don’t be afraid to ask the question, “Are you thinking about hurting or killing yourself?”



Seeing Urgent Warning Signs? Here's What to Avoid

All children and adolescents can experience moodiness and will take time to ask life's big questions. Since they lack the perspective of time, they can become overwhelmed. The best roles for teachers are to support students, and if you see the suicide warning signs, use ACT. Some of the statements below might make perfect sense for students who aren't suicidal; but when kids are in crisis, these things can make it worse.

Here are some actions and words to avoid when you see the urgent warning signs and positive, alternative options:

Don't Shame - Validate

NOT: "You've got to get over this. It's not a big deal."

RATHER: "You seem to be struggling with something. How can I help?"

NOT: "You're too sensitive. Grow up!"

RATHER: "I can tell something's really bothering you. What's up?"

Don't Delay - ACT

When you see urgent warning signs, *get help right away*, don't wait.

Don't Blame - Support

NOT: "If you wanted a better grade, you would've worked harder."

RATHER: "You're disappointed in yourself. How can we do better?"

NOT: "Maybe you should change your attitude if you want friends."

RATHER: "Tell me what you look for in a friend. How can that be you?"

Don't Give Up - Persevere

Suicide is NOT a destiny—when people make it through the suicidal crisis, they usually go on to live healthy, productive lives!

Don't Do It Alone - It Takes a Village

Enlist other pupil services staff or administration to help you!



This publication is available from:

Division for Learning Support

Student Services/Prevention and Wellness

(608) 267-0363

dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/youth-suicide-prevention

March 2023 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, creed, age, national origin, ancestry, pregnancy, marital status or parental status, sexual orientation, or ability and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts of America and other designated youth groups.

