



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局
Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

香港九龍九龍塘沙福道 19 號 教育局九龍塘教育服務中心西座二樓 201 室 教育心理服務(九龍一)組
Educational Psychology Service (Kowloon 1) Section, Room W201, 2/F, West Block, Education Bureau KTESC, 19 Suffolk Road, Kowloon Tong, Kowloon, Hong Kong

本局檔號 Our Ref.: **EDB(EPSK1)/23-10/3**

電話 Telephone: 3698 4321

來函檔號 Your Ref.:

傳真 Fax Line: 2715 8056

To: Supervisors and Heads of all Primary Schools

1 December 2023

Dear Supervisors / Principals,

Early Identification and Support of Students with Mental Health Needs

This letter aims to urge all primary schools in Hong Kong to early identify and support students with mental health needs.

Details

The Government has always attached great importance to the mental health of children. Relevant international and local studies have pointed out that suicide is a complicated social problem caused by the interaction of multiple factors, including mental health issues, psychological concerns, interpersonal relationships, adjustment problems, as well as various types of pressure in life. The Government set up the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides (the Committee) in March 2016. The Committee issued its final report in November of the same year and put forward a number of proposed measures. The Government has accepted the report's recommendations and implemented relevant measures. The Government also established the standing Advisory Committee on Mental Health in November 2017 to assist the Government in developing policies, strategies and measures related to mental health, including strengthening mental health support services to children and adolescents.

At the school level, in accordance with the recommendations of the Final Report of the Committee, the Education Bureau (EDB) strives to assist schools in adopting the Whole School

Approach at three levels, namely “Universal”, “Selective” and “Indicated”¹, to promote mental health among students and enhance support for students with mental health needs, including those with suicidal risk. EDB also reminds schools from time to time to pay close attention to the mental health of students, help them deal with emotions and stress, and cope with academic, social or emotional developmental problems in a proactive manner. Professionals of different disciplines in schools (including guidance personnel, school social workers, school-based educational psychologists) provide students with appropriate support, strengthen communication with parents, understand students’ emotional states and provide further assistance to students in need and refer students with emotional distress to professionals in a timely manner. Schools can also flexibly allocate school resources to employ additional staff and enhance support for students according to their needs.

The epidemic in the past few years has caused an unprecedented impact on the mental health of Hong Kong citizens. There was no exception with students. They faced greater adjustment challenges following the full resumption to normalcy. In view of the recent upward trend of student suicide cases, with a majority of which are secondary school students, the Government has taken immediate action to strengthen the services and support provided to students, increase the protective factors for students’ mental health, and strive to reduce the impact of risk factors on students. EDB issued a circular memorandum on 9 November 2023, strongly advised schools to prioritise the protection of students’ well-being and their mental health, and encouraged teachers be vigilant of students’ mental health. Schools should review students’ homework load, schools’ assessment arrangements and lesson timetables in a practical and professional manner, to create more space for students, and to ensure that students have sufficient rest and relaxation time to engage in activities that are beneficial to their body and mind, so that students can learn and grow healthily and happily. EDB also calls on all schools in Hong Kong to launch the “Spread the Love, Care and Shine” Campaign in November 2023 to encourage students to care more about themselves and others, enhance their sense of well-being, and strengthen the protective factors of mental health. Details of the “Spread the Love, Care and Shine” Campaign are set out in EDB Circular Memorandum No. 209/2023 “Mental Health@School” Measures for Promoting of Students’ Mental Health and the “Spread the Love, Care and Shine” Campaign designated webpage.

EDBCM No. 209/2023 “Mental Health@School” Measures for Promotion of Students’ Mental Health:

<https://applications.edb.gov.hk/circular/upload/EDBCM/EDBCM23209E.pdf>



¹ Targets at the universal level are general students, teachers and parents; targets at the selective level are students at risks of mental health issues; and targets at the indicated level are students with mental health problems.

“Spread the Love, Care and Shine” Campaign designated webpage:

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/tc/promotion-at-the-universal-level/promotional-resources-for-schools/112.html>

(Chinese version only)



In the meantime, in order to strengthen students' understanding of mental health and to assist schools to promote mental health, EDB launched the “Mental Health Literacy Resource Package” (hereinafter referred to as “resource package”) suitable for upper primary levels in November this year. Schools are encouraged to make good use of the resource package to teach students how to maintain good mental health, understand mental illnesses and effective treatments, reduce stigmas of help-seeking and towards people with mental illness, and promote the culture of help-seeking. To help school personnel use the teaching materials appropriately to enhance students' mental health, and to understand the rationale of the design and teaching ideas of the resource package, EDB will conduct a workshop on 7 December 2023. Teachers and guidance personnel may enroll the workshop through EDB training calendar system on or before 5 December 2023 (Course ID: SE0020230263).

“Mental Health Literacy (Key Stage 2) Resource Package” designated webpage:

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/tc/promotion-at-the-universal-level/promotional-resources-for-schools/110.html>

(Chinese version only)



Early identification and support

EDB hopes that schools and parents pay more attention to the students' mental health condition during this critical period, early identify students at higher risk of suicide, and provide them with appropriate support as soon as possible to build a stronger safety net.

(i) Identification and support for students with suicidal risk

EDB urges school guidance teams to review the condition of students with mental health needs in schools as soon as possible, especially students who have been/are depressed or have suicidal thoughts. School personnel can refer to “A Resource Handbook for Schools: Detecting, Supporting and Making Referral for Students with Suicidal Behaviours” to preliminarily identify more vulnerable students and give heed to whether they have warning signs of suicide. After preliminary identification, school guidance personnel should launch follow-up services to identify students with different level of suicidal risk through individual interviews with students at higher risk. Schools should first discuss with the school's inter-disciplinary team (including guidance masters/mistresses, guidance personnel, school social workers and school-based educational

psychologists) to flexibly deploy its manpower and resources to give priority to take care of and counsel students with higher suicidal risks. The school personnel are recommended to refer to the Guidelines on “How Schools can Help Students with Mental Health Problems” to provide support to students as soon as possible, such as guiding students to consider coping skills for overcoming difficulties and the support available for them, meeting with students regularly and providing them with group training, conducting individual counselling on relaxation techniques and coping methods, and arranging appropriate school-based support and activities (e.g., positive thinking classes), and maintaining close communication with the parents, providing them with information about relevant community resources. Please refer to **Annex 1** for details.

(ii) Enhanced support for school personnel

With a view to strengthening school personnel’s early identification and support of students with suicidal risk, in addition to providing the above-mentioned “A Resource Handbook for Schools: Detecting, Supporting and Making Referral for Students with Suicidal Behaviours”, the Guidelines on “How Schools can Help Students with Mental Health Problems” and other relevant information on the “Mental Health@School” one-stop student mental health information website (mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk), EDB will organise an online “gatekeeper” training course for primary schools on **18 December 2023**. In this course, educational psychologists from EDB will share suicidal behaviours and warning signs, as well as how to respond to signs of suicide. Teachers and guidance personnel may enroll the course through EDB Training Calendar System **on or before 13 December 2023** (Course ID: SE0020230287).

Enhanced community support

Subsequent to the school-based intervention provided by the inter-disciplinary guidance team, if the school confirms that it has difficulty in deploying manpower to handle the newly identified students with higher risk of suicide, (i) publicly-funded primary schools² that have participated in the “Student Mental Health Support Scheme” may consult the multi-disciplinary team of the Scheme as soon as possible to seek additional support; (ii) publicly-funded schools and other schools that have not participated in the “Student Mental Health Support Scheme” may contact the school’s respective Educational Psychology Service Section of EDB (Please refer to **Annex 2** for the enquiry hotline of each district), and seek professional consultation on how to support students with mental health needs at the school system level and to seek more advice for support. Schools should note that if a student is seriously injured, life-threatening or needs immediate support, the school should immediately activate the crisis management procedure and

² Publicly-funded primary schools include government primary schools, aided primary schools (including the primary section of special schools) and primary schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme.

take prompt action, including calling the police for help or sending the student to the hospital for treatment.

For the early identification of students with mental health needs and at risk of suicide, EDB will continue to provide “gatekeeper” training for teachers, parents and students. EDB will organise face-to-face parent seminar on 9 December 2023 to help parents support their children’s mental health. Moreover, a series of workshops for teachers, school social workers and guidance personnel will be conducted in the first quarter of 2024 to enhance their knowledge and skills for taking care of students with mental health needs. We urge schools to take note of these programmes and encourage parents and school personnel to actively participate in relevant training programmes.

The Government hopes to bring all sectors of the community together to support students to cope with different problems and challenges along their growth journey. The Government will continue to introduce measures and resources related to enhancing students’ mental health. Schools are reminded to take note of and actively participate in the up-coming events.

For enquiries, please contact Ms Mandy YEUNG of the Educational Psychology Service (Kowloon 1) at 3698 4311.

Ms Mandy HO
for Secretary for Education

- Annex 1: Recommendations for early identification and support for students with suicidal risks (Primary Schools)
- Annex 2: Contact information of Educational Psychology Service Sections

**Recommendations for early identification and support for
students with suicidal risks (Primary Schools)**

In order to early identify and support students at risk of suicide, school teachers and social workers can refer to “A Resource Handbook for Schools: Detecting, Supporting and Making Referral for Students with Suicidal Behaviours” published by EDB and identify students at higher risk:

A Resource Handbook for Schools: Detecting, Supporting and Making Referral for Students with Suicidal Behaviours:

https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/uploads/mh/content/document/Resource_Handbook_for_Schools_Eng_Mar_2017.pdf



(1) Preliminary identification of students in need

Identify students who may be more vulnerable, such as those with the following risk factors:

- Social support: Poor family or peer relationships, or weak support network.
- Emotional regulation: Emotions are more sensitive, more reactive, or easier to lose control of.
- Coping skills and attitudes: Tend to use passive and avoidant coping style to cope with significant events or traumatic events.
- Recent major stressful events: such as repeating a grade, changing schools, parental divorce or relationship deterioration, or experiencing the death or suicide of someone close to them.
- Repeated self-harm behaviours or past suicide attempts.

Pay attention to warning signs of suicide

Pay attention to the possible suicide warning signs of these more vulnerable students through daily observation, for example:

- Physical aspect: e.g., fatigue, increasing symptoms of physical discomfort, and abnormal inattention to personal hygiene or appearance.
- Behavioral aspect: e.g., increased absenteeism, sharp decline in grades, and becoming socially isolated.
- Emotional aspect: e.g., mood changes or remarkable unstable emotions, loss of interest and motivation in daily activities.
- Cognitive aspect: more difficult to stay focus than before or keep their mind clear, and have frequent self-critical thoughts.
- Words or behaviors related to death and suicide: such as mentioning negative or hopeless thoughts in conversation or on social media, sending beloved items, and saying goodbye to family or friends as if they were saying goodbye.

(2) Provide follow-up services

If necessary, schools may consult school guidance personnel (including social workers, school-based educational psychologists or relevant mental health professionals). After taking the student's background and behavioral patterns into account, they may make decisions on prioritising individual interviews and follow-up actions for the students. School guidance personnel must conduct individual interviews with these students for further preliminary assessment of suicidal risk. For details, please refer to Chapter 3 “Responding to Suicidal Behaviors” in “A Resource Handbook for Schools: Detecting, Supporting and Making Referral for Students with Suicidal Behaviours”.

Schools should first discuss through the school's inter-disciplinary team to flexibly deploy manpower and resources within the school to help and provide counselling to students who have been identified and need support. We recommend that school personnel refer to the Guidelines on “How Schools can Help Students with Mental Health Problems” to support students with mental health needs.

Guidelines on “How Schools can Help Students with Mental Health Problems”:

https://sense.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/types-of-special-educational-needs/mental-illness/ENG_Guidelines_to_help_MI_students_20200717.pdf



The school's multi-disciplinary team must give priority to care for and counsel students who are at higher risk of suicide, such as guiding students to consider coping skills for overcoming difficulties and the support available for them, meeting with students regularly and providing group training, conducting individual counselling on relaxation techniques and coping methods and arranging appropriate school-based support and activities (e.g., positive thinking classes), or providing parents with information about relevant community resources. Schools must conduct continuous and close monitoring on students' conditions and maintain close communication with the parents. Schools should also make good use of community resources to refer students with mental health needs to receive support services. Through mental health educational activities or promotional leaflets, let all students and parents aware of different help-seeking channels, including community helplines and counselling platforms.

Community Resources and Helplines:

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/en/early-identification-at-the-selective-level/helplines-and-community-resources.html>



Contact Information of Educational Psychology Service Sections

(Only applicable to schools that have not participated in the “Student Mental Health Support Scheme”)

If, subsequent to the coordination by the school’s inter-disciplinary team, flexibly deploying manpower and resources within the school to help and provide counselling to students with mental health needs, there is still difficulty in deploying manpower to handle the newly identified students who are at higher risk of suicide, schools may refer to the information below to contact the Educational Psychology Service Section of the school’s respective region and seek professional consultation on how to support students with mental health needs at the school system level.

School Districts	Enquiry no. of Educational Psychology Service Section
Central & Western, Southern, Hong Kong East, Wan Chai and Islands	Hong Kong Section: 3695 0486
Kwun Tong, Kowloon City, Wong Tai Sin and Sai Kung	Kowloon 1 Section: 3698 4321
Yau Tsim & Mong Kok, Sham Shui Po, Tsuen Wan and Kwai Chung & Tsing Yi	Kowloon 2 Section: 3907 0949
Tuen Mun and Yuen Long	New Territories West Section: 2437 7270
North, Sha Tin and Tai Po	New Territories East Section: 3547 2228