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Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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To: Supervisors and Heads of all Secondary Schools

1 November 2024

Dear Supervisors / Principals,

Strengthening Support for Student Mental Health

This letter aims to inform all secondary schools in the territory of the details of the latest measures on enhancing support for students' mental health.

I. Extension and Enhancement of the Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism (the Three-tier Emergency Mechanism)

2. Through the inter-departmental collaboration among the Education Bureau (EDB), the Health Bureau (HHB), and the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Three-tier Emergency Mechanism has been implemented since December 2023. Schools, parents and stakeholders in the public are encouraged to work collectively by pooling together the schools' multi-disciplinary teams, the off-campus support network and medical services so as to achieve early identification and offer support to students with higher suicidal risk.

3. After reviewing relevant circumstances and gauging the views of the sector, the Government announced in the "2024 Policy Address" that the Three-tier Emergency Mechanism would be extended and enhanced till end-December 2025, with strengthened collaboration and services among the schools' multi-disciplinary teams, the off-campus support network and medical services. Enhanced measures have been implemented with effect from 1 November 2024. For details, please refer to **Annex 1**. Major enhanced measures include:

(i) *The first-tier mechanism*

- More training for school personnel will be provided to strengthen their capacity in

early identification of students with higher suicidal risk and skills in offering support to students with mental health needs.

- Parent education will be strengthened to enhance the role of parents in supporting students with higher risk.
- The responsible personnel at the second and third-tier mechanisms will maintain close communication and coordination with the school personnel and parents to address the mental health needs of students with suicidal risks, and when appropriate, refer the cases to the schools' multi-disciplinary teams at the first-tier mechanism for follow-up support.

(ii) *The second-tier mechanism*

- Schools requiring support from the “off-campus support network” teams can contact their respective regional “off-campus support network” team direct without routing through EDB.
- After understanding the conditions of the students with suicidal risk, the “off-campus support network” team will match and refer them or their families to other community support services as necessary so that they can receive appropriate out-of-school support.
- The “off-campus support network” teams will enhance communication with the school personnel regarding the referred cases, especially the cases transferring to the schools' multi-disciplinary teams for follow-up after emergency intervention.
- The coverage will be extended to publicly-funded secondary schools participating in the Student Mental Health Support Scheme (SMHSS) as well as not newly identified cases with higher suicidal risk.

(iii) *The third-tier mechanism*

- Clear guidelines will be provided to schools to clarify the criteria of cases that may be considered appropriate for referral to the psychiatric specialist outpatient services of the Hospital Authority (HA).
- For students who are waiting for the psychiatric services, they can be arranged by schools to receive the first-tier in-school support and services from the second-tier “off-campus support network”.

II. Other Related Measures in Strengthening the Promotion of Mental Health at Schools

(i) Enhanced Training for School Personnel

4. Under the collaboration of EDB and SWD, two seminars on gatekeeper training for secondary schools, were organised in October 2024 to support teachers in safeguarding students' mental health. In addition, in order to strengthen the school personnel's capacity in early

identification and skills in offering support to students with higher suicidal risk, as well as to promote students' mental health in schools, EDB will organise a number of thematic training programmes/workshops for schools in the 2024/25 school year, inviting psychiatrists, clinical/educational psychologists, registered social workers or other professionals, to share practical handling skills on providing emotional support to students, introduce different counselling methods and intervention strategies, such as mental health literacy, basic counselling skills, classroom management strategies, crisis management skills, and emergency emotional support strategies.

(ii) Provision of Short Educational Videos and Lesson Plans

5. To enhance students' resilience, help them integrate into school life and cope with the challenges faced in the course of development, EDB will provide secondary schools with short videos and lesson plans relating to students' mental health in November 2024 to facilitate teachers' discussion and sharing with students in class or related student growth activities. Content of the short videos and lesson plans with themes on "adaptability", "peer social interaction", "emotion management" and "stress resistance" is relevant to students' daily life. Teachers can make reference to the questions and key messages in the lesson plans when guiding students to share their views and feelings, as well as encourage them to handle stress and regulate emotions with positive attitudes. In parallel, from their sharing, teachers will be able to better understand students' needs, explore possible solutions with them and provide them with timely intervention and support.

(iii) Provision of On-site School Mental Health Promotional Activities

6. In the 2023/24 school year, EDB collaborated with SWD to arrange non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to visit more than 140 secondary schools and organised mental health related programmes with a view to enhancing students' awareness of mental health, helping them develop positive thinking as well as strengthening their adaptability. In the 2024/25 school year, EDB will continue to collaborate with SWD to arrange NGOs to visit secondary schools in need and organise mental health programmes, such as mental health talks, stress reduction groups, delivering resources to the school teams and providing appropriate support for students with mental health needs. Schools are encouraged to make good use of this support service. Schools requiring the service may contact the "off-campus support network" teams in respective regions direct and discuss about the arrangement details.

7. In addition, EDB will collaborate with "Shall We Talk" organised by the Advisory Committee on Mental Health, arranging athletes to visit secondary schools in the 2024/25 school year to share the themes of positive thinking and perseverance so as to promote students' resilience. Relevant details will be announced at an appropriate time.

(iv) Strengthened Positive Parent Education

8. EDB has been proactively implementing positive parent education and appeals to parents to address the mental health of their children. To help parents better equip with the skills of supporting their children's healthy development and ways of safeguarding their children's mental health, EDB will organise thematic parent education workshops or talks regularly covering a wide range of topics, including the "parent gatekeeper" training workshop, supporting children to lead a healthy lifestyle, conflict management, using digital devices wisely, strengthening children's adaptability and resilience, helping children cope with stress, understanding the skills for taking care of children with mental health needs. EDB will inform schools of the related arrangements in due course.

9. EDB will collaborate with the Committee on Home-School Co-operation (CHSC), the Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations and NGOs to organise the "Positive Parent Education Film Gala Presentations". This event aims to promote the importance of positive parenting, parent education experts will be invited to share on the knowledge and skills of positive parent-child education with parents. Schools will be informed of relevant details soon and the information will also be announced on the CHSC website (<https://www.chsc.hk/eng>) and the "Smart Parent Net" website (parent.edu.hk).

10. The Government will continue to strengthen inter-departmental collaboration to establish an effective support network for students and foster an accepting and caring culture in society, as well as to enhance the mental health literacy of parents, teachers and students to help students embrace the challenges of personal growth.

11. For enquiries, please contact Ms Maggie CHIANG of the Educational Psychology Service (Kowloon 1) Section at 3698 4311.

Ms Candy CHAN
for Secretary for Education

- Annex 1: The Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism
- Annex 2: Early identification of and support for students with suicidal risk
- Annex 3: List of Off-campus Support Network Team
- Annex 4: "Off-campus Support Network" Team Referral Form and Parent/Guardian Consent Form
- Annex 5: Reference Guide for Assessing and Managing Suicidal Risk
- Annex 6: Designated School Principal Referral Form to Psychiatric Services of the Hospital Authority

Annex 1

The Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism

The first-tier mechanism

The first-tier aims to early identify students with higher suicidal risk, and to provide students concerned priority for timely support and help them seek professional counselling or treatment services at an early stage.

EDB urges school personnel to refer to “A Resource Handbook for Schools: Detecting, Supporting and Making Referral for Students with Suicidal Behaviours” to preliminarily identify more vulnerable students and pay attention to whether they have warning signs of suicide. If necessary, schools can arrange students with higher-risk to conduct a preliminary mental health screening through effective screening tools. After screening, school guidance personnel should launch follow-up services. Schools should first discuss with the school’s inter-disciplinary team (including guidance masters/mistress, 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 risk. 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, for example, 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, or providing students with information about relevant community resources. Schools must conduct continuous and close monitoring on students’ conditions, make good use of community resources — and refer students with mental health needs to receive support services. Please refer to **Annex 2** for details.

The second-tier mechanism

The second-tier mechanism is for the Government to organise an “off-campus support network” through inter-departmental, cross-professional and cross-sectoral collaboration to provide schools with enhanced “external support” in the short term. Social workers concerned have received professional training on how to support students with higher suicidal risk and can provide appropriate intervention services for students in need. If schools confirmed that the students, having been identified and provided with school-based intervention by the first-tier mechanism, have a high suicidal risk and need further support from the “off-campus support network”, they can contact the “off-campus support network” teams in their respective regions — (please refer to the contact list at **Annex 3**). If the schools deem it necessary to make a case referral, schools must first obtain the consent of the parents or guardians of students concerned,

— and submit the referral form and parent or guardian consent form (**Annex 4**) to the “off-campus support network” teams in the respective regions.

Please note that, in the past, the second-tier mechanism only covered publicly-funded secondary schools that did not participate in the SMHSS, and those newly identified cases that the schools did not have sufficient manpower to deal with. Starting from 1 November 2024, under the enhanced second-tier mechanism, publicly-funded secondary schools participating in the SMHSS and cases that are not newly identified can also seek support from the “off-campus support network” teams.

The “off-campus support network” teams will contact the students concerned as soon as possible and arrange follow-up services which include emergency intervention services such as assessment, support and counselling through individual, group or online mode. The team will also match students’ needs with community support services, such as integrated family service centres, integrated children and youth services centres and integrated community centres for mental wellness, to provide them with diverse and appropriate follow-up services. If the “off-campus support network” team, after contact and assessment, determines that the student has high suicidal risk, they will discuss with the parents whether it is necessary to refer the student to the psychiatric services of HA according to the third-tier mechanism below.

The third-tier mechanism

— The third-tier mechanism is for schools to refer students with high suicidal risk (as opposed to those only with severe mental health needs) to the HA to receive psychiatric specialist
— outpatient services. Schools may refer eligible students with reference to the guide at **Annex 5**.
— After discussing with the students’ parents, schools may issue a designated school principal referral form (**Annex 6**) for parents to accompany the students to the psychiatric specialist outpatient clinics for triage assessment, and to receive necessary treatment and support services. School personnel may also accompany the students and their parents to the psychiatric specialist outpatient clinics as necessary to provide relevant information during the triage process, with a view to facilitating a more comprehensive assessment of the students’ condition by healthcare professionals. After the triage assessment, HA will prioritise the follow up of students with urgent conditions that necessitate prompt treatment. Before making referrals, schools should carefully evaluate whether the students concerned have high suicidal risk, so as to avoid comprising the chances to receive treatment of other patients who are on the waiting list of HA’s psychiatric services. For students assessed as routine (stable) cases waiting for psychiatric specialist outpatient services, schools may arrange for them to receive support in the school setting at the first-tier mechanism, as well as services from the “off-campus support network” at the second-tier mechanism. If the mental conditions of the students have changed, they may return to their respective psychiatric specialist outpatient clinic to receive re-assessment to determine whether there is a need to advance their

consultation appointment or seek treatment from the accident and emergency services. At the same time, HA has set up a telephone consultation hotline specifically for school principals (telephone number: 2742 4508) to provide them with professional advice.

If a student is severely injured, in a life-threatening situation or requires immediate support, the school should immediately activate the crisis management mechanism and take prompt action, including contacting the police for assistance or transferring the student to the hospital for treatment.

Early Identification of and Support for Students with Suicidal Risk

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/en/early-identification-at-the-selective-level/resources-and-guidelines/25.html>



(1) Preliminary identification of more vulnerable students

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.
- Need to face 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 aspects: 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) Use mental health screening tools

If necessary, schools can also arrange mental health screening for students in need after discussing with school guidance personnel (including social workers, school-based educational psychologists or relevant mental health professionals). School teachers and social workers can refer to the following commonly used mental health screening tools and arrange the students concerned to complete the self-test scales:

- Student Health Service “Self-Test Station: Depressive Mood”:
https://scics.one.gov.hk/forms/dhs005/dhs005_en.html
- Student Health Service “Self-Test Station: Anxiety”:
https://scics.one.gov.hk/forms/dhs006/dhs006_en.html
- “Shall We Talk” Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10):
<https://www.shallwetalk.hk/en/mental-health-information/psychological-distress-testing/>
- The Spence Children’s Anxiety Scale

(3) Provide follow-up services

Schools should note that the scores of mental health screening tools are only used as one of the references. School guidance personnel should consider students’ responses to individual items on the scale, their background, and behavioral patterns to make decisions on prioritising individual interviews and follow-up actions. 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 (including guidance masters/mistress, guidance personnel, school social workers, school-based educational psychologists) 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 suicidal risk.

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., effective thinking training groups), or providing students with information about relevant community resources. Schools must conduct continuous and close monitoring on students' conditions and make good use of community resources to refer students with suicidal risk to receive support services. Through mental health educational activities or promotional leaflets, let all students 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 List of “Off-campus Support Network” Team

If schools have provided assistance and counselling for students with suicidal risk through their inter-disciplinary team and flexible deployment of internal manpower and resources but still consider that it is necessary to refer students with higher suicidal risk to the “off-campus support network” for follow-up, they can refer those students to respective regional “off-campus support network” teams through direct contact by telephone, facsimile or email.

Region	Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) operating “Off-campus support network” Team
Hong Kong Island (including Central and Western, Eastern, Southern, Wan Chai and Islands Districts)	NGO : St. James’ Settlement Service Unit : 6 PM Cyber Youth Support Team Tel. No. : 2609 3228 Fax No. : 2817 8910 Email : cyberyouth@sjs.org.hk
East Kowloon (including Kwun Tong, Wong Tai Sin and Sai Kung Districts)	NGO : Caritas Hong Kong Service Unit : Caritas Infinity Teens - Cyber Youth Support Team Tel. No. : 2117 0321 / 9377 3666 Fax No. : 2117 1190 Email : ycsteens@caritassws.org.hk
West Kowloon (including Kowloon City, Sham Shui Po and Yau Tsim Mong Districts)	NGO : The Boys’ & Girls’ Clubs Association of Hong Kong Service Unit : Nite Cat Online – Cyber Youth Support Team Tel. No. : 2396 9447 Fax No. : 3529 1462 Email : nitecat@bgca.org.hk
New Territories East (including North, Tai Po and Sha Tin District)	NGO : Hong Kong Children & Youth Services Service Unit : eSmile Cyber Youth Support Team Tel. No. : 3615 8331 Fax No. : 3020 6224 Email : esmiley@hkccys.org.hk
New Territories West (including Tsuen Wan, Kwai Tsing, Tuen Mun and Yuen Long District)	NGO : The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups Service Unit : uTouch Cyber Youth Outreach Service Tel. No. : 2788 3444 Fax No. : 2715 6086 Email : utouch@hkfyg.org.hk

To: Off-campus support network team ()

The Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism
“Off-campus Support Network” Team Referral Form
(Applicable from 1 November 2024)

[*Schools should submit **this form and parent or guardian consent form** to
 respective “off-campus support network” team]

Our school _____ (name of school), after conducting preliminary mental health screening and school-based intervention, would like to refer the student with higher suicidal risk to the “off-campus support network” team arranged by the Social Welfare Department. Our school has obtained and enclosed with this form the parent consent form signed by the parent or guardian of the student concerned for this referral. Our school will help arrange the “off-campus support network” team to meet with the student concerned at school, including finding venues suitable for in-person or online interviews.

Student Name	Gender / Age	Class	Contact phone no.	Areas that require special attention (Please tick the appropriate box(es))	Name & contact no. of student's guardian in case of emergency
1.				☐ Learning performance ☐ Family situation ☐ Special educational needs ☐ Interpersonal relationship ☐ Emotional/mental health needs ☐ Others (please specify):	

Remarks: This referral form contains personal data of the student, which shall be properly kept by the school and ensure that the purpose and manner of data collection, use of data, data security, access, etc. comply with the requirements of the personal data (Privacy) ordinance.

School Chop:

Signature of school
 personnel in charge : _____

Name : _____

Post : _____

Contact no. : _____

Date : _____

The Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism

“Off-campus Support Network” Team

Parent / Guardian Consent Form

I _____ (Name of Parent / Guardian*) give consent to
_____ (Name of School) to refer my child / ward*
_____ (Name) _____ (ID No.) to receive services
rendered by the “off-campus support network” team arranged by the Social Welfare Department.

Signature of Parent / Guardian*: _____

(Contact Phone No.: _____)

Date: _____

*Delete as appropriate

Reference Guide for Assessing and Managing Suicidal Risk

Suicidal Risk*	Suicidal Ideation	Suicidal Plan/ Intent	Suicide Attempt	Emotional Distress	Management Plan
Low	Low frequency and intensity, shorter duration	• No concrete suicidal plan • No obvious suicidal intent	Nil	Mild	Arrange first-tier / second-tier support services
High	More frequent and intense, longer duration	• With more concrete suicidal plan • With more obvious suicidal intent	With previous suicide attempt	Quite distressed	Refer to third-tier support services; and arrange follow-up services at the first-tier and second-tier
Very High/ Imminent	Frequent and intense, enduring suicidal ideation	• With concrete suicidal plan • Preparing for suicide, including tools, after-death arrangements, etc. • Strong suicidal intent	With previous suicide attempt using lethal means (such as hanging, charcoal burning, jumping from height, or overdosing on medication), especially in the recent past	Severe	Consider taking the student to the Accident and Emergency Department for treatment

* The level of suicidal risk is dynamic and may be adjusted based on the prevalence and changes of protective factors (such as adequate problem-solving skills, good social skills, effective stress management, positive self-esteem, support from significant others, and family connections and cohesion) and risk factors (such as self-harming behaviours, previous suicide attempt, mental illness, adverse childhood experiences, negative thoughts / sense of hopelessness, parental discord / family conflict, and poor peer relationships). Protective factors enhance an individual's resilience to cope with setbacks in life, while risk factors increase an individual's suicidal risk.

The Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism

Referral of student to receive psychiatric services of the Hospital Authority Designated School Principal Referral Form (Applicable from 1 November 2024)

Our school _____ (Name of School) would like to refer _____ (Name of Student) _____ (ID No.) who is currently studying in _____ (Class) to receive psychiatric services of the Hospital Authority (HA). Please arrange risk assessment and follow-up services for this student as soon as possible.

I. Reason(s) for referral to the third-tier support services: *(Please select one of the following options)*

- ☐ High suicidal risk
- ☐ High suicidal risk, and with other severe mental health need(s)

Details of the reason(s) for referral: *(e.g. related suicidal ideation/ threat/ attempt, psychological and mental state, behaviour)*

- History of suicidal ideation/ threat/ attempt: **[Mandatory]**

Nature	Date	Details
Suicidal ideation/ threat/ attempt*		
Suicidal ideation/ threat/ attempt*		
Suicidal ideation/ threat/ attempt*		

[*Please delete as appropriate]

- Supplementary information regarding the suicidal risk:

- Supplementary information of the severe mental health need(s):

II. The first and / or second-tier support services which the student has received in relation to the above referral reason(s) (including services within schools or outside schools, such as assessment or support services by school social worker and school-based educational psychologist): *(May choose more than one option)*

☐ Details of the first-tier support services:

☐ Individual interview:

☐ Group training:

☐ School-based support and activities:

☐ Others, please specify:

☐ Details of the second-tier support services:

☐ Services of “off-campus support network”:

☐ Services of “Student Mental Health Support Scheme”:

☐ Others, please specify:

III. To the school’s knowledge, other medical services that the student has received or is currently receiving / has been referred to in relation to the above referral reason(s) (such as private psychiatrist and clinical psychologist): *(Please select one of the following options)*

☐ No

☐ Yes, please specify:

☐ Not sure

IV. Contact Information:

	School	Parent / Guardian*
Name:		
Post / Relationship:		
Phone number:		

[*Please delete as appropriate]

[Remarks: If the student’s situation is urgent, the school may consider taking the student to the Accident and Emergency Department for treatment.]

Signature of Principal: _____

Date: _____

Name of Principal: _____

School Chop: