

Education Bureau Circular Memorandum No. 215/2025

From: Secretary for Education

To: Supervisors and Heads of all Primary and Secondary schools

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Date: 20 November 2025

Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism and Key Measures for Strengthening the Promotion of Mental Health at Schools

Summary

This circular aims to provide an overview of the arrangements and details regarding the regularisation of the “Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism” (hereinafter referred to as the Mechanism) in secondary schools and its extension on a trial basis to Primary Four to Six (upper primary), as well as other key measures to further promote mental health in schools.

Background

2. Through the inter-departmental collaboration among the Education Bureau (EDB), the Health Bureau (HHB), and the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Mechanism has been implemented in all secondary schools since December 2023. Schools, parents and relevant stakeholders in the society are encouraged to work collectively by pooling together the schools’ multi-disciplinary teams, the off-campus support network and medical services to facilitate early identification of and support for students with higher suicidal risk.

3. After reviewing the implementation of the Mechanism and gauging the views of the sector, the Government announced in November 2024 the extension and enhancement of the Mechanism until the end of December 2025. It was further stated in “The Chief Executive’s 2025 Policy Address” that the Government would regularise the Mechanism in secondary schools and extend it on a trial basis to upper primary levels in the 2025/26 school year, aiming to help primary and secondary schools identify and strengthen support for students in need as early as possible.

Details

(1) Implementation of the “Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism” (Applicable to Primary Four to Six and secondary schools)

4. The Mechanism will be implemented regularly in all secondary schools in Hong Kong with effect from 1 December 2025, and will be on trial in upper primary levels from 1 December 2025 to 31 August 2026. The Government will closely monitor the operation of the Mechanism,

maintain communication with the sector and review the arrangements as appropriate. The key measures of the Mechanism include:

(i) The first-tier mechanism

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

6. The 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, including meeting regularly with students, providing group training or individual counselling, arranging appropriate school-based support and activities, or providing students with information on relevant community resources and referring students with mental health needs to receive support services. For details, please refer to **Annex 1**.

(ii) The second-tier mechanism

7. The second-tier mechanism is for the “off-campus support network” coordinated by SWD to provide schools with enhanced support to students with higher suicidal risk in the short term. Subsequent to the identification in the first-tier mechanism and school-based intervention, if the school¹ confirms that a student with higher suicidal risk needs further support, the school can directly contact the “off-campus support network” team in its respective regional district (please refer to **Annex 2** for the contact list). When referring a case, the school must first obtain the consent of the parent or guardian and submit the referral form and the parent or guardian consent form (**Annex 3**) to the “off-campus support” team in its respective regional district.

¹ Starting 1 November 2024, under the enhanced second-tier mechanism, even publicly funded secondary schools that have participated in the Student Mental Health Support Scheme or non-newly identified cases with a higher risk of suicide can seek additional support from the “off-campus support network” team.

8. Social workers from the “off-campus support network” team² will contact the students concerned as soon as possible and arrange follow-up services, including emergency intervention services such as assessment, support and counselling through individual, group, or online mode. They will also match students with community support services according to their needs, providing diverse and appropriate follow-up services, such as Integrated Family Service Centres, Integrated Children and Youth Service Centres, and Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness. If a student is assessed by the “off-campus support network” team to have a high risk of suicide after contact and assessment, they will discuss with the parents whether it is necessary to refer the student to the Hospital Authority’s (HA) psychiatry specialist services for follow-up treatment through the third-tier mechanism.

(iii) The third-tier mechanism

9. 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 to the HA with reference to the guide at Annex 4. After discussing with the students’ parents, the school may issue a designated school principal referral form (Annex 5) for the parents to accompany the students to the psychiatric specialist outpatient clinics for triage assessment, and to receive the necessary treatment and support services. School personnel may also accompany the students and their parents to the psychiatric specialist outpatient clinics as needed 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, the HA will prioritise the follow-up of students with urgent conditions that necessitate prompt treatment. Before making referrals, schools must carefully evaluate whether the students concerned have high suicidal risk, so as to avoid compromising the chances to receive treatment of other patients who are on the waiting list of HA’s psychiatric specialist service. For students assessed by the HA as routine (stable) cases, while waiting for psychiatric specialist outpatient services, schools can arrange for them to receive school-based support from the first-tier mechanism and the off-campus support network services from the second-tier mechanism. If the mental conditions of the students have changed, they may return to their respective psychiatric specialist outpatient clinic for re-assessment to determine whether there is a need to advance their consultation appointment or seek treatment from the accident and emergency services.

10. Meanwhile, the 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

² The responsible social worker has received professional training on how to support students at high suicide risk and can provide appropriate intervention services to students in need.

immediately activate the crisis management mechanism and take prompt action, including calling the police for help or sending the student to hospital for treatment.

11. To help primary school principals understand the operation of the Mechanism, the EDB, together with the HHB, the HA and the SWD, will organise Briefing Session on the “Three tier School-based Emergency Mechanism” (course ID: SE0020250320) on 24 November 2025. Interested secondary school principals are also welcome to attend.

Briefing Session on the “Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism”:

<https://tcs.edb.gov.hk/tcs/admin/courses/previewCourse/forPortal.htm?courseId=SE0020250320&lang=en>



(2) Key Measures for Strengthening the Promotion of Mental Health at Schools (Applicable to all primary and secondary schools)

(i) Promoting the “4Rs Mental Health Charter”

12. The EDB will continue to make every effort to promote the 4Rs Mental Health Charter (hereinafter referred to as the “4Rs Charter”) in schools in the 2025/26 school year, encouraging all schools in Hong Kong to join the 4Rs Charter, and engaging parents and various stakeholders to set goals and take concrete actions to implement relevant measures and organise related activities, with a view to promoting student mental health and enhancing the overall health culture in schools. With “Resilience” being the core theme of the 4Rs Charter this year, the EDB supports schools in developing students’ resilience through diversified means, such as providing teaching resources, organising teacher training and parent education activities. To rally the efforts of different sectors and introduce more diverse resources to promote mental health, the EDB has produced three episodes of “4Rs Vibrant with Energy” videos, featuring tips on maintaining physical and psychological well-being and building up resilience shared by doctors, university professors, school principals, parents and young athletes, to encourage students to navigate challenges with a healthy mindset. These videos will be uploaded in phases to the “4Rs Mental Health Charter” designated webpage. In addition, the EDB will launch a designated “Resilience” webpage on the “Mental Health@School” website at the end of November, providing schools, students and parents with more relevant resources to better prepare students to face adversity with courage and manage the emotions arising from setbacks and stress.

“4Rs Mental Health Charter” designated webpage (Chinese version only):

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/tc/promotion-at-the-universal-level/promotional-resources-for-schools/121.html>



(ii) Launching the Mental Health Literacy Resource Packages

13. The EDB launched the Mental Health Literacy Resource Packages (hereinafter referred to as the resource packages) for different key learning stages in the 2024/25 school year and uploaded them to the designated webpage on the “Mental Health @School” website for reference and use by school personnel. These resource packages aim to help students understand the strategies for maintaining sound mental health, learn about common mental health disorders and respective effective treatments, reduce the stigma against people with mental illness, as well as raise the awareness of help-seeking among them. In addition, the EDB is also implementing the “Support Scheme on School-based Application of the Mental Health Literacy Resource Packages” this school year, providing school-based training and consultation to primary and secondary schools, assisting schools to master the content of the resource packages and the techniques in implementation, and make use of the resource packages in collaborative teaching according to school-based needs.

*“Mental Health Literacy Resource Package” designated webpage
(Chinese version only):*

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/tc/promotion-at-the-universal-level/mental-health-literacy-resource-package.html>



(iii) Strengthening Training in Mental Health First Aid and Other Related Aspects

14. The EDB will continue to conduct a two-day mental health first aid training session this school year to enable more school personnel to receive relevant training, thereby enhancing their mental health literacy, deepening their understanding of the different aspects of mental health, so as to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and support students with mental health needs at an early stage. Furthermore, to promote student mental health, the EDB will arrange various sessions of thematic training courses/workshops aimed at enhancing school personnel’s awareness and skills in the early identification of and support for students with mental health needs. Each year, the EDB organises the 60-hour thematic course for teachers, which focuses on the needs of students with mental illness. Schools are encouraged to proactively facilitate teacher participation, enabling more teachers to understand how they can support students with mental health needs. Registration details for the above courses will be uploaded to the Training Calendar System.

(iv) **Implementing Positive Parent Education -- “Family Resilience Series” and “Positive Parent Education Film Gala”**

15. To align with the 4Rs Charter, the EDB organises the Parent-Child FUNtastic Free Verse Challenge and Positive Parent Campaign Activity Day under the Family Resilience Series, encouraging parents and their children to recognise the importance of maintaining good interpersonal relationship and building resilience, thereby enhancing their mental health. Besides, the EDB in collaboration with the Committee on Home-School Co-operation (CHSC) and non-governmental organisations organises the “Positive Parent Education Film Gala Presentations” in the 18 districts of Hong Kong this school year to promote the importance of positive parenting, parent education experts are arranged to share the knowledge and skills on positive parent-child education with parents. Relevant details have been disseminated to schools and uploaded to the CHSC website and the “Smart Parent Net” website. In addition, the enrolment of the Online Workshop on Parent Gatekeeper Training for parents of upper primary school students will also begin in December. For details, please refer to the Parent Gatekeeper Training designated webpage on the “Mental Health @School” website.

Committee on Home-School Co-operation:

<https://www.chsc.hk/eng>



Smart Parent Net:

<https://www.parent.edu.hk/en/smart-parent-net>



“Parent Gatekeeper Training” designated webpage:

<https://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/en/support-programmes/parent-workshop-on-gatekeeper-training.html>



Enquiry

16. For related information on the Mechanism, please refer to the annexes or visit the designated webpage on the “Mental Health @School” website. For inquiries, please contact Ms CHIANG of the Educational Psychology Service (Kowloon 1) Section at 3698 4311.

Ms Vickie LI
for Secretary for Education

Annex 1: Early identification of and support for students with suicidal risk (applicable to secondary schools and Primary Four to Six)

Annex 2: Contact List of “Off-campus Support Network” Team

Annex 3: “Off-campus Support Network” Team Referral Form

Annex 4: Reference Guide for Assessing and Managing Suicidal Risk (applicable to secondary schools and Primary Four to Six)

Annex 5: Designated School Principal Referral Form to Psychiatric Services of the Hospital Authority

Early Identification of and Support for Students with Suicidal Risk **(Applicable to Secondary Schools and Primary Four to Six)**

To complement the “Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism” 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 the EDB, to identify students at higher risk through the following channels and provide appropriate support and referrals based on their circumstances and severity:

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/147.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 school social workers, school-based educational psychologists or relevant mental health professionals). Before conducting a mental health screening, it is advisable to carefully plan the entire process in conjunction with school guidance personnel. When selecting screening tools, factors such as the student's age, developmental stage, cognitive and language abilities, and cultural background should be considered. It is recommended to also gather data from different adults familiar with the student, including parents, teachers, and other caregivers, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the student's behavior and emotional state, accurately identify students in need for further assessment and follow-up. 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, 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, the “Off-campus Support Network” Team services, and telephone consultation hotline of HA specifically for principals to refer students with different levels of suicidal risk to receive appropriate 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. : 2865 4332 Email : nitecat@bgca.org.hk
New Territories East (including North, Tai Po and Sha Tin District)	NGO : Hong Kong Children & Youth Services Service Unit : eSmiley Cyber Youth Support Team Tel. No. : 3615 8331 Fax No. : 3020 6224 Email : esmiley@hkcyys.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 December 2025)

[*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 date, 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
(Applicable to Secondary Schools and Primary Four to Six)

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.

Management plan should be based on the conditions and needs of the students. While arranging the related services, it is not necessary to include all the features under the corresponding suicidal risk level.

(Last updated on November 2025)

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 December 2025)

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)

Related information on 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	Related information
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)*

☐ Utilisation of the first-tier support services:

☐ Individual interview:

☐ Group training:

☐ School-based support and activities:

☐ Others, please specify:

☐ Utilisation of the second-tier support services:

☐ Services of “off-campus support network”:

☐ Services of “Student Mental Health Support Scheme”:

☐ Others, please specify:

*Please use additional paper if necessary and confirm with signature.
(Last updated on November 2025)*

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 Personnel	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:

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