

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>

