

## **Suicide Prevention**

The Board of Directors (Board) of Westlake Charter School (WCS) recognizes that suicide is a major cause of death among youth and should be taken seriously. To attempt to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students and families, WCS has developed prevention strategies and intervention procedures.

This Suicide Prevention Policy (Board Policy) has been developed in consultation with WCS-employed mental health professionals, community stakeholders, and suicide prevention experts and shall, at a minimum, address procedures relating to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. This Board Policy is intended to work in conjunction with and support WCS's Internal Memorandum addressing suicide prevention.

### **Prevention and Instruction**

Suicide prevention strategies may include, but not be limited to, efforts to promote a positive school climate that enhances students' feelings of connectedness with WCS and is characterized by caring staff and harmonious interrelationships among students.

WCS's instructional and student support program shall promote the healthy mental, emotional, and social development of students including, but not limited to, the development of problem-solving skills, coping skills, and resilience.

WCS shall make available to parents/guardians/caregivers this Board Policy on the WCS Website. The Executive Director or designee may offer parents/guardians/caregivers education or information which describes the severity of the youth suicide problem, WCS's suicide prevention efforts, risk factors and warning signs of suicide, basic steps for helping suicidal youth, reducing the stigma of mental illness, and/or WCS and community resources that can help youth in crisis.

WCS's instructional curriculum may include information about suicide prevention, as appropriate or needed, taking into consideration the grade level and age of the students. If offered or included in WCS's instructional curriculum, suicide prevention instruction shall be designed to help students:

1. Identify and analyze signs of depression and self-destructive behaviors and understand how feelings of depression, loss, isolation, inadequacy, and anxiety can lead to thoughts of suicide.
2. Identify alternatives to suicide and develop coping and resiliency skills.



3. Learn to listen, be honest, share feelings, and get help when communicating with friends who show signs of suicidal intent.
4. Identify trusted adults, WCS resources, and/or community crisis intervention resources where youth, including those at high risk, such as youth bereaved by suicide; youth with disabilities, mental illness, or substance use disorders; youth experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings such as foster care; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth can get help and recognize that there is no stigma associated with seeking mental health, substance abuse, gender identity, or other support services.

### **Staff Development**

Suicide prevention training for staff will be provided and be designed to help staff identify and find help for students at risk of suicide. The training may be offered under the discretion of the Executive Director or designee in cooperation with WCS-employed mental health professionals and may include information on:

1. Research identifying risk factors, such as previous suicide attempt(s), history of depression or mental illness, substance abuse problems, family history of suicide or violence, feelings of isolation, interpersonal conflicts, a recent severe stressor or loss, family instability, and other factors.
2. Warning signs that may indicate suicidal intentions, including changes in students' appearance, personality, or behavior.
3. Research-based instructional strategies for teaching the suicide prevention curriculum and promoting mental and emotional health.
4. WCS and community resources and services for students and families in crisis and ways to access them.
5. WCS procedures for intervening when a student attempts, threatens, or discloses the desire to die by suicide.
6. Materials approved by WCS for training shall include how to identify appropriate mental health services, both at the WCS site and within the larger community, and when and how to refer youth and their families to those services.
7. Materials approved for training may also include programs that can be completed through self-review or suitable suicide prevention materials.

### **Intervention and Emergency Procedures**



Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions, he/she shall promptly notify the Principal or designee. The Principal or designee shall then notify the student's parent/guardian as soon as possible and may also refer the student to mental health resources at WCS or in the community.

When a suicide attempt or threat is reported, the Principal or designee shall, at a minimum:

1. Ensure the student's physical safety by one of the following, as appropriate:
  - a. Securing immediate medical treatment if a suicide attempt has occurred;
  - b. Securing law enforcement and/or other emergency assistance if a suicidal act is being actively threatened;
  - c. Keeping the student under continuous adult supervision until the parent/guardian and/or appropriate support agent or agency can be contacted and has the opportunity to intervene.
2. Designate specific individuals to be promptly contacted, for example the WCS-employed mental health professionals, nurse, Principal, and/or the student's parent/guardian, and, as necessary, local law enforcement or mental health agencies.
3. Document the incident in writing as soon as feasible.
4. Follow up with the parent/guardian and student in a timely manner to provide referrals to appropriate services as needed.
5. Provide access to counselors or other appropriate personnel to listen to and support students and staff who are directly or indirectly involved with the incident at WCS.
6. Provide an opportunity for all who respond to the incident to debrief, evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used, and make recommendations for future actions.

In the event a suicide occurs or is attempted on the WCS campus, the Principal or designee shall follow the crisis intervention procedures contained in the WCS Comprehensive School Safety Plan and WCS Memorandum #0045 regarding Suicide Prevention Procedures. After consultation with the Principal or designee and the student's parent/guardian about facts that may be divulged in accordance with the laws governing confidentiality of student record information, the Principal or designee may provide students, parents/guardians, and staff with information, counseling, and/or referrals to community agencies as needed. WCS staff may receive assistance from WCS-employed mental health professionals or other mental health professionals in determining how best to discuss the suicide or attempted suicide with students.



Students shall be encouraged through the education program and in WCS activities to notify a teacher, Principal, another WCS administrator, psychologist, or other adult when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's suicidal intentions.

### **WCS Employees Acting Within Scope**

WCS shall ensure that employees act only within the authorization and scope of the employee's credential or license. Nothing in this Board Policy shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging a WCS employee to diagnose or treat mental illness unless the employee is specifically licensed and employed to do so.