

Suicide Prevention Policy

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 (“Policy”) has been developed in consultation with WCS-employed mental health professionals, administrators, other school staff members, parents/guardians/caregivers, students, local health agencies and professionals, community stakeholders, the county mental health plan, law enforcement, and suicide prevention experts and shall, at a minimum, address procedures relating to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. This Policy is intended to work in conjunction with and support WCS’s Internal Memorandum addressing suicide prevention.

To ensure the policies regarding suicide prevention are properly adopted, implemented, and updated, WCS shall appoint an individual (or team) to serve as the suicide prevention point of contact for WCS. The suicide prevention point of contact for WCS and the Principal or designee shall ensure proper coordination and consultation with the county mental health plan if a referral is made for mental health or related services on behalf of a student who is a Medi-Cal beneficiary. This policy shall be reviewed and revised as indicated, at least annually in conjunction with the previously mentioned community stakeholders.

Suicide Prevention Crisis Team

To ensure that this Policy is properly adopted, implemented, and updated, WCS created an in-house Suicide Prevention Crisis Team (“SPCT”) consisting of administrators, mental health professionals, relevant staff, parents, and middle and high school students.

WCS designates the following administrators to act as the primary and secondary designated Suicide Prevention Liaisons (“SPL”) to lead the SPCT:

1. Primary Designated SPL: School Psychologist
2. Secondary Designated SPL: Principal from each campus

The functions of the SPCT are to:

- Review mental health related school policies and procedures;
- Provide annual updates on school data and trends;
- Review and revise school prevention policies;

- Review and select general and specialized mental health and suicide prevention training;
- Review and oversee staff, parent/guardian, and student trainings;
- Ensuring the suicide prevention policy, protocols, and resources are posted on the school website;
- Collaborate with community mental health organizations;
- Identify resources and agencies that provide evidence-based or evidence-informed treatment;
- Help inform and build skills among law enforcement and other relevant partners; and
- Collaborate to build community response.

Prevention and Instruction

Messaging about suicide has an effect on suicidal thinking and behaviors. Consequently, WCS, along with its partners, has carefully reviewed and will continue to review all materials and resources used in awareness efforts to ensure they align with best practices for safe messaging about suicide. 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. Instruction shall not use the stress model to explain suicide.

WCS shall make available to parents/guardians/caregivers this 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' 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' instructional curriculum may include information about suicide prevention, as appropriate or needed. If suicide prevention is included in WCS' instructional curriculum, it shall consider the grade level and age of the students and be delivered and discussed in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of young students. If offered or included in WCS' instructional curriculum, suicide prevention instruction shall be under the supervision of an appropriately trained individual acting within the scope of her/his/their credential or license and will be designed to help students:

1. Identify and analyze behaviors (warning signs) and life issues (risk factors) associated with suicide and mental health issues in oneself and

others, 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 including how to engage school-based and community resources and refer peers for help, 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.
5. Receive developmentally appropriate guidance regarding WCS's suicide prevention, intervention, and referral procedures

WCS maintains a list of current student trainings, which is available upon request. WCS has shared school-based supports and self-reporting procedures, so students are able to seek help if they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or if they recognize signs with peers. Although confidentiality and privacy are important, students should understand safety is a priority and if there is a risk of suicide, school staff are required to report. WCS-based mental health professionals are legally and ethically required to report suicide risk. When reporting suicidal ideation or an attempt, school staff must maintain confidentiality and only share information limited to the risk or attempt.

WCS shall establish and widely disseminate a referral process to all students, so they know how to access support through school, community-based, and crisis services. Students shall be encouraged to notify a staff member when they are experiencing emotional distress or suicidal ideation, or when they have knowledge or concerns of another student's emotional distress, suicidal ideation, or attempt.

Staff Development

WCS, along with its partners, has carefully reviewed available staff training to ensure it promotes the mental health model of suicide prevention and does not encourage the use of the stress model to explain suicide.

Training shall be provided for all school staff members. It may also be provided, when

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appropriate, for other adults on campus (such as substitutes and intermittent staff, volunteers, interns, tutors, coaches, and afterschool staff). Training shall include the following:

1. All suicide prevention trainings shall be offered under the direction of mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, school psychologists, other public entity professionals, such as psychologists or social workers) who have received advanced training specific to suicide. WCS has collaborated with Natomas Unified School District and Sacramento County Behavioral Health Services to review the training materials and content to ensure it is evidence-based, evidence-informed, and aligned with best practices.
2. Staff training may be adjusted year-to-year based on previous professional development activities and emerging best practices.
3. WCS shall ensure that training is available for new hires during the school year.
4. At least annually, all staff shall receive training on the risk factors and warning signs of suicide, suicide prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention.
5. At a minimum, all staff shall participate in training on the core components of suicide prevention (identification of suicide risk factors and warning signs, prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention) at the beginning of their employment or annually. Core components of the general suicide prevention training shall include:
 - a. Suicide risk factors, warning signs, and protective factors.
 - b. How to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide.
 - c. How to respond appropriately to the youth who has suicidal thoughts. Such responses shall include constant supervision of any student judged to be at risk for suicide and an immediate referral for a suicide risk assessment.
 - d. Emphasis on immediately referring (same day) any student who is identified to be at risk of suicide for assessment while staying under constant monitoring by staff member.
 - e. Emphasis on reducing stigma associated with mental illness and that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide.
 - f. Reviewing the data annually to look for any patterns or trends of the prevalence or occurrence of suicide ideation, attempts, or death. Data from the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (Cal-SCHLS) should also be analyzed to identify school climate deficits and drive program development. See the Cal-SCHLS Web site at <http://cal-schls.wested.org/>.

- g. Information regarding groups of students judged by the school, and available research, to be at elevated risk for suicide. These groups include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - i. Youth affected by suicide.
 - ii. Youth with a history of suicide ideation or attempts.
 - iii. Youth with disabilities, mental illness, or substance abuse disorders.
 - iv. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth.
 - v. Youth experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings, such as foster care.
 - vi. Youth who have suffered traumatic experiences.
6. In addition to initial orientations to the core components of suicide prevention, ongoing annual staff professional development for all staff may include the following components:
 - a. The impact of traumatic stress on emotional and mental health.
 - b. Common misconceptions about suicide.
 - c. WCS and community suicide prevention resources.
 - d. Appropriate messaging about suicide (correct terminology, safe messaging guidelines).
 - e. The factors associated with suicide (risk factors, warning signs, protective factors).
 - f. How to identify youth who may be at risk of suicide.
 - g. Appropriate ways to interact with a youth who is demonstrating emotional distress or is suicidal. Specifically, how to talk with a student about their thoughts of suicide and (based on WCS guidelines) how to respond to such thinking; how to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide and appropriately respond and provide support based on WCS guidelines.
 - h. WCS-approved procedures for responding to suicide risk (including multi-tiered systems of support and referrals). Such procedures should emphasize that the suicidal student should be constantly supervised until a suicide risk assessment is completed.
 - i. WCS-approved procedures for responding to the aftermath of suicidal behavior (suicidal behavior postvention).
 - j. Responding after a suicide occurs (suicide postvention).
 - k. Resources regarding youth suicide prevention.
 - l. Emphasis on stigma reduction and the fact that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide.
 - m. Emphasis that any student who is identified to be at risk of suicide is to be immediately referred (same day) for assessment while being constantly monitored by a staff member.

Specialized Professional Development for School-based Mental Health Staff

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(Screening and/or Assessment)

Additional professional development in Suicide Risk Assessment (“SRA”) and crisis intervention is provided to designated student mental health professionals, including but not limited to school counselors, psychologists, social workers, administrators, and nurses employed by WCS. Training for these staff is specific to conducting SRAs, intervening during a crisis, de-escalating situations, interventions specific to preventing suicide, making referrals, safety planning, and re-entry.

Specialized Professional Training for targeted School-based mental health staff includes the following components:

- Best practices and skill building on how to conduct an effective suicide risk screening/SRA using an evidence-based, WCS-approved tool; [Patient Health Questionnaire 9 \(PHQ-9\) Depression Scale](#); [BSS Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation](#); [National Institute of Mental Health \(“NIMH”\)’s Ask Suicide-Screening Questions \(“ASQ”\) Toolkit](#); and the [Adolescent Suicide Assessment Protocol – 20](#).
- Best practices on approaching and talking with a student about their thoughts of suicide and how to respond to such thinking, based on school guidelines and protocols.
- Best practices on how to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide and appropriately respond and provide support based on school guidelines and protocols.
- Best practices on follow up with parents/caregivers.
- Best practices on re-entry.

Virtual Screenings for Suicide Risk

Virtual suicide prevention efforts include checking in with all students, promoting access to school and community-based resources that support mental wellbeing and those that address mental illness and give specific guidance on suicide prevention.

WCS has established a protocol for assigning school staff to connect with students during distance learning and school closures. In the event of a school closure, WCS has determined a process and protocols to establish daily or regular contact with all students. Staff understand that any concern about a student’s emotional wellbeing and/or safety must be communicated to the appropriate school staff, according to WCS protocols.

WCS has determined a process and protocols for school-based mental health professionals to establish regular contact with high-risk students, students who are on their caseloads, and those who are identified by staff as demonstrating need. When connecting with students, staff are directed to begin each conversation by identifying the location of the student and the availability of parents or caregivers. This practice allows for the staff member to ensure the safety of the student, particularly if they have

expressed suicidal thoughts.

Intervention and Emergency Procedures

Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions, he/she/they shall promptly notify the Primary Designated SPL. If this Primary SPL is unavailable, the staff shall promptly notify the Secondary Designated SPL. The SPL shall then notify the student's campus Principal, as applicable, and student's parent/guardian as soon as possible if appropriate and in the best interest of the student. Determination of notification to parents/guardians/caregivers should follow a formal initial assessment to ensure that the student is not endangered by parental notification. The SPL shall also refer the student to mental health resources at WCS or in the community.

When a student is in imminent danger (has access to a gun, is on a rooftop, or in other unsafe conditions), a call shall be made to 911. The call shall NOT be made in the presence of the student and the student shall not be left unsupervised. Staff shall NOT physically restrain or block an exit.

When a suicide attempt or threat is reported on campus or at a school-related activity, the SPL shall, at a minimum:

1. Ensure the student's physical safety by one (1) or more 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.
 - d. Remaining calm, keeping in mind the student is overwhelmed, confused, and emotionally distressed.
 - e. Moving all other students out of the immediate area.
 - f. Not sending the student away or leaving him/her alone, even to go to the restroom.
 - g. Providing comfort to the student, listening and allowing the student to talk and being comfortable with moments of silence.
 - h. Promising privacy and help, but not promising confidentiality.
2. Designate specific individuals to be promptly contacted, for example the WCS-employed mental health professionals, nurse, student's campus Principal, and/or the student's parent/guardian, and, as necessary, local law enforcement or mental health agencies. Determination of notification to parents/guardians/caregivers should

follow a formal initial assessment to ensure that the student is not endangered by parental notification.

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 and coordinate and consult with the county mental health plan if a referral is made for mental health or related services on behalf of a student who is a Medi-Cal beneficiary.
5. After a referral is made, WCS shall verify with the parent/guardian that the follow up treatment has been accessed. Parents/guardians will be required to provide documentation of care for the student. If parents/guardians refuse or neglect to access treatment for a student who has been identified to be at risk for suicide or in emotional distress, the suicide prevention liaisons shall meet with the parent to identify barriers to treatment (e.g., cultural stigma, financial issues) and work to rectify the situation and build understanding of care. If follow up care is still not provided, WCS may contact Child Protective Services.
6. 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.
7. 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 SPL 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 campus 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 campus 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.

In the event a suicide occurs or is attempted off the WCS campus and unrelated to school activities, the student's campus Principal or designee shall take the following steps to support the student:

1. Contact the parent/guardian and offer support to the family.
2. Discuss with the family how they would like WCS to respond to the attempt while minimizing widespread rumors among teachers, staff, and students.
3. Obtain permission from the parent/guardian to share information to ensure the facts

regarding the crisis are correct.

4. The suicide prevention liaisons shall handle any media requests.
5. Provide care and determine appropriate support to affected students.
6. Offer to the student and parent/guardian steps for re-integration to school. Re-integration may include obtaining a written release from the parent/guardian to speak with any health care providers; conferring with the student and parent/guardian about any specific requests on how to handle the situation; informing the student's teachers about possible days of absences; allowing accommodations for make-up work (being understanding that missed assignments may add stress to the student); appropriate staff maintaining ongoing contact with the student to monitor the student's actions and mood; and working with the parent/guardian to involve the student in an aftercare plan; providing parents/guardians/caregivers/families local emergency numbers for after school and weekend emergency contacts.

Students shall be encouraged through the education program and in WCS activities to notify a teacher, campus 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 staff should treat each report seriously, calmly, and with active listening and support. Staff should be non-judgmental to students and discuss with the student and the student's parent/guardian about additional resources to support the student.

Responding After a Suicide Death (Postvention)

A death by suicide in the school community (whether by a student or staff member) can have devastating consequences on the school community, including students and staff. WCS shall follow the below action plan for responding to a suicide death, which incorporates both immediate and long-term steps and objectives:

The SPL shall:

1. Coordinate with the Executive Director to conduct an initial meeting of the SPCT to:
 - a. Confirm death and cause.
 - b. Identify a staff member to contact deceased's family (within 24 hours).
 - c. Enact the Suicide Postvention Response.
 - d. Notify all staff members (ideally in-person or via phone, not via e-mail or mass notification).
2. Coordinate an all-staff meeting, to include:
 - a. Notification (if not already conducted) to staff about suicide death.
 - b. Emotional support and resources available to staff.
 - c. Notification to students about suicide death and the availability of support services

(if this is the protocol that is decided by administration).

d. Share information that is relevant and that which you have permission to disclose.

3. Prepare staff to respond to needs of students regarding the following:

- a. Review of protocols for referring students for support/assessment.
- b. Talking points for staff to notify students.
- c. Resources available to students (on and off campus).

4. Identify students significantly affected by suicide death and other students at risk of imitative behavior, and refer them to a school-based mental health professional.

5. Identify students affected by suicide death but not at risk of imitative behavior.

6. Communicate with the larger school community about the suicide death. Staff shall not share explicit, graphic, or dramatic content, including the manner of death.

7. Consider funeral arrangements for family and school community.

8. Respond to memorial requests in respectful and non-harmful manner; responses should be handled in a thoughtful way and their impact on other students should be considered.

9. Identify media spokesperson if needed.

10. Ensure that all communications, documents, materials related to messaging about suicide avoid discussing details about method of suicide, avoid oversimplifying (i.e. identifying singular cause of suicide), avoid sensational language, and only includes clear, respectful, people-first language that encourages an environment free of stigma. As part of safe messaging for suicide, we use specific terminology when referring to actions related to suicide or suicidal behavior:

Use	Do Not Use
<p>“Died by suicide” or “Took their own life”</p>	<p>“Committed suicide” Note: Use of the word “commit” can imply crime/sin</p>
<p>“Attempted suicide”</p>	<p>“Successful” or “unsuccessful” Note: There is no success, or lack of success, when dealing with suicide</p>

11. Include long-term suicide postvention responses:

- a. Consider important dates (i.e., anniversary of death, deceased birthday, graduation, or other significant event) and how these will be addressed.
- b. Support siblings, close friends, teachers, and/or students of deceased.
- c. Consider long-term memorials and how they may impact students who are emotionally vulnerable and at risk of suicide.

Student Identification Cards

WCS will include the telephone numbers on all student identification cards:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline/Suicide Crisis Lifeline: Call 1-800-273-8255
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: Call 1-800-799-7233
- Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741741

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.