

Teacher's Guide

Supporting the wellbeing of primary school children

Suicide



In any situation where a student has been seen attempting or is suspected of attempting to suicide, do not leave the student alone, send for assistance and report according to school policy.

The World Health Organization defines suicide as 'an act deliberately initiated and performed by a person in the full knowledge or expectation of its fatal outcome'.

Suicide is rarely the result of a single event or factor. Research shows that a wide range of biological, psychological and social factors are associated with an increased risk of suicide. Risk factors can be things that can change (such as personal choices) and things that cannot change (like family history).

Signs that a student may be at risk of suicide could include

- Social withdrawal.
- A persistent drop in mood.
- Disinterest in maintaining personal hygiene or appearance.
- Uncharacteristically reckless behaviour.
- Expressed feelings of hopelessness.
- Saying they feel worthless or alone.
- Talking about their death or wanting to die.

If you become aware of suicide warning signs in a student, it is important to ensure they are safe whilst you notify the school wellbeing team or the principal (depending on the school's protocol). It is not your responsibility as an educator to assess and manage young people who may be at risk. A risk assessment should be undertaken by staff who've had specific training, and who've been allocated this role within your school.

Suicide prevention starts with

- Recognising the warning signs and taking them seriously.
- Talking to the person about what is going on.
- Helping them maintain safety whilst they seek professional support.

With support, students can find ways to manage their distress and get through the crisis. Talking to a person about suicide will not increase their risk of suicide.

It is important to acknowledge that recognising and supporting students at risk of suicide can be challenging. You may find it triggering in terms of your own feelings and emotions, or it may bring up issues relating to your family and / or friends. You may also feel anxious about your personal capacity to support students at risk of suicide and may feel like you are not well-enough equipped. If you need to talk with someone, you could reach out to trusted colleagues, your school leaders, or the school's Employee Assistance service to arrange a confidential discussion.

<https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/school-link-teachers-guide>