

## Suicide prevention policy

We believe that a school's environment is key to support a students' mental health. This is why, maintaining a safe school environment is our priority at the German International School Dubai. Our teachers, mental health providers and all other school personnel who interact with students are trained to respond to warning signs by students who may be at risk.

This policy outlines the steps the DISD has prepared to prevent suicide among their students.

We use the "**comprehensive approach**" with following crucial components:

- **Promote** emotional wellbeing and connectedness among students
- **Identify** students, who may be at risk for suicide and assist them in getting help
- **Be prepared** to respond when a death through suicide occurs

This policy is in a line with our school mission and KHDA Forms and Guidelines.

### 1. Definition and risk factors

Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death.

Students considered to be at suicide risk are those who express thoughts of suicide or tried to commit suicide. We make the distinction between:

#### Immediate risk

- Speaking about the wish to die or to kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

**High risk** (especially if the behavior is new and/or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change)

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Self-hating and self-lowing talk
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Behaving recklessly, withdrawing or strongly isolated
- Showing extreme mood swings

#### Possible risk (most common mentioned)

- death in close environment
- victim of long-time or intense short-time bullying
- suffering of mental illness that negatively affects the way of feeling
- individual respond to traumatic event

### 2. Prevention

We recognise, that effective suicide prevention is comprehensive and effective in a safe and blame-free environment. It requires a combination of efforts to address different aspects of the problem. The **comprehensive approach** we use has three core components:

### **2.1. Promote emotional wellbeing and connectedness**

We are aware, that positive and supportive social relationships and community connections can help to minimize the effects of risk factors among the students. DISD increases the connectedness, integration and support through activities that support the development of positive and supportive communities such as sport and mindfulness days, "Students help students" projects, Teambuilding, Christmas evening, Class trips, Wellbeing weeks etc. We promote programs and projects leading to positive and supportive relationships through creating and maintaining peer support groups like "Peer mediators" or "Anti-bullying team", also in order to teach students about mental illness and encourage them to seek help in case they are in need.

We develop a positive feedback culture with tools like self-reflected questionnaires, individual feedback meetings with subject teachers or trainings of non-violent communication and mental health.

### **2.2. Identify and assist students, who may be at risk for suicide**

Our school has developed a suicide screening, that is used for those particular students who are displaying any warning signs of elevated risk, opening up to have suicide thoughts, having non-suicidal self-injuries or being treated outside the school for depression, bipolar or eating disorders etc.

In case of death by suicide, additional factors such as suicidal ideation or suicide contagion must be addressed identifying students, who may be at risk for taking a similar path. For this instance, first the school staff and parents have to pay close attention to the risk factors described in above definition.

In any cases of suspicion, parents will be informed and encouraged to close cooperation with the school staff. In case of positive screening results, the affected student will be guided to connect with professional support institutions outside the school. Parents will be required to sign a Parents-School contract to ensure the emotional health and safety for their child. Through this agreement, they consent to provide the school with full psychological assessments or reports about the mental condition of the student or/and weekly psychological report. The school from its side works in cooperation with an external therapist/psychologist to support the student in the best possible way and provides emotional and social support to the student through the school psychologist/school counsellor.

### **2.3. Be prepared to respond**

Our approach of response to a death by suicide includes not only the immediate response, but also long-term follow-up and support.

We ensure this through providing training courses in mental health for liaison teachers and adolescents on an annual basis, which includes among other focus areas:

- guidance and suicide first aid to a person at risk
- key elements of actions required to implement an effective suicide safety plan
- improving and integration of life-promotion and self-care in the school community

The DISD has Medical Director and School Psychologist in place, who are experienced and trained in supporting students and providing the necessary assistance to parents and caregivers. We also work in cooperation with certified and evidence-based therapy institution groups.

### 3. Respond

When a suicide death occurs, we ensure that everyone affected—family, fellow students and the school community—receives the right type and amount of support. For this purpose, the DISD integrates the psychological **first aid model** among the school staff to help grieving students.

This model includes 5 core points:

- Listen – observation of verbal and nonverbal signs from students that show stress
- Protect - Answering questions honestly and communicate what is being done to ensure safety
- Connect - finding resources that can offer support and encourage students to interact with friends
- Model – awareness of own reactions to crises
- Teach - demonstration of healthy coping strategies

A Crisis team will be created formed by members of the Wellbeing, Communication, and Medical departments to notify school staff and parents and to provide students opportunities to discuss and understand what they might have heard about a death, while considering what the family would like to share and what has already been reported by authorities.

Additional support through grief counsellors, community mental health providers or application of small techniques such as “grieving desk”, where students put their messages, will be offered.

The main goal of the DISD is to spread a strong message among students through various channels, that there are many solutions for a problem and suicide is never one of them!