



K-12 Suicide Intervention Guide: Identifying Students at Risk and Responding to Crisis

This guide is designed to support schools in identifying and responding to students who are at risk for suicide or experiencing suicidal behaviors. It is grounded in the Suicide Prevention Resource Center's (SPRC) [Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention](#), a model that outlines nine interconnected strategies for promoting mental health and preventing suicide.

While all components of SPRC's Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention are important, this guide focuses on two of the model's essential strategies: "Identify and Assist" and "Respond to Crisis."

This guide is intended to be completed by a multidisciplinary team, which may include school health and wellness staff, administrators, educators, and safety teams.

Rate Your Readiness Level

Use the Readiness Levels described below (Start, Grow, and Sustain) to mark your school's progress on each activity in the tables. Consider how consistently each activity is implemented across your system.

Readiness Levels

- ✓ **Start** – Activity is not in place, not planned, and still needs to be started.
- ✓ **Grow** – Activity is planned, partially or inconsistently implemented, and needs development.
- ✓ **Sustain** – Activity is fully and consistently implemented and accompanied by written policies and procedures.



For each activity, place a ✓ in the column that best represents your school's current readiness level.

Start	Grow	Sustain	Identifying Students at Risk
			Build a step-by-step procedure to identify, intervene, refer, and follow up when a student is struggling with thoughts of suicide.
			Provide annual evidence-based training for all staff, then students, on recognizing suicide warning signs and risk factors and how to seek help in a crisis.
			Provide annual training for all staff on your suicide prevention policy and procedures.

To strengthen your ability to identify students at risk:

- Develop or update a school suicide prevention policy with community, family, and student input.
- Offer suicide prevention training to the school community and families.
- Define and discuss with all staff expectations and processes related to identifying students at risk for suicide.

Start	Grow	Sustain	Immediate Response to Student Risk
			Train all staff to ask students directly about suicidal thoughts when concerned.
			Ensure students are never left alone when there are safety concerns; define supervision responsibilities for staff roles.
			Write clear, accessible procedures and staff role responsibilities into school suicide prevention policy.

Start	Grow	Sustain	Immediate Response to Student Risk
			Train designated staff to promptly involve parent / guardian and connect student with designated trained professionals who can conduct a same-day risk assessment.
			Train all staff to determine when a situation is urgent versus when it is an emergency and follow written policy accordingly.

To strengthen your immediate response to student risk:

- Help all staff practice steps for immediate response to crisis.
- Provide all parents/guardians, students, and staff with a copy of the school suicide prevention policy and procedures.
- Involve students, families, and staff in updating suicide prevention policy and procedures.

Start	Grow	Sustain	Suicide Risk Assessment
			Identify a list of licensed providers trained to conduct suicide risk assessments.
			Maintain a list of community resources to support families seeking suicide risk assessment (e.g., support for transportation, cost, translation).
			Implement a suicide prevention policy that provides clear, written guidance on how to refer a student and next steps based on risk level.

To strengthen suicide risk assessment:

- Collaborate with trained professionals to ensure school supports are aligned with risk assessment best practices.
- Ensure trained providers conducting risk assessments are using evidence-based suicide risk assessment tools.
- Create a suicide risk assessment referral form that includes a release of information request form.



Start

Grow

Sustain

Safety Planning, Referral, and Follow-Up

Develop and implement evidence-based safety plans for students at risk of suicide. Safety planning may be conducted by designated trained school staff or through a formal partnership with a mental health provider.

Actively involve parents/guardians and youth throughout the suicide risk response process – from initial identification and assessment through safety planning, referral, and follow-up.

Maintain community partnerships to support pathways for referring students to outside services.

Specify next steps for follow-up after a student is referred to outside services and designate staff to track the referral and follow-up process.

To strengthen safety planning, referral, and follow-up:

- Help students and families identify protective factors that help prevent suicide.
- Provide written policy describing how and when the school/district will communicate with parents/guardians about suicide risk.
- Establish written agreements with community providers to streamline the referral process.
- Prior to a student returning to school after a crisis, hold a meeting with the student and parents/guardians to discuss student needs and supports.
- Conduct an annual analysis of referral and assessment data to make improvements.



Reflection Activity

Use your responses above to identify your school's current overall level of readiness to identify and respond to students who are at risk for suicide or experiencing suicidal behaviors.

✓ **Start – Early Readiness**

Most activities are starting or not in place – no red (sustain), mostly blue (start).

Foundational components are still being developed. Focusing on foundational practices can strengthen student safety.

✓ **Grow – Developing Readiness**

Mix of growing and sustaining activities in place – no blue (start), mostly green (grow).

Foundational practices are in place, with opportunities to improve consistency and clarity across staff and systems.

✓ **Sustain – Established Readiness**

Most activities sustained and some in growth – no blue (start), mostly red (sustain).

Strong systems are in place. Continued refinement can help ensure sustainability and effectiveness.

Focused Action Planning

Identify 1 to 3 activities to strengthen your ability to identify students at risk for suicide and respond to suicide-related crises. Consider including at least one activity for this school year, one for the next school year, and one longer-term goal. Focus on activities with clear, realistic steps. Identify responsible staff and detailed action steps for each activity.



Activity	Responsible Staff	Detailed Action Steps
<i>Example:</i> Train all staff and then students to identify suicide risk factors, protective factors, and warning signs; invite families to a community training.	<i>Example:</i> School/district administrator; student support staff; trainer	<i>Example:</i> 1) Draft an actionable timeline with dates. 2) Meet with administrators to identify partners and decision-makers. Meet with students and parent-teacher group for input and planning 3) Choose evidence-based training 4) Secure funding and trainer 5) Schedule venue and advertising 6) Develop annual training plan with all partners



Resources

[SPRC Safety Planning for Youth Suicide Prevention](#): Course in which learners develop knowledge and skills in using the Stanley-Brown Safety Planning Intervention when working with young clients at risk of suicide.

[AFSP Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention](#): Model policy outlining best practices for school-based suicide prevention.

[SAMHSA FindTreatment.gov](#): Tool to help identify local mental health and substance use services.

[Zero Suicide Screening for Suicide Risk](#): Guidance and tools on screening for suicide risk.

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#): 24/7 free and confidential crisis support via call, text, or chat.

[ASCA Information-Gathering Tool: Suicide Concern](#): Tool to support school counselors in assessing and documenting suicide risk.

[SPRC Best Practices Registry \(BPR\)](#): Searchable library of vetted suicide prevention programs and interventions. The BPR helps communities, providers, and organizations find the best program or intervention for their setting.

[NASP Preventing Youth Suicide: Tips for Parents & Educators](#): Practical guidance for recognizing and responding to youth suicide risk.

[Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale \(C-SSRS\) in Schools](#): Tool for assessing the severity of suicide risk in students.

For additional resources and assistance, visit [SPRC.org](https://sprc.org)
or SPRC's [Contact Us](#) page.

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