

Students Returning to School After a Suicide Attempt

Students who have made a suicide attempt are at a higher risk of re-attempting during the first 90 days after the attempt unless the parents and school work together utilizing evidence-based prevention protocols. It is important for the student to be monitored by parents, mental health professionals and designated school professionals which will establish an available support system. It is critical to link the student, his or her parents, the mental health team working with the student, as well as the school counselor so that pertinent information flows, and a safety net is created. This safety net may also include closest friends, coaches, faith-based leaders, and other important adults in the student's social atom.

The transition back to school after a suicide attempt and psychiatric hospitalization can be a difficult one, especially if the attempt was very public. The student's privacy going forward is critical and the student and his or her parents need to be an integral part of the decisions that get made in the reentry plan.

How school staff can help:

- Obtain releases of information so the school counselor can talk directly to the student's hospital and outpatient treatment team. This will ensure that pertinent information is shared, and there is a smooth transition throughout the levels of care.
- Meet with the student and his or her parents before the return to school, plan together what information they want shared and with whom.
- Practice role playing so that the student can try out different responses to different situations (peer-to-peer & staff-student) that may arise to help lower anxiety.
- Make a social contract with the attempter and his or her parents to include agreement on the following: (1) Student will not post any material regarding the attempt on any social media site and (2) Student and parents will adhere to all treatment conditions prescribed by the discharging physician and the community based therapist and psychiatrist.
- Work out an agreement with the student to not share details of the attempt including the method, with other students to avoid the potential of increasing self-harm risks with other students. Explain that peers talking to peers about the details of an attempt may give false courage to other students who are struggling with their own thoughts of suicide to make an attempt. However, do let the student know that it is an important part of the healing process to talk about the attempt with trusted adults and the student's therapist. Explain that talking about the attempt and what precipitated it in a safe environment can help the student avoid an attempt in the future.

- Reassure the student and family that sharing information with school personnel will be done on a need to know basis. Faculty and staff that have direct contact should be informed so they can actively assist the student academically.
- Speak with the student and his or her parents about how they think teachers and other school personnel can best support the recovery.
- Treat the student's return to school as you would had the student been out sick for a few days. Let the student know you are glad he or she is back, "Good to see you."
- Reassure the student that staff will be available to help the student with any academic issues, and that it will be important for the student to reach out if he or she is feeling worried about their schoolwork.
- Create a crisis plan with the student that will include the names of the trusted adults he or she will reach out to in the school, family and community if he or she is struggling and especially if he or she is having thoughts of suicide
- Be aware that the student may still be dealing with symptoms of depression which can affect concentration and motivation.
- Also, be aware that the student may be adjusting to medication and may be dealing with side effects including fatigue, or jitteriness.
- Some accommodations may need to be made such as an extended time to turn in assignments, or additional time for testing. Some students with concentration issues may find it easier to take a test alone. Some students dealing with anxiety may find it helpful to be able to leave class a little early to avoid the crowds and noise in the hallways when changing classes.
- Monitor social interactions. Meet with the student, and if he or she agrees, their friends, in the days and weeks following the transition back to school to check in and see how things are going with peers. Quickly address any bullying behaviors that are occurring.
- Have regular contact with the student's parents and therapist to provide feedback and to garner information that will help to further support the student's recovery.
- If the student and family were not given this information already, provide the resources below

Resources

Toll-free, 24/7 Access Line for information, referrals and crisis response – 1-888-868-1649

Santa Barbara Response Network 24/7 Line – 805-699-5608. www.sbresponsenetwork.org

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1-800-273-TALK. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org