



## SUICIDE PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, AND POSTVENTION POLICY

### **PURPOSE:**

At Para Los Niños, the health, safety, and well-being of our students, including mental health and wellness, must be a top priority in our schools. We recognize that suicide is a major cause of death among youth and should be taken seriously. By working together, we can increase awareness of the mental health issues our students face and reduce the number of student suicides. To attempt to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students, families, and stakeholders, Para Los Niños has developed this policy to codify preventive strategies and intervention procedures.

This policy covers actions that take place in the school, on school property and at off-site school-sponsored functions and activities. This policy applies to the entire school community, including educators, school and district staff, students, parents/guardians, and volunteers. This policy will also cover appropriate school responses to suicidal or high risk behaviors that take place outside of the school environment.

### **APPROACH:**

#### **1. Prevention and Instruction**

Para Los Niños recognizes suicide prevention is most effective when students, staff, parents, and community members have adequate information about prevention. Suicide prevention strategies may include, but not be limited to, efforts to promote a positive school climate that enhances students' feelings of connectedness with the school and is characterized by caring staff and harmonious interrelationships among students. This policy shall compliment Para Los Niños' comprehensive wellness program by promoting the healthy mental, emotional, and social development of students including, but not limited to, the development of problem-solving skills, coping skills, and self-esteem.

As an organization, Para Los Niños has developed Crisis Response Teams at each of the charter schools. The Crisis Response Teams are multidisciplinary teams of primarily administrative, mental health, safety professionals, and support staff whose primary focus is to address crisis preparedness, intervention/response and recovery. These professionals have been specifically trained in crisis preparedness through recovery and take the leadership role in developing crisis plans, ensuring school staff can effectively execute various crisis protocols, and may provide mental health services for effective crisis interventions and recovery supports.

Suicide prevention instruction will be implemented as follows:

#### *Students:*

Suicide prevention education will be taught in 6<sup>th</sup> grade – 8<sup>th</sup> grade Advisory Classes. It is recommended that these lessons are taught in September (to coincide with Suicide Awareness month) and March (to coincide with Self-Injury Awareness month). All students will be expected to create a school culture of respect and support in which students feel comfortable seeking help for themselves or friends. Students are encouraged to tell any staff member if they, or a friend, are feeling suicidal or in need of help. They should know that because of the life or death nature of these matters, confidentiality or privacy concerns are secondary to seeking help for students in crisis.

*Staff:*

It is expected that all school staff will review this policy and accompanying protocols before or near the beginning of the school year. Training will be provided for all teachers, school administration, afterschool staff, and other staff, including the following information:

- Background on the scope of the problem of youth suicide;
- Information about the signs of stress and depression and where to send students for help;
- Information on risk factors for suicide;
- Information about signs of suicidal thinking;
- Step by step process on what to do when you encounter a student who exhibits risk of self-harm, verbalizes or writes suicidal ideation or exhibits immediate risk of self-harm/suicide.

In addition to this training, teachers will be invited to attend the Integrated Services meeting upon submitting an IS Referral to further discuss concerns.

*Students' Families:*

Parents and guardians play a key role in preventing youth suicide. Parents/guardians need to learn the warning signs and risk factors for suicide. This information helps them connect their children to mental health professionals when appropriate. In partnership with the Family Advocate Coordinator and Mental Health team, an annual parent/family training will be offered that will include information on:

- Background on the scope of the problem of youth suicide;
- Information about the signs of stress and depression and a parent's role in helping;
- Information on risk factors for suicide;
- Information about signs of suicidal thinking;
- Information about parenting and communication strategies for suicide prevention;
- Information about when and how to intervene when signs of suicidal thinking appear;
- Resources in the school and community for families that need help.

Families will also be informed about the services available at Para Los Niños including mental health services, parenting groups and workshops. The contact information for the school's Family Advocate will be provided so parents/caregivers have a contact at their school to help link them to appropriate services for their child.

## **2. Intervention**

From time to time, it will come to a staff member's attention that a student is experiencing a crisis that may include suicidal thinking or behavior. The following procedures will be observed when this occurs:

- All staff members must take threat of self-harm and suicidal behavior seriously every time!
- If the information comes directly from the student, expressed either verbally or through behavior, the staff member will obtain basic information from the student about the crisis. The staff member will then contact a member of the Crisis Response Team. If there is no member of the Crisis Response Team present, the Office Manager will contact a staff from the Mental Health team.
  - Mental Health Team
    - Judi Stadler, LCSW
    - Sharon Berg, PhD
    - Jaime Chaignat, MFT

- Elaine Bagorio, MFT
- Coral Compagnoni, MFT
- If the information comes from another person such as a peer or a parent, the staff member will immediately contact a member of the Crisis Response team to meet with the student to further assess. If no one from the Crisis Response team is available, the Office Manager will contact a member of the Mental Health team who will schedule a meeting with the student and further assess risk.
- The Crisis Response team/Mental Health team member will further discuss the situation with the student to obtain information about the crisis and assess their needs.
- If the student reveals mental health concerns and/or suicidal ideation, the Mental Health team or School Psychologist/Social Worker will perform a suicide risk assessment using Para Los Niños' Risk Assessment Protocol (see Appendix).
- If immediate support is needed, staff would reach out to Psychiatric Mobile Response Team (PMRT) or call 911.

### **3. Postvention**

Para Los Niños recognizes that suicide is a crisis that affects the entire school community. In the event of a student's death by suicide, it is critical that the school's response be swift, consistent, and intended to protect the student body and community from suicide contagion. The following actions will be taken immediately following the news of an incident:

- Confirm the news and convene the Crisis Team;
- Before school begins on the first day, a staff meeting will be held to debrief the faculty and staff to review the crisis response plan, discussion of the day's procedures, and assignment of appropriate roles. The staff meeting will include information about the verifiable facts of the situation and opportunity for faculty and staff to ask questions.
- During the school day on the first day following the incident, the building administrator will distribute a short announcement to be read by all classroom teachers at the beginning of the school day. This statement should not be made in an assembly or over the school's public address system. The statement will summarize the facts of the situation, the school's response plan, and the importance of seeking immediate help from an adult if a student or their peer is in crisis. Communication should also go to students' families by letter. At the conclusion of this first school day, there will be another all-staff meeting to debrief the day.
- After the first day, the "Safe Room" will be open for multiple days after the incident if student need continues. However, the school will return to a normal schedule as quickly as possible, with accommodations available for students who have been identified as at elevated risk. Students identified as at risk will receive extra support and observation during these times as well.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Para Los Niños recognizes that one outcome of quality postvention will be enhanced and improved by strong prevention. When postvention in the aftermath of the crisis has been completed, the Crisis Response Team, including members of Administration will convene to determine whether adjustments need to be made in the school's prevention plan moving forward.