

# Practical Strategies



## for School Counselors



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# PURPOSE

Professional school counselors in the state of Maryland are privileged to have numerous resources at their disposal to use as they seek to effectively implement comprehensive counseling programs in their schools. Both Maryland State Law, through the Pupil Services Regulation of 1988, COMAR. 13A.05.05.02, and the American School Counselors' Association's National Model direct school counselors in their efforts. Additionally counselors' actions are guided by the policies and procedures adopted by their own local school systems. Nevertheless, there are times when counselors seek additional detail, information, and/or direction on how to address a situation. This handbook was created as an additional resource to meet this need. It is not intended to replace the policies and procedures contained in national, state and local guidelines, but rather to compliment them.

This handbook is a work in progress. Sections have been chosen for completion based on their pertinence to the daily work of school counselors. It will be revised and updated as needed so it remains a current and effective resource. As sections are completed or revised copies will be made available to the School Counseling Supervisors in the local school systems for distribution to individual school counselors. The contents of this handbook are broken into five sections: Introduction, Counseling, Coordination, Consultation, and local school system information.

# INTRODUCTION

# FORWARD

All professional organizations develop a set of standards that define the purpose of the professional services provided by their members and the benefits derived by the consumers of these services.

In Maryland, the goals and subgoals for school counseling are outlined in the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.05.05.02 (B). COMAR 13A. 05 .05. 02 (A) defines the School Counseling (Guidance) Program as a planned, systematic program of counseling, consulting, appraisal, information, and placement services for student in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The services provided are intended to help students:

- Demonstrate personal and academic growth;
- Make appropriate educational and career decisions; and
- Have productive interactions with others.

In 1997, the American School Counselors Association articulated the history of the standards of practice for school counselors. These standards were formal expressions of what has been accepted practice in school counseling programs for decades. These clearly stated national standards provide a consensus on both the focus of the services in school counseling programs and the competencies and skills that school counselors help students develop through their services.

School systems in Maryland use the goals (or domains) for school counseling stated in COMAR as the basis of the design of their K-12 school counseling programs. The ASCA National Standards provide school counselors with additional insights into the three domains of school counseling by identifying three standards supporting each domain and student competencies that can be developed through these standards as a template to design needs-based programs in their own schools.

With COMAR serving as the foundation of school counseling programs in the State of Maryland, the ASCA National Standards provide additional language for the development of school counseling program plans. The National Standards take each of the three goals (or domains) for school counseling programs and attach to them measurable student competencies aligned under each standard.

## 1. Comparison Between COMAR goals and ASCA National Standards

PUPIL SERVICES REGULATION 1988 COMAR. 13A. 05. 05. 02	ASCA NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING PRORGRAMS 1998
1) Facilitate personal and academic growth so that the student will: a. Understand all facets of the school	1) Academic development - a. Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills

<p>environment,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Understand individual rights and responsibilities,</li> <li>c. Demonstrate effective student skills, and</li> <li>d. Engage in appropriate classroom behavior</li> </ul> <p>2) Encourage the development of educational and career decision-making skills so that the student will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Comprehend aptitudes, interests, and experiences as they relate to individual career development,</li> <li>b. Apply the steps of decision making to any situation,</li> <li>c. Develop an approved 4-year high school plan of study,</li> <li>d. Analyze various careers that are appropriate to an individual's aptitudes, interests, and experiences,</li> <li>e. Identify appropriate career opportunities,</li> <li>f. Select the most relevant educational or vocational training programs,</li> <li>g. Formulate and appropriately modify a personal career development plan, and</li> <li>h. Demonstrate useful employment keeping skills</li> </ul> <p>3) Promote the development of interpersonal skills so the student will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Understand the effect of one's behavior on others,</li> <li>b. Demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills, and</li> <li>c. Possess the knowledge and skill for resolving interpersonal conflicts.</li> </ul>	<p>that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Students will complete school with the academic preparation to choose from a wide range of substantial postsecondary options, including college.</li> <li>c. Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.</li> </ul> <p>2) Career Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed decisions.</li> <li>b. Students will employ strategies to achieve future career success and satisfaction.</li> <li>c. Students will understand the relationship among personal qualities, education and training, and the world of work.</li> </ul> <p>3) Personal/Social Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.</li> <li>b. Students will make decisions, set goals, and take necessary</li> </ul>
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	<p>action to achieve goals.  c. Students will understand safety and survival skills.</p>
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**2. National Standards – Student Competencies**

**I. Academic Development**

Standards in this area guide the school counselor to implement strategies and activities to support and enable the student to experience academic success, maximize learning through commitment, produce high quality work, and prepare for a full range of options and opportunities after high school.

The academic development area includes the acquisition of skills in decision-making, problem solving and goal setting, critical thinking, logical reasoning, and interpersonal communication and the application of these skills to academic achievement.

Academic Development: Standard A

Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span.

Student Competencies:

*Improve Academic Self-Concept*

Students will:

- articulate feelings of competence and confidence as a learner
- display a positive interest in learning
- take pride in work and in achievement
- accept mistakes as essential to the learning process
- identify attitudes and behaviors which lead to successful learning

*Acquire Skills for Improving Learning*

Students will:

- apply time management and task management skills
- demonstrate how effort and persistence positively affect learning
- use communication skills to know when and how to ask for help when needed
- apply knowledge of learning styles to positively influence school performance

*Achieve School Success*

Students will:

- take responsibility for their actions
- demonstrate the ability to work independently, as well as the ability to

- work cooperatively with other students
- demonstrate dependability, productivity, and initiative
- share knowledge

### Academic Development: Standard B

Students will complete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial postsecondary options, including college.

#### Student Competencies:

##### *Improve Learning*

Students will:

- demonstrate the motivation to achieve individual potential
- learn and apply critical thinking skills
- apply the study skills necessary for academic success at each level
- seek information and support from faculty, staff, family, and peers
- organize and apply academic information from a variety of sources
- use knowledge of learning styles to positively influence school performance
- become self-directed and independent learners

##### *Plan to Achieve Goals*

Students will:

- establish challenging academic goals in elementary, middle/junior high, and high school
- use assessment results in educational planning
- develop and implement an annual plan of study to maximize academic ability and achievement
- apply knowledge of aptitudes and interests to goal setting
- use problem-solving and decision-making skills to assess progress toward educational goals
- understand the relationship between classroom performance and success in school
- identify post-secondary options consistent with interests, achievement, aptitude, and abilities

### Academic Development: Standard C

Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.

Student Competencies:

*Relate School to Life Experiences*

Students will:

- demonstrate the ability to balance school, studies, extracurricular activities, leisure time, and family life
- seek co-curricular and community experiences to enhance the school experience
- understand the relationship between learning and work
- demonstrate an understanding of the value of lifelong learning as essential to seeking, obtaining, and maintaining life goals
- understand that school success is the preparation to make the transition from student to community member
- understand how school success and academic achievement enhance future career and vocational opportunities

## **II. Career Development**

Standards in this area guide the school counseling program to implement strategies and activities to support and enable the student to develop a positive attitude toward work, and to develop the necessary skills to make a successful transition from school to the world of work, and from job to job across the life career span. Also, standards in this area help students to understand the relationship between success in school and future success in the world of work. The career development standards reflect the recommendations of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1991) and the content of the *National Career Development Guidelines* (NOICC, 1989).

Career Development: Standard A

Students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions.

Student Competencies:

*Develop Career Awareness*

Students will:

- develop skills to locate, evaluate, and interpret career information
- learn about the variety of traditional and non-traditional occupations
- develop an awareness of personal abilities, skills, interests, and motivations
- learn how to interact and work cooperatively in teams
- learn to make decisions

- learn how to set goals
- understand the importance of planning
- pursue and develop competency in areas of interest
- develop hobbies and avocational interests
- balance between work and leisure time

*Develop Employment Readiness*

Students will:

- acquire employability skills such as working on a team, problem-solving and organizational skills
- apply job readiness skills to seek employment opportunities
- demonstrate knowledge about the changing workplace
- learn about the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees
- learn to respect individual uniqueness in the workplace
- learn how to write a resume
- develop a positive attitude toward work and learning
- understand the importance of responsibility, dependability, punctuality, integrity, and effort in the workplace
- utilize time- and task-management skills

Career Development: Standard B

Students will employ strategies to achieve future career goals with success and satisfaction.

Student Competencies:

*Acquire Career Information*

Students will:

- apply decision-making skills to career planning, course selection, and career transitions
- identify personal skills, interests, and abilities and relate them to current career choices
- demonstrate knowledge of the career planning process
- know the various ways which occupations can be classified
- use research and information resources to obtain career information
- learn to use the Internet to access career planning information
- describe traditional and non-traditional occupations and how these relate to career choice
- understand how changing economic and societal needs influence employment trends and future training

*Identify Career Goals*

Students will:

- demonstrate awareness of the education and training needed to achieve career goals

- assess and modify their educational plan to support career goals
- use employability and job readiness skills in internship, mentoring, shadowing, and/or other world of work experiences
- select course work that is related to career interests maintain a career planning portfolio

Career Development: Standard C

Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, training, and the world of work.

Student Competencies:

*Acquire Knowledge to Achieve Career Goals*

Students will:

- understand the relationship between educational achievement and career success
- explain how work can help to achieve personal success and satisfaction
- identify personal preferences and interests which influence career choices and success
- understand that the changing workplace requires lifelong learning and acquiring new skills
- describe the effect of work on lifestyles
- understand the importance of equity and access in career choice
- understand that work is an important and satisfying means of personal expression

*Apply Skills to Achieve Career Goals*

Students will:

- demonstrate how interests, abilities, and achievement relate to achieving personal, social, educational, and career goals
- learn how to use conflict management skills with peers and adults
- learn to work cooperatively with others as a team member
- apply academic and employment readiness skills in work-based learning situations such as internships, shadowing, and/or mentoring experiences.

**III. Personal/Social Development**

Standards in the personal/social area guide the school counseling program to implement strategies and activities to support and maximize each student’s personal growth and enhance the educational and career development of the student.

Personal/Social Development: Standard A

Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help them

understand and respect self and others.

Student Competencies:

*Acquire Self-Knowledge*

Students will:

- develop a positive attitude toward self as a unique and worthy person
- identify values, attitudes, and beliefs
- learn the goal setting process
- understand change as a part of growth
- identify and express feelings
- distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors
- recognize personal boundaries, rights, and privacy needs
- understand the need for self-control and how to practice it
- demonstrate cooperative behavior in groups
- identify personal strengths and assets
- identify and discuss changing personal and social roles
- identify and recognize changing family roles

*Acquire Interpersonal Skills*

Students will:

- recognize that everyone has rights and responsibilities
- respect alternative points of view
- recognize, accept, respect, and appreciate individual differences
- recognize, accept, and appreciate ethnic and cultural diversity
- recognize and respect differences in various family configurations use effective communication skills
- know that communication involves speaking, listening, and nonverbal behavior
- learn how to make and keep friends

Personal/Social Development: Standard B

Students will make decisions, set goals, and take necessary action to achieve goals.

Student Competencies:

*Self-Knowledge Applications*

Students will:

- use a decision-making and problem-solving model
- understand consequences of decisions and choices
- identify alternative solutions to a problem
- develop effective coping skills for dealing with problems
- demonstrate when, where, and how to seek help for solving problems and making decisions
- know how to apply conflict resolution skills

- demonstrate a respect and appreciation for individual and cultural differences
- know when peer pressure is influencing a decision
- identify long- and short-term goals
- identify alternative ways of achieving goals
- use persistence and perseverance in acquiring knowledge and skills
- develop an action plan to set and achieve realistic goals

Personal/Social Development: Standard C

Students will understand safety and survival skills.

Student Competencies:

*Acquire Personal Safety Skills*

Students will:

- demonstrate knowledge of personal information (i.e., telephone number, home address, emergency contact)
- learn about the relationship between rules, laws, safety, and the protection of an individual's rights
- learn the difference between appropriate and inappropriate physical contact
- demonstrate the ability to assert boundaries, rights, and personal privacy
- differentiate between situations requiring peer support and situations requiring adult professional help
- identify resource people in the school and community, and know how to seek their help
- apply effective problem-solving and decision-making skills to make safe and healthy choices
- learn about the emotional and physical dangers of substance use and abuse
- learn how to cope with peer pressure
- learn techniques for managing stress and conflict
- learn coping skills for managing life events.

# THE ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR

## **The Need for School Counseling**

As students develop from childhood through adolescence, they face unique sets of challenges. Mastery of these academic, cognitive, social, emotional, and cultural challenges will, in turn, prepare students for success in the next phase of their development. School counselors play a key role within the schools' support services by facilitating the proactive development of many competencies needed by students in the areas of school success, personal decision making, career exploration, goal setting, self esteem, and interpersonal relationship skills. Additionally, during the course of their development, a number of students experience problems which call for the remediating interventions of school counselors to prevent negative perceptions and inappropriate coping behaviors from becoming patterns which affect future growth. School counseling is an integral aspect of the total school plan. It is planned, sequential, developmental, and designed for delivery to *all* students at *all* levels of education as a regular component of their school experience.

The professional school counselor has another critical role within the school: that of student advocate. It falls to the school counselor to be a voice for student needs and an agent for change as well as a creator of services to meet these needs. The role of the counselor as change agent includes conducting student needs assessments, collaborating in site-based improvement teams, monitoring changing demographics, transiency concerns, community issues, addressing parental concerns, meeting school system goals for student achievement and safe and orderly school environments, and coordinating the development of a school counseling program plan which organizes and assesses these services.

School counselors of the twenty-first century assume the following roles as student advocates:

- Facilitator of Cooperative Interpersonal Relationships
  - Coordinating school counseling advisory councils
  - Working on school committees
  - Serving on Strategic Planning teams
  - Consulting as an instructional team member
  
- Facilitator of an Invitational School Climate
  - Promoting community cohesiveness
  - Monitoring the quality of messages to parents/students
  - Creating schoolwide climate initiatives
  - Modeling effective communication skills
  - Advocating for multicultural sensitivity
  
- Promoter of Positive Student Outcomes
  - Working on behalf of student achievement
  - Using guidance to promote successful school behaviors
  - Consulting on effective classroom management
  - Sharing information and data related to positive student outcomes

- Resource Broker of Services
  - Referring to private and community agency resources
  - Collaborating in transition programs (e.g., school-to-work).
  - Providing access to career and post secondary education
  - Advising parents/student of career and financial aid opportunities
  
- Change Agent
  - Advocating for students
  - Advising on issues of equity
  - Participating as team member
  - Developing the school counseling program plan
  - Consulting with parents/guardians and teachers
  
- Specialist in Human Behavior and Relationships
  - Identifying the developmental needs of students
  - Consulting about the social and personal needs of students
  - Recommending conflict resolution strategies (e.g., peer mediation program development)
  - Modeling effective human relations and problem solving skills
  - Coordinating services to address a variety of personal and interpersonal student needs

#### The Foundation for the School Counselor's Program

School counselors have demonstrated through the impact of their programs that they are a positive force in the lives of students and in the climate of schools. Recent research into the effectiveness of school counseling programs has generated two significant findings:

- School counselors' interventions have a substantive impact on student achievement and personal development
- Specific counselor initiated interventions such as individual and small group counseling, classroom guidance, and professional consultations contribute directly to student success in the classroom. (Border & Drury, 1992)

It is apparent that school counseling programs support the school system's mission and enhance student learning.

The goals upon which counseling programs are based are set forth in *The National Standards for School Counseling Program (1997)* and COMAR ( 13A.05.05.02 ). These documents identify three core goals for school counseling programs. These goals are:

- School success for all students
- Competency in decision-making, career development, and post-secondary educational planning
- Effective interpersonal relationships and positive self-appraisals.

Serving as the foundation of the school counselors' program and defining the unique role of the school counselor are the three essential functions of counseling, consultation, and coordination.

- **Counseling:** Effective counseling is developmental. School counseling programs recognize that *all* students need help as they routinely pass through childhood and adolescence. School counselors help young people with issues related to their personal, social, career, and educational development. They assist students to cope with crises and developmental losses in their lives.

In addition to their developmental role, school counselors have an important remediating role which calls upon them to intervene to address areas of student needs which affect school safety and order. These issues include self-defeating perceptions students may have about themselves and others, concerns related to academic success, and self-destructive patterns of behavior (e.g., acting out behaviors and substance abuse). This critical role demands an ability to identify and directly assist "at risk" students in a timely manner despite a large case load, to consult with others, to participate in the coordination of educational and community resources, and to make appropriate referrals for additional therapeutic intervention.

- **Consultation:** School counselors offer consultation to parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and service providers. They identify students' needs and assist in the development of strategies to address students' academic, personal, developmental, and social-emotional concerns.

School counselors serve an essential consultative role on Student Support Team. Counselors may be involved as consultants to IEP teams when students' social, emotional, or behavioral needs have an impact on the educational disability. In addition, counselors consult to site-based teams, teaching teams, Student Assistance teams, and school committees.

- **Coordination:** School counselors serve a coordinating role by making their services known to all potential users, establishing linkages within the school curriculum to counseling goals, and creating networks of related services and referral resources, such as the services of community agencies. This coordinating role could include, for example, the counselor working with the school staff on school safety issues such as conflict resolution. Additionally, school counselors play a leadership role in coordinating schoolwide initiatives such as the development of a peer mediation or peer helper program. These varied services are organized, coordinated, communicated to the school community, implemented, and evaluated through a needs-based school counseling program plan.

The ultimate impact of effective counseling is student success. The counseling process encompasses unique interventions designed by counselors to assist students in the development of skills to bring about changes in relation to achievement, decision-making, behavioral modification, personal development, and interpersonal relationships. This process can be best understood through four counseling approaches which should be the central components of any school counseling program plan.

- Individual Counseling - is a one-to-one, personal interaction between a counselor and a student to resolve problems, undertake new tasks, or explore concerns. In school settings, this counseling interaction is typically based upon a brief, action-oriented counseling model although some student concerns may require multiple counseling sessions. The counseling relationship is founded upon trust and rapport which result from the unconditional positive regard the counselor demonstrates to the student.
- Small Group Counseling - involves the counselor working with a number of students at the same time on issues of mutual interest or concern. The purposes of a small counseling group vary according to the central action to be undertaken by the group, (e.g., task oriented, problem-centered, support, or remedial groups). Under the leadership of the school counselor, group members share experiences, explore thoughts and feelings, receive feedback, gain new information, role play new skills, and identify goals and actions necessary for improved functioning.
- Developmental Classroom Guidance - operates on an instructional approach and involves all students at respective grade levels. These sessions are based upon developmental tasks, assessed needs, and emerging situational concerns. A variety of teaching strategies are employed including the creative use of cooperative learning methods, multimodal learning approaches, mixed media, well-constructed activities to address the affective domain, and matches between guidance indicators and those of the essential curricula from other subject areas.
- Large Group Guidance - These meetings reflect a strategy which counselors typically use to present information to a large group of students regarding topics such as school planning, career development, and college informational sessions. Large group work can address a variety of counseling objectives in the realm of the affective domain, personal safety, and informational concerns.

### The School Counselor's Professional Identity

All public school counselors in the state of Maryland are fully certified. School counselors are specialists in human development, interpersonal skills, effective communication strategies, decision-making, and personal life management. To this end, counselors commit themselves to the ongoing development of professional competencies through professional growth activities including advanced work in graduate level training, conference attendance, inservice training and workshops to update their training in contemporary counseling issues and counseling trends, memberships in professional organizations and certification programs, and professional reading.

School counselors are solidly grounded in the ethical practices of their profession, as outlined in the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practices of the American Counseling Association* (1995) and the *Ethical Standards for School Counselors of the American School Counselors' Association* (1995). They are required to advise their counselees of the purposes of counseling, the extent and limits of privacy of information obtained through counseling, and their professional responsibility to report what was learned through counseling when a child's welfare or the welfare of others may be in danger.

Above all, school counselors commit themselves to their own growth as self-actualized individuals. They develop an understanding of self and monitor how their personal characteristics, recent life experiences, and individual values may affect their counseling with others.

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# ETHICAL AND LEGAL ISSUES

(Lynne Linde)

**COUNSELING**

# STUDENTS IN CRISIS

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## Crisis Counseling

# Bullying

## I. Description of Topic:

Bullying behavior is defined as a direct or indirect physical or psychological intimidation that occurs repeatedly over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse. It can involve individuals or groups of students. Noted youth violence researcher Dan Olweus describes bullying as, “a student’s repeated exposure, over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students...”(Olweus, 1991, p. 431). Examples of bullying behavior include, but are not limited to, physical aggression, verbal abuse, intentional exclusion from a group, and any other purposefully antagonistic behaviors. According to the Center for Mental Health Services Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative bullying is a pervasive problem in our schools and can have a significant shaping influence on students in later years. Bullying behavior is addressed in Maryland law in COMAR section 13A.04.05.05-1.

All students are at risk for becoming victims of bullies. There is not one profile of a bullying victim that can be defined. However, several characteristics have been identified through the research that put students at greater risk as victims. A list of these characteristics appears below. It is important to note that many of these characteristics especially those related to sexual orientation, race, gender, or ethnicity also put students at risk for acts of hate and violence. Thus any response to bullying in a school setting should take into account potential acts of hate and violence and the issue of increasing acceptance of diversity among members the school community.

In addressing bullying behaviors it is important that school counselors consider a comprehensive approach that includes both preventive and responsive services. Proactively, prior to any specific bullying incident, school counselors should collaborate with other school staff to establish and maintain a safe, respectful, and accepting school climate. When responding to a specific incident, it is critical to address all the various individuals or groups involved, including students exhibiting the bullying behavior, students being bullied, students who are witnesses to bullying behavior, and adults in the school community including staff members and parents.

It is important to consider the nature of the bullying incident when deciding the extent to which you will share details with individuals affected by the behavior, but not directly involved, most notably staff members and parents. This assessment is especially important when the content of the bullying is focused on issues such as sexual orientation or gender identity. The details of these issues in an individual’s life may not be widely known. Revealing them in this context may put the victim at greater risk for continued acts of prejudice, hate and violence.

The best practices outlined in this document provide information to design and implement a comprehensive response to a bullying incident.

## II. Indicators:

It is important to note that the terms “bully” and “victim” may refer to the same individual in a bullying situation. Research has shown that often students who act as bullies have at another point in their lives, or within another relationship, been victims of bullying behavior.

Characteristics of students at risk for bullying behavior:

- Excessive feelings of isolation or being alone
- Feelings of being picked on and persecuted
- Chronic discipline problems
- Poor academic performance
- Expression of violence in writing and drawings
- Intolerance for differences and prejudice
- Chronic exposure to or traumatization by violence
- Temperament marked by impulsivity, irritability, and/or hyper-vigilance
- Physically bigger or stronger than their victims
- Victimized by others
- Socially withdrawn
- Uncontrolled anger
- Drug and alcohol use
- Low school interest

Characteristics of students at risk for becoming victims of bullies:

- Poor or no social connections
- Diverse sexual orientation
- Physical differences (i.e. race, body type, clothing)
- Lack assertiveness skills
- Often physically weaker than peers
- Excessive feelings of isolation or being alone
- Feelings of being picked on and persecuted
- Low self esteem
- Insecure
- Victimized by others

Characteristics of students experiencing bullying:

- Loss of interest in school work and experience a decline in academic performance
- Fearful about attending school, walking to/from school, or riding the bus
- Cautious
- Socially withdrawn
- Anxious

### III. Procedures:

Prevention: Steps for addressing bullying concerns on a school-wide basis

- Build a positive school climate that discourages bullying behavior and encourages positive student interaction
- Gather information to develop a clear picture of the bullying situation in your school
- Conduct parental awareness and educational workshops to explore the issue of bullying and its relation to your school
- Conduct teacher in-service training to increase staff knowledge regarding recognition of bullying behavior and appropriate responses to it
- Increase supervision in areas that are “hot spots” for bullying and/or violence at your school
- Develop a school wide system to reinforce pro-social behavior and positive conflict resolution skills
- Develop school wide guidelines which govern bullying incidents and which are applied consistently
- Establish a confidential reporting system for students who are victims of, or witnesses to, bullying behavior
- Establish school wide programs that enhance students’ feelings of connectedness to other students, teachers, and the school environment
- Equip students with the skills they need to resist, avoid, ignore, or manage bullying behavior
- Develop classroom and school-wide guidelines to discourage bullying, and to provide clear consequences for what will result if bullying does occur
- Implement classroom guidance or school-wide activities on related topics such as:
  - Social skill development
  - Assertiveness skills
  - Conflict resolution
  - Resiliency skills
  - Communication skills
  - Empathy
  - Expression of emotions
  - Anger management
  - Strategies for responding to a bullying
- Regularly provide class meetings, or other problem solving forums for students to use to discuss concerns and resolve conflicts
- Regularly engage students in varied, creative, and non-violent expressions of emotions such as journaling, expressive writing, drawing, group discussions, role- playing, etc.

Response: Steps for responding to a specific bullying incident

- Ensure, to whatever extent possible, the physical and emotional safety of all students involved
- Separate all students involved in the incident

- Speak to all students involved to assess the degree of physical injury and/or emotional impact that the bullying behavior has had.
- Share all appropriate information gained with the administrator in your school building
- Contact parents or guardians of all students involved in the incident (bullies, victims, and witnesses), as appropriate
- Address the bullying incident with appropriate consequences or disciplinary measures to deter, to whatever extent possible, a repeat of the behavior
- Gather information regarding the incident, its precedents and antecedents
- Consult with the administration, other appropriate school staff, and local school system guidelines to determine appropriate consequences and/or disciplinary actions
- If the bullying incident has involved a threat of physical harm to an individual or group of individuals follow the procedures for dealing with a serious threat as specified by your local school system
- Consult IDEA regulations regarding discipline for students with disabilities if the student responsible for the bullying behavior has a recognized disability.
- Determine steps to be taken and Inform all involved individuals
- Increase student awareness of the potential impact of bullying behavior on both bullies and victims.
- Be knowledgeable regarding bullying, its implications for both bullies and victims, and other more appropriate behaviors
- Counsel all students involved in the incident
- Within your counseling response include a conversation with the student(s) who are exhibiting the bullying behavior regarding the affects of bullying behavior on its victims
- After considering the nature of the incident, the students involved, and the issues that need to be processed decide on a case by case basis whether these conversations should be held with individuals or groups of students
- Increase student coping skills and strategies for dealing with bullying behavior:
- Meet with students or groups of students, as appropriate to discuss related topics such as:
  - Anger management and expression
  - Communication skills
  - Empathy
  - Diversity appreciation
- Provide opportunities for students to practice these skills
- Support the needs of students who are witnesses to bullying behavior
- Meet with students who have witnessed bullying behavior to discuss thoughts, emotions, and reactions that these students may experience as a result of witnessing the bullying behavior
- Reinforce strategies within the school which offer students opportunities to report bullying behavior. Consider including an option which allows for a confidential or anonymous report
- Instruct students in various strategies to use when they witness bullying behavior
- Offer students the opportunity to practice these strategies

IV. References:

Related Books and Articles:

- Bitney, James. *No Bullying*. Minneapolis, Minn.: The Johnson Institute.  
California Association of School Psychologists. “*The Good, The Bad, and The Bully.*” Resource Paper April 1997: 1-8.
- Garrity, Carla, Kathryn Jens, William Porter, Nancy Sagar and Cam Short-Camilli. *Bully-Proofing Your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Elementary Schools*. Longmont, Colorado: Sopris West, 1994.
- Olweus, Dan. “*Bully/Victim Problems at School: Facts and Effective Intervention.*” *Reclaiming Students and Youth* Spring, 1996: 15-22.
- Sprick, R., Sprick, M., and Garrison, M. (1992). *Foundations: Establishing Positive Discipline Policies*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Internet Resources:

- USDE Bullying Prevention Manual: Available at  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/ssp/bullymanual.htm>
- National Bullying Awareness Campaign:  
[www.new.org/issues/safescho/bullying/](http://www.new.org/issues/safescho/bullying/)
- Recognizing and Preventing Bullying Fact Sheet  
[www.safetyzone.org/publications/fact4\\_index.html](http://www.safetyzone.org/publications/fact4_index.html)
- Hate Motivated Behavior in Schools  
[www.alameda-coe.k12.ca.us/aco/HATECRIMES/index.htm](http://www.alameda-coe.k12.ca.us/aco/HATECRIMES/index.htm)

# Child Abuse and Neglect

## I. Description of Topic:

Family Law Article Annotated Code of Maryland mandates the direct reporting by every health practitioner, police officer, educator or human service worker who has reason to suspect that the child has been subjected to abuse or neglect to inform the local department of social services or the appropriate law enforcement. Any other person, including any volunteer of the school system, is also obligated to make such a report. Immunity from civil liability or criminal penalty is extended by the law to those who report in good faith or participate in an investigation or judicial proceeding resulting from this action.

Child Abuse is the physical, sexual, or mental injury of a child by any person who is responsible for the supervision of that child or by any household or family member. Child Neglect is leaving a child unattended or failing to provide proper care by any parent or person who is responsible for the supervision of that child. This indicates that the child's health or welfare is harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm.

## II. Definitions and Indicators (not inclusive, serves as an aid)

### Sexual Abuse

Sexual Abuse of a child, whether physical injuries are sustained or not, includes any act that involves sexual molestation or exploitation of a child by a parent or other person who has permanent or temporary custody or responsibility for a supervision of a child, or by any household or family member. Sexual abuse includes, incest, rape or sexual offense in any degree, sodomy and unnatural or perverted sexual practices.

- Physical Indicators

- Self inflicted injuries and/or suicidal actions
- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Pain, offensive odor or itching in genital areas
- Bleeding in or bruises on genital areas
- Frequent use of bathroom/urinary tract infections
- Penile discharge or swelling
- Pregnancy or positive test for sexually transmitted disease
- Sophisticated attire inappropriate for age of child

- Behavioral Indicators

- Clinging to adults or wary of adult contact
- Expressing affection inappropriately
- Unusual knowledge of sexual matters and sophisticated sexual play
- Refusing to undress in physical education class
- Passivity during a pelvic examination

- Isolation/poor peer relationships and/or withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating/poor academic progress
- Regressive or aggressive behaviors
- Poor self concept
- Flat affect
- Recurrent nightmares, disturbed sleep patterns, fear of the dark
- Use of drugs and delinquents act, e.g. running away

### Physical Abuse

Abuse is the physical or mental injury of a child by any parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of a child, or by any household or family member, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or at a substantial risk of being harmed.

- Physical Indicators
  - Bruises or welts on the face, back, buttocks and patterns often indicating the implement used to inflict pain/punishment (e.g. belt, buckle, electric cord)
  - Burns on palms, back, side, buttocks, burns on genitalia, caused by cigarettes, cigars; burns caused by immersion in hot liquid or various implements, such as irons or curling irons
  - Suspicious cuts and abrasions
  - Head injuries-bleeding and hair loss caused by hair pulling
  - Fractures
  - Internal injuries caused by hitting or kicking in the abdomen
  - Inappropriate clothing for the weather to mask body injuries
- Behavioral Indicators
  - Hyperactivity, impulsivity
  - Extreme behaviors, either aggressiveness or withdrawal
  - Nervous habits or movements
  - Excessive requests for food and tokens of affection
  - Distrust of adults
  - Display of adult responsibilities
  - Frequent school absences or lateness
  - Guarded responses when questioned regarding an injury or home life

### Child Neglect

The leaving of a child unattended or other failure to give proper care and attention to a child by any parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for the supervision of the child under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm, or there is mental injury to the child or a substantial risk of mental injury.

- Physical Indicators
  - Very poor hygiene
  - Left unattended or inadequately supervised for long periods of time
  - Poor growth
  - Inadequate medical or dental treatment
  - Wearing inadequate clothing for weather
  - Living in a home without minimum health, nutrition and fire standards
  - Limited interaction and stimulation of child by caregiver
  
- Behavioral Indicators
  - Flat affect and/or depression
  - Extreme behaviors, either aggressive or withdrawal
  - Nervous habits or movements
  - Excessive request for food and tokens of affection
  - Distrust of adults and display of adult responsibility
  - Frequent school absences or lateness
  - Guarded responses when questioned regarding injury or home life

#### Mental Injury

Mental Injury is defined as the “observable, identifiable, and substantial impairment of a child’s mental or psychological ability to function.

Indicators of mental injury may include any or all of the behavioral indicators listed above.

#### III. Reporting Procedure:

- Make an oral and written report to the local Department of Social Services (DSS), or in child abuse cases to either the local DSS or law enforcement department within 48 hours..
- Call DSS (number appears on top of reporting form)
- Complete the Child Abuse and Neglect form (Be certain to write the date and time of the oral report and obtain the “name of person to whom oral report was made”), and
- Distribute copies to the following (following guidelines of your district):
  - County Department of Social Services
  - State’s Attorney’s Office
  - School Principal; School Abuse/Neglect Folder
  - Director of Student Services; Supervisor of Psychological Services

#### IV. References

Local administrative procedure for reporting child abuse  
 American Counseling Association ([www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org))  
 American Psychological Association ([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org))  
 American School Counseling Association- Position Paper Child abuse  
 (<http://schoolcounselor.org>)

Maryland Association of Counseling and Development ([www.loyola.edu/macd](http://www.loyola.edu/macd))  
Maryland School Counselor Association (<http://mdschoolcounselor.org>)  
National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information ([www.calib.com](http://www.calib.com); 703-385-7565)  
The Childhelp USA/National Child Abuse Hotline Parenting (1-800-442-4453)  
Maryland State Department of Human Resources ([www.dhr.state.md.us/cps/](http://www.dhr.state.md.us/cps/); (410)767-7112 or 1-800-332-6347)  
Parenting and Family Best Practices  
Parent Help line @ 1-800-342-7472  
How to Recognize Child Abuse  
Parenting Practices Associated with Child Abuse  
Recognize the Warning Signs of Child Abuse  
What Happens after the Report is made  
[www.kidshelpkids.net](http://www.kidshelpkids.net)  
People Against Child Abuse, Inc.  
125 Cathedral St  
Annapolis, MD 21401  
(301)296-7816 or 1-800-422-3055  
National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse  
332 S. Michigan Ave. Suite 1600  
Chicago, Il. 60604  
(312)663-3520  
[www.childabuse.org](http://www.childabuse.org)

# Rape and Sexual Assault

## I. Description of Topic:

Sexual violence is one of the fastest growing, yet most under-reported, violent crimes in the United States today. It includes a variety of sexual acts committed against a person's free will which include, but are not limited to, rape and sexual assault. It is important to differentiate between child abuse and assault. The child abuse laws are in effect when the sexual act has been committed by a person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of a child (any person under the age of 18), including household or family members. This may also include school employees and babysitters. The Department of Social Services is the contact for these circumstances. Sexual assault is committed by a person who does not have responsibility for care and custody and may include strangers, peers, boyfriends/girlfriends, relatives and friends of the family. Sexual assault is reportable to law enforcement authorities. Date rape, or acquaintance rape, is forced or coerced sex between partners, dates and boyfriends/girlfriends. If a person has had too much to drink or is on drugs, s/he can not consent to sex and having sex with him/her is legally rape. Date rape is the most common form of rape. In Maryland, the age of consent for participating in sexual activity is 14 however, if there is four (4) or more years difference in age between the partners it is a violation of the law and must be reported even if the partners state that the activity is consensual.

Some statistics about sexual violence include:

- 61 % of female rape victims are under the age of 18
- 1 in 3 women will be sexually assaulted during her lifetime
- 1 in every 10 men will be sexually assaulted in his lifetime
- 1 in 4 children, both boys and girls, will be sexually assaulted before the age of 18
- 75 % of sexual assaults are committed by a friend, acquaintance, neighbor, intimate partner or family member of the victim. This includes date rape.

Legal Definition:

**Rape:** Vaginal intercourse with another person by force or threat of force against the will and without the consent of the other person.\*

**Sexual Assault:** A sexual act with another person by force or threat of force against the will and without the consent of the other person.\*

*\*Maryland Criminal Laws from the Annotated Code of Maryland, Art. 27, 464B and 464C*

Rape, sexual assault or the attempt to do either is a crime.

## II. Indicators:

Rape and/or sexual assault may be reported by the victim, a confidante of the victim or a witness. In some instances, the victim may be too afraid or embarrassed to report the incident. The

student may be confused or unsure of what happened and may feel guilty and blame him/herself for the incident. Other indicators of possible unreported sexual abuse or assault may include a variety of physical and/or behavioral signals. Any or several of these may be an indicator:

- sleep disturbances
- loss of appetite/eating disorders
- withdrawing from usual activity
- changes in school performance
- unusual interest/knowledge of sexual matters inappropriate for child's age
- sexual acting out/preoccupation with sexual matters

### III. Procedures for responding to sexual assault and rape:

It is important to realize that the victim may be confused or unsure of what happened and may feel guilty and blame themselves for what happened.

- Stay with the victim and offer support
- Notify the school administrator immediately
- Notify (along with the school administrator) the appropriate law enforcement agency
- Notify the parent/guardian
- Preserve physical evidence on or around victim as much as possible
- Provide resource information to student and parent/guardian
- Provide follow up and continue to be a support person for the victim

### Referral Resources:

- School Nurse
- School Psychologist
- Mental Health Department
- Health Department
- Maryland Youth Crises Hotline      1-800-422-0009
- Rape Crisis Center
- Sexual Assault Hotline
- Maryland State Police
- Local Law Enforcement (Sheriff's Office)
- Youth Services Bureau
- Community Crisis Center

### IV. References:

Effective Strategy: Teaching Teens to Prevent Dating Violence, National Crime Prevention Council, <http://128.121.17.146/ncpc>  
The Victim Rights Law Center, [www.legalhelp@victimrights.org](http://www.legalhelp@victimrights.org)  
The Rape Abuse & Incest National Network website, [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)  
Maryland Criminal Laws from the Annotated Code of Maryland  
Family Law Code Ann. Section 5-701 and 5-7

# Self Injurious Behaviors

## I. Description of Topic:

Self-Injury is also termed self-mutilation, self-harm or self-abuse. The behavior is defined as the deliberate, repetitive, impulsive, non-lethal harming of one's self. Self-injury includes: (1) cutting; (2) scratching; (3) picking scabs or interfering with wound healing; (4) burning; (5) punching self or objects; (6) infecting oneself; (7) inserting objects in body openings; (8) bruising or breaking bones; (9) some forms of hair pulling, as well as other various forms of body harm. The behaviors, which pose serious risks, may be symptoms of a mental health problem that can be treated.

Experts estimate that nearly 1% of the population exhibit habitual self-injurious behaviors, with higher incidence among females. The typical onset of self-harming acts is puberty. The behaviors often last for 5 – 10 years but can persist much longer without appropriate treatment.

## II. Indicators of adolescent self-injury

- Unexplained frequent injuries, including cuts and burns
- Wearing long pants and sleeves in warm weather
- Wearing wrist warmers
- Wearing thick bracelets to cover wrists
- Having sharp objects in purse, book-bag, bedroom
- Low self-esteem
- Overwhelmed by feelings
- Inability to function at work, school or home
- Inability to maintain stable relationships

## III. Procedures:

- Notify school administration
- Notify parents/legal guardian
- Collaborate with other pupil service staff such as the school nurse or school psychologist.
- Provide referral resources to parents/legal guardians for a licensed mental health professional.
- An evaluation or assessment is the first step, followed by a recommended course of treatment.
- Use a variety of techniques to help students build skills to positively address their emotional issues.
- Suggest alternative behaviors to self-soothe:
  - journal writing
  - phoning someone
  - using a punching bag

- snapping rubber bands on the wrist
  - using ice on body parts
  - jogging
  - listening to music
  - pursuing creative arts
  - holding a pet
  - using lotion on skin
  - taking a bubble bath
  - talking to a trusted adult
- Develop a follow-up plan to continue to monitor student needs
- Source: S.A.F.E.Alternatives®Joan Goodman LCSW-C

IV. Resources:

<http://selfabuse.com>

<http://www.safealternatives.com>

<http://youngminds.org>

<http://selfinjury.org>

Levenkron, S. (1998) Cutting: Understanding and Overcoming Self-Mutilation

Kettewell, C. (1999) Skin Game

Alderman, Tracy (1997) The Scarred Soul: Understanding & Ending Self-Inflicted Violence

Video: Can You See My Pain? NEWIST/CESA 7 in partnership with Wisconsin Public Television

# Serious Threats of Violence

## I. Description of the Topic

Schools must be a safe place for students and staff. *No Child Left Behind* legislation addresses this important issue in Performance Goal 4 as does the State Master Plan ( Goal IV) which states that *All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free and conducive to learning.* Therefore, any serious threat against students, staff members and other persons in the school must be taken seriously and addressed appropriately. Serious threats of violence directed against students and staff are prohibited if there is an impact on maintaining safety or order in the school. Counselors and other staff will work with students, staff and parents to ensure that all members of the school community understand the importance of and feel comfortable in reporting such threats to school officials.

## II. Indicators

Serious threats of violence are verbal or nonverbal declarations of intent or determination to inflict significant injury to persons, and/or damage to property with the perceived ability/intention to carry through on the intent. Threats may come in the form of verbal statements, written statements including electronic communications , and through posters or drawings.

## III. Procedures for intervening in serious threats of violence include:

- Refer to local system guidelines for specific actions to be taken
- Inform the school principal so that immediate action can be taken.
- Take reasonable means to prevent the serious threat of violence from being carried out.
- Support administration as appropriate as they: notify law enforcement officials; notify the parents/legal guardians; implement school discipline; follow guidelines for suspension and expulsion of students with disabilities.
- Provide support services to the student who made the threat and the student(s) about whom the threat was made.
- Refer the student and family for assessment and follow up counseling as appropriate.

## IV. References:

No Child Left Behind - Goal 4

MSDE Master Plan - Goal IV

Education Article Section 26-101 which prohibits disturbing activities that prevent the orderly conduct of activities at a given school and prohibits threats of bodily harm or molestation of students, employees, or administrations.

[Http://helping.apa.org/warningsigns/recognizing.html](http://helping.apa.org/warningsigns/recognizing.html). This website discusses the scope of the problem, identifies solutions including early intervention and social skills training, and reviews ways to promote a positive school culture

# Sexual Harassment of Students

## I. Description of Topic:

Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendment states that: *No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participating in , be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.* Sexual harassment is a form of sexual discrimination, and therefore is in violation of the Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendment. In addition, No Child Left Behind and the State Master Plan both address this issue by stating that *All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free and conducive to learning.* All students must be provided a learning environment that is free from sexual harassment.

## II. Indicators

Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, by students or schools employees which: denies , limits , conditions or interferes with the provision of education, assistance or services protected under Title IX , or creates a hostile or intimidating educational environment.

Examples of such behavior include:

- sexual name calling
- spreading sexual rumors
- telling sexual jokes
- making derogatory comments relating to appearance, gender, or sexual preference.
- displaying or drawing derogatory posters, cartoons, drawings, graffiti or gestures of a sexual nature.
- physical conduct such as unwanted touching, blocking another's movements or sexual assault.

## III. Procedures for intervening in sexual harassment.

School counselors play an important role in educating all students about sexual harassment and that it is not to be tolerated in school or in the community. When specific actions do occur, the following procedures shall be used:

- Refer to local system guidelines for specific actions to be taken.
- Take reasonable means to correct any acts of sexual harassment observed.
- Assist the student victim in bringing the incident to the attention of the school principal or designee.
- The principal or designee will promptly investigate the complaint and notify the parent/guardian of the student doing the harassing and the parent/guardian of the victim.
- The principal or designee will implement school discipline consequences including suspension through expulsion as appropriate.

- Provide counseling and educational services to the victim as well as the harrasser.
- If sexual or physical abuse of a student by a school employee is suspected, the Department of Social Services and the school system Department of Human Resources must be notified .
- Assist all persons involved in maintaining confidentiality as much as possible.

#### IV. References

No Child Left Behind - Goal 4.

MSDE Master Plan - Goal IV

Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendment

Education Article Section 26-01 which prohibits disturbing activities which prevent the orderly conduct of activities at a given school and prohibits threats of bodily harm or molestation of students, employees or administrators.

# Sexual Harassment/Sexual Orientation

## I. Description of Topic:

### Sexual Minority Youth (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender youth)

It is commonly believed that between 3 to 10% of the student population is comprised of sexual minority youth. In addition, there are between 1 to 5 million lesbian mothers in the United States and between 1 to 3 million gay fathers. This means that an estimated 6 to 14 million children in the United States have a lesbian mother or a gay father. Counselors need to be sensitive both to the needs of sexual minority students and families in which children are being raised by gay parents. Homophobia, or the fear of gays and lesbians is engrained within American society, and homosexuality is often condemned as a religious or political issue. Nonetheless, schools do have students who are either gay themselves or whose parents are gay or lesbian. Sexual minority youth have higher than average suicide rates. Depression and isolation are common companions for sexual minority youth. Harassment is a frequent occurrence, and withdrawn behavior or school failure resulting in dropping out of school is common coping mechanisms employed by sexual minority youth. The school counselor is often the first person to whom students talk about their orientation. Counseling the child requires understanding and acceptance. Coming out, or recognizing and accepting one's sexual orientation, is a process that occurs over the course of time. The rush to label or to have students resolve their orientation issues is neither necessary, nor recommended. Counselors will want to assist students with internalized homophobia that often results in self-hate. Support for parents (if the student is "out" to them) can be offered through groups such as PFLAG. If no student support group exists in the school, students can be referred out to self-help groups such as SAIM. Resources and materials should be available in public libraries to help the student dispel the common myths about homosexuality.

Making school safe for sexual minority youth is the responsibility of all counselors. Harassment issues should be reported to administrators in the same way other harassment issues are handled. Guidelines released in 1997 by the U.S. Department of Education state that, "sexual harassment directed at gay or lesbian students may constitute sexual harassment prohibited by Title IX..."

### Facts about harassment of sexual minority students:

- Students hear anti-gay remarks at school on the average of 26 times a day
- Teachers who hear slurs from students and other staff members fail to respond 97% of the time
- Students can be harassed because they are "perceived" to be gay
- 20% of sexual minority youth will skip school at least once a month because they are afraid of being hurt.
- 28% of sexual minority youth will drop out of school due to harassment
- Students don't report the harassment because they feel they will not be supported
- Harassment of sexual minority youth can range from climate-setting harassment (name calling, offensive jokes and insulting gestures); to on-going verbal harassment; physical harassment and sexual assault; and physical assaults

- Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students are nearly seven times more likely to have been threatened or injured at school than heterosexual students and more than four times more likely to have been threatened or injured with a weapon at school than their heterosexual counterparts

## II. Indicators of sexual orientation harassment problems

- Unexplained absences
- Avoidance of areas in the school (lavatories, lunch room, gym)
- Depression
- Isolation
- Self-injurious behaviors
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Suicidal ideation
- Suicide attempts
- Homelessness (kicked out of home)

## III. Procedures

- Report harassment to administrators
- Support administrators as they investigate the incidents
- Work with administrators to ensure the targeted student's safety
- Support the student and the family
- Advocate for school intervention of harassment
- Provide supportive counseling as the student investigates his or her sexuality
- Know where to refer the student for supportive counseling
- Refer for drug/alcohol intervention when needed

## IV. References

### PFLAG-Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

There are PFLAG chapters in many counties in Maryland. Consult the National PFLAG Center for directory information.

### PFLAG National Chapter

1101 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW Suite 1030  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 638-4200

[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

### Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Baltimore

241 W. Chase Street  
Baltimore, MD. 21201  
Mailing address: P.O. Box 2257, Baltimore, MD 21203  
(410)-837-5445 evenings

### SAIM-Sufficient As I Am (youth support group, peer educators)

(410)-837-5445

GLSEN-Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network  
121 West 27th Street  
Suite 804  
New York, NY 10001  
[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

National Youth Advocacy Coalition  
1638 R Street, NW, Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20009  
(202) 319-7596 x15  
[www.nyacyouth.org/](http://www.nyacyouth.org/)

SMYAL (Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League)  
410 7<sup>th</sup> Street SE  
Washington, DC 20003-2702  
(202)-546-5940  
[smyal@aol.com](mailto:smyal@aol.com)

*Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel.* GLSEN. 1999.

*Hostile Hallways, AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools,* June 1993  
AAUW Sales Office  
PO Box 251  
Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0251

Heron, Ann, *One Teenager in Ten: Testimony by Gay and Lesbian Youth.* New York, Warner Books, Boston, Alyson Publications, 1983.

# Suicidal Gestures and Attempts

## I. Description of Topic:

There are three levels of suicidal behavior that are considered to be even more serious than verbal suicidal threats – parasuicidal behaviors, suicidal gestures, and suicidal attempts. In each of these categories, the intent becomes more serious in that there is an appeal to the adolescent’s sense of drama and need for attention. Additionally, the behavior of the suicidal person also becomes more self-injurious.

## II. Indicators:

*Parasuicidal behaviors* include a variety of high-risk behaviors in which individuals needlessly put their own lives in danger. Such behaviors are termed parasuicidal because the individual seems to place little value on his own life. Examples of parasuicidal behaviors may include;

- Drinking and driving
- Polydrug use
- Multi-partner unprotected sexual behaviors
- Eating disorders
- Victim precipitated exposure to danger
- High-risk, injury prone dares.

A *suicidal gesture* is an act or behavior that, while not lethal in itself, brings a degree of harm or injury to the individual engaged in it. A suicidal gesture is a self-injurious behavior in which there is little chance of doing permanent harm to oneself (e.g., lightly scraping one’s wrists with the edge of a ruler or impulsively swallowing a number of pills). The question remains, is a suicidal gesture a signal that the young person “wants to be dead?” Often, with suicidal gestures, the intent is to “up the ante”, so to speak, by visibly signaling one’s distress. There is an embedded danger connected to suicidal gestures in that individuals have unintentionally inflicted great harm to themselves or completed suicide by miscalculating the danger of the behaviors in which they are engaged.

*Suicidal attempts* are actually behaviors that do harm to one. Some attempts actually are failed suicides while others are a suicidal person’s efforts to communicate their great pain and distress without the clear intention to kill oneself. Youth suicide research shows that the majority of those who have completed suicides have actually attempted suicide before.

## III. Procedures for Responding to Suicidal Gestures:

While distinctions of intent and behavior are important to keep in mind when working with young people who have engaged in parasuicidal behavior, suicidal gestures, or suicidal attempts, the same general principle of *Duty to Warn* applies (Eisel v. Board of Education of Montgomery County). There is an additional guiding principle involved in that these covert or overt behaviors have intensified the lethality of the act. School counselors must consider intervening through

direct steps to prevent the possibility of the individual doing harm to self and/or others. The management of these cases will be discussed in the next section.

Interventions:

### *Parasuicidal Behaviors*

The diagnosis that a young person's behaviors may be parasuicidal should always be a tentative one. The management of *parasuicidal behaviors* demands that the school counselor discuss with the student and his/her parents observed patterns of behavior. The counselor can help them to make connections between certain problematic events in the student's life and the resultant high-risk behaviors. In addition to expressing concern about these high risk behaviors and their potential negative impact on the young person's and others' lives, the school counselor needs to develop a treatment plan with the family that directly addresses the behaviors and reduces risk as well as one that explores that issues that prompted the behaviors initially.

## Suicidal Gestures

A *suicidal gesture* cannot be taken less seriously merely because it caused little permanent harm to self. The management of suicidal gestures demands that the school counselor engage the student and the family in a discussion of what triggered the behavior and what the young person hoped to accomplish. The counselor, in addition to warning parents and seeing that the parents obtain medical care for the student, needs to draw the student out and ascertain "What did you want to tell people when you \_\_\_\_\_?" Also the counselor needs to replace a suicidal gesture with instructions on how to ask for and assertively obtain help rather than presenting oneself as a victim.

Counselors may also state to those who make suicidal gestures, "We take every threat to hurt yourself seriously here. If you are down, you don't need to threaten to hurt yourself in order to get my attention. Just say, 'Ms. Jones, I need help because.' and I'll be there for you."

### Working with Outside Mental Health Services

In most cases of suicidal threat, school counselors encourage parents to take young people to private therapists or mental health professionals in community mental health centers for both lethality assessments and individual or family therapy. After obtaining parent permission, school counselors are encouraged to establish a consultative relationship with the private therapist so that continuing therapeutic needs can be addressed supportively at the local school.

## Suicide Attempts

In that a *suicidal attempt* is an act in which both the intent and the behavior are to do harm to oneself, immediate and direct action is required of the school counselor. If the school counselor becomes aware of a suicidal attempt in the school, the counselor must act to protect the student. This would involve engaging the school nurse, calling for police assistance, and contacting the parents or someone on the student's emergency notification card. Often the management of an overtly suicidal student requires immediate referral to an Emergency Room for further consideration of hospitalization and psychiatric care. The school counselor must monitor the handling of the case until it has been resolved and the student's safety assured.

Attempts must also be handled with a view to long-term follow up. The great preponderance of completed suicides comes from those who have attempted before. It is part of the school counselor's responsibility to work with the family and outside mental health service providers to develop a follow-up management plan at the school. Issues to be explored may include:

- What did attempter learn from his/her attempt?
- Has his/her world/situation improved since people are now aware of his/her distress?
- Has the attempter developed better coping skills and more supports in his/her life?
- What will the attempter do instead of making a suicidal threat?
- What "coping skills" are not really helping the attempter? What other skills need to be developed?
- What are the attempter's triggers and warning signs?
- Who are the people in school the attempter can go to when experiencing distress?
- What supports have been put in place in school to support the attempter?
- What information do teachers need in order to be supportive?
- How can school counselors refine the relationships among parents, mental health providers, and school to support the attempter?
- Who are the attempter's outside support people to be contacted by the school? Under what conditions should they be contacted?

### Parental Resistance

In some cases of youth suicidal intent and behavior, families have resisted the school counselor's calls of concern and ignored the suggestion that a lethality assessment be conducted by either licensed Student Support Services personnel in the school or appropriate outside mental health service providers. The school counselor is encouraged to address family resistance with sensitivity. Such resistance can often be a product of denial and concern for the mental health of one's child. The counselor is advised to address this resistance as a temporary-process issue. Eliciting parental concerns and informing them how suicidal threats can be safely managed best does this. It may also be helpful to remove the stigma of mental illness by discussing the possibility that the student is in a temporary crisis that must be resolved.

School counselors should avoid debating with families about whether or not the behavior is attention-seeking. It is the counselor's role to advocate for the needs of the student by raising the concern that "we can't afford to be wrong; and that the danger of loss of life is too much to risk."

In cases where the family ignores an overtly suicidal student's needs, involvement of the police or the Department of Social Services is an additional course of action to pursue.

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# Suicidal Threats

## I. Description of Topic:

Youth suicide is a troubling concern for school counselors. They are frequently called upon to provide expert consultation to administrators, teachers, and parents in response to students' threats to do harm to themselves.

There are several principles that counselors need to follow in order to draft an appropriate intervention as well as ethical guidelines and case law they need to follow in informing others of the potential danger of a suicidal threat (Duty to Warn). In the State of Maryland, *Eisel v. Board of Education of Montgomery County*, held the following concerning school counselors' duty to warn:

*With the harm that may result from a school counselor's failure to intervene appropriately when a child threatens suicide is total and irreversible for the child, and severe for the child's family. It may be that the risk of any particular suicide is remote is statistically quantified in relation to all of the reports of suicidal talk that are received by school counselors. We do not know. But the consequence of the risk is so great that even a relatively remote possibility of a suicide may be enough to establish duty. ... We hold that school counselors have a duty to use reasonable means to attempt to prevent suicide when they are on notice of a child or adolescent's suicidal intent....*

## II. Indicators of Suicidal Threats:

The first principle to be considered is a determination of the level of threat the suicidal statement (lethality assessment). Threats are made up of two major components:

- Intention
- Behavior

A basic rule of thumb for assessing the lethality of a threat is that the more serious the intent to do harm to self and the more harmful the behavior that is generated from this intent, the more lethal the threat. An example would be the student who reports that he is experiencing thoughts about his own death at moments when he is down in the dumps. As the counselor probes the situation further, he finds that the child feels uncomfortable about these thoughts, has never acted on them in any planful way, and, in fact, puts on some of his favorite music and runs in place on the family's treadmill to get to a better place. No intention; no behaviors; low lethality.

Students will often present counselors with issues that are not as clear as the former case. There are many types of suicidal threats in the arena of actual suicidal threats.

- Verbal Threats – Suicidal threats can take the form of both direct and indirect statements. They can take the form of expressing general dissatisfaction with life or a more specific desire “to end it all.” These statements could also be masked by curiosity about death or an interest in speculating about one's own funeral.

- Written notes, journal entries, drawings, or electronic messages may be another form of threat.
- At times, non-verbal behaviors like high risk-taking or chronic self-injurious behaviors may indicate a lack of concern for one's life.

The *intent* of a threat serves as a signal to others one's emotional distress. Often it is a red flag that a young person is feeling overwhelmed by a situation or a number of events in his life.

To the degree that the person making a suicidal threat has taken steps to plan how he would harm himself and to obtain the means to do this injury, the threat is to be considered more lethal.

### III. Procedures for dealing with students who threaten suicide:

All threats, even if no planning steps have been taken, warrant breaking confidentiality and require duty to warn parents or guardians.

The suggested course of intervention is to keep the young person in contact with you.

- Contacting parents and encouraging them to take young person for a lethality assessment (Duty to Warn)
- Offering the opportunity for a student to sign a "Contract for Life"
- Encouraging the use of the Youth Crisis Hotline 1-800-422-0009
- Requiring student to remain with the counselor
- Requesting a signed release of information from parents to allow counselor to speak with mental health professional treating student
- Contacting mental health professionals, if appropriate
- Consulting with a counseling colleague or supervisor
- Documenting course of action taken by you
- Providing follow-up support for parents and student

### IV. References:

Val Cloutier, Office of Attorney General, Educational Affairs Division  
November 6, 1999

*Eisel v. Board of Education of Montgomery County*. Tort Liability for School Counselor

# CONSULTATION

# RELATIONSHIP WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

The presence of law enforcement in schools is becoming as common as the presence of teachers. Partly a reflection of the increasing violence in our communities, and partly the diligent effort of educators and law enforcement to work together to provide a safe environment for learning, the gap between law enforcement officers and educators is quickly closing.

The importance for both educators and law enforcement to understand each other's role in the schoolhouse is paramount. There is widespread agreement that a safe and orderly environment enhances learning. Goal 4 of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and the *Maryland Strategic Plan* states that "All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free, and conducive to learning." To ensure that schools meet this goal, the need to implement violence-prevention activities, programs, and services is being explored. The presence of law enforcement is an example of one of these services.

Counselors are in a unique position to work closely with law enforcement. They both provide support to the learning environment by eliminating the barriers that prevent achievement at the highest level. There are opportunities for counselors and police officers, security guards, and other persons in related fields to work together to create programs that will prevent disruption and violence in school. Providing intervention, remediation, and counseling services to individual students who consistently create havoc in the school are most successful when services are coordinated. It is important for counselors to know that law enforcement has become part of the school setting for a variety of reasons. The presence of police officers is known to diminish the possibility of violent behavior. However, even more pertinent to the role of the counselor, is the responsibility of law enforcement to teach students alternatives to violence. Officers are often seen in classrooms teaching students about ways to respond to threats, places to go to get help, alternatives to fighting, and consequences for making poor decisions. Each of these topics relates to the role of the counselor in school in some way. Working together will provide additional outlets for students, and help students to recognize there is a unified approach in their school to help them succeed.

The only caution that comes with this relationship is the understanding that law enforcement is usually not a member of the school faculty. Therefore COMAR 13A.08.02.18 *Student Records*, given authority by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is very much in effect. (The parent or guardian of a student or the eligible student shall provide a signed and dated written consent before an educational agency or institution discloses personally identifiable information from the student records...) All parties involved need to carefully review and adhere to procedures for disclosing information contained in a student record before sharing documents and information about a student.

In summary, this is an excellent opportunity for counselors to create a positive working relationship with law enforcement to develop school-wide and individual programs for prevention, as well as techniques for intervention and remediation.

# RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DIVISION OF JUVENILE SERVICES

The school counselor plays a vital role in helping youth who become involved with the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) manage the changes in their life that results from said involvement. More often than not the behaviors that lead to DJS involvement are not isolated incidents but rather constitute a long series of chronic, escalating behaviors. Thus, it would be naïve to assume that once DJS becomes involved that the supports provided by the school and student services professionals are no longer needed. Moreover, the school counselor is in a position to help these youth attempt to see the positives that may be the outcome of DJS involvement and to manage the additional stress that DJS involvement may cause. Also, the school counselor is often the first school official to learn of formal DJS involvement with a student. It is a recommended practice that a referral is made to the student services team once said formal involvement occurs and that the student's progress is monitored on an ongoing basis by the student services team.

As a school-based member of the student services team, the school counselor can assist with the case management of DJS involved youth. He/she can help to make certain that student records are readily accessible in a timely fashion to the educational professionals in a DJS facility so that the educational programming provided aligns with the student's school program. It is recommended that each local school system (LSS) have procedures that make certain educational records are processed in a timely fashion and that those procedures include steps and protocols for receiving information on the academic work that has been completed while the student was at a DJS facility. Part of the procedures should include a process to evaluate the effectiveness of the procedures and updating them. See the Code of Maryland Regulations 13A.08.02.19A(5)(b) and 13A.08.02.26 for information on disclosing student records to DJS.

Moreover, nationally and in Maryland a paradigm shift is occurring with juvenile services. Instead of removing non-violent offenders from their homes and communities and placing them in DJS facilities, a continuum of community-based programming is recommended. Thus, more and more DJS-involved youth will remain in their home communities and stay in school without having education interrupted. Thus, an expanded model of student service teams may prove to be the vehicle where schools and other service-providing agencies develop plans for the youth, case manage those plans, and avoid duplication of services. This type of team would need to consider how to involve the youth and his/her parents and guardians.

Each LSS has been asked to form a centralized team to facilitate the return of a DJS-involved student from a DJS facility. Various models for these teams exist throughout the State. It is recommended that the Supervisor of School Guidance Counselors for each LSS familiarize school counselors with the LSS transition team and the role of the school counselor in the procedures developed for the LSS for returning youth. It is essential for the student when he/she returns to the school that a program of studies be scheduled that takes into consideration the work completed while in the DJS facility and that the student begins attending classes immediately. It is also essential that the school be made aware of any after-care plans developed

by DJS and how school personnel may support those plans. School counselors should become acquainted with the DJS personnel in their communities and develop good working relationships with them. A suggested practice is a regularly scheduled meeting with DJS professionals and school counselors.

The school counselor can play an instrumental role in helping a DJS-involved youth transition back to the school. Often these youth are leaving a highly structured environment and returning to some of the same situations that led to the involvement in the first place. Also, these youth often encounter hostility from other students and educators upon return to the school. The school counselor can function as an advocate making certain that these students are treated equitably and justly. He/she can also periodically monitor how the youth is adjusting and progressing. The school counselor may also act as the gatekeeper if the youth starts to fall into old patterns of behavior alerting DJS, other student service professionals, educators, and parents/guardians to danger signs.