



## SUICIDE PREVENTION POLICY

Freire Charter School (“the School”) recognizes that youth suicide is a serious problem. While youth suicide is a complex issue which cannot be addressed by the School alone, as a safe and supportive community Freire is committed to putting safeguards in place to prevent student suicides. The impact of students’ mental health on their academic performance and the effect of mental health issues and suicide on students and the entire school community are significant. To ensure the safety and welfare of students, Freire will work to educate school staff and students about actions and resources that can prevent suicide and promote mental well-being. This Suicide Prevention Policy outlines the School’s suicide prevention program in compliance with Pennsylvania Act 71 of 2014 and Section 1526 of the Public School Code.

Freire has a strong commitment to supporting students embodied by, among other things, our emotional support program, academic advisors, Take Back the City, and peer mediation. All of these programs have many benefits to the school community, one of which is that they can help reduce the risk of student suicide by making students feel safe and supported. In addition to these efforts, Freire is putting in place the measures described in this policy to specifically address the issue of youth suicide.

### **CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM**

Freire will establish a crisis response team including administrators, academic advisors, and members of the emotional support team. It may also include other members of the School community such as a school nurse, school psychologist, teachers, staff, Build the Future representatives, students, parents, or others. With the approval of the Head of School, representatives from outside agencies, mental healthcare providers, or other individuals from beyond Freire’s community may be called upon to join the team. The School will generally seek a letter of agreement with outside providers before including them on the team. The Head of Academic Supports or his/her designee will serve as the team’s coordinator for investigation of cases involving peer-to-peer harassment, including hostile environments created by persistent or severe harassment on the basis of gender, race, disability, or other protected classes.

### **STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

All Freire employees, including but not limited to administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff, will receive information regarding the School’s protocols for suicide awareness and prevention. The School will provide education for all school personnel on the following topics:

- The importance of suicide prevention and recognition of suicide risk factors
- Strategies to enhance protective factors, resilience, and school connectedness
- Warnings signs and risk factors for youth depression and suicide
- The relevance of Freire’s Code of Conduct (e.g. bullying) to suicide prevention and intervention
- Awareness of and familiarity with appropriate resources

Specifically, all professional staff are required to participate in four hours of youth suicide awareness and prevention training every five years. Freire will generally devote a minimum of one hour to this topic during mandatory school-provided professional development each school year. The individuals providing the training, who may be members of Freire’s emotional support team or other staff, will reference the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Act 71 Model Curriculum when designing such training.

Freire will ensure that any individual working on behalf of the School to assess an at-risk student is appropriately trained in risk assessment and crisis intervention.

## **PREVENTION EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS**

Freire provides age-appropriate lessons to students in their classrooms through health education or other appropriate curricula on the importance of safe and healthy choices, as well as how to seek help for themselves and others. These lessons may be taught by community service providers or student services staff in addition to classroom teachers. Skills and topics covered may include:

- Information on comprehensive health and wellness, including emotional, behavioral and social skills development
- Not to make promises of confidence when students are concerned about a peer or significant other
- Information about suicide prevention, including increasing students' ability to recognize if they or their peers are at risk for suicide
- Help-seeking approaches, promoting a climate that encourages peer referral and emphasizes school connectedness
- Addressing problems that can lead to suicide, such as depression and other mental health issues, anger, and drug use

## **RISK FACTORS**

Early identification of individuals with suicidal risk factors is vital to suicide prevention efforts. This section defines risk factors and describes how to respond when they are identified in a student.

### **RISK FACTORS**

Risk factors refer to personal or environmental characteristics that are associated with suicidal behavior including, but not limited to behavioral health issues, homelessness, struggles with gender identity or sexual orientation, history of abuse, exposure to suicide, disciplinary or legal problems, bullying, family conflict, death of a loved one, or other adverse circumstances.

### **REPORTING OF RISK FACTORS**

Any school staff member who identifies a student with one or more risk factors must refer the student for further assessment and intervention. Staff should follow the School's procedures for responding to General Mental Health Concerns as described in the Safety/Emergency Manual.

**If the concern is more serious than a risk factor, such as a warning sign or threat, respond to the situation using the Warning Signs procedure outlined below.** When in doubt, the staff member should call the Head of Academic Supports.

If the risk factor is identified through a direct conversation with the student at risk, the staff member should not make any promises of confidence to the student.

## WARNING SIGNS

Quick response to suicide warning signs is vital to suicide prevention efforts. This section defines warning signs and describes how to respond when they are identified in a student.

### WARNING SIGNS

Warning signs are evidence-based indicators that someone may be in danger of suicide, either immediately or in the future. These signs may mean that a youth is at risk for suicide, particularly for youth who have attempted suicide in the past. Risk is greater if the warning sign is new and/or has increased and if it seems related to an anticipated or actual painful event, loss, or change. The presence of more than one of the following warning signs may increase a youth's risk for engaging in suicidal behaviors.

- Talking about or making plans for suicide
- Expressing hopelessness about the future
- Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
- Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, particularly in the presence of the warning signs above, including one or more of the following when to a significant degree:
  - Withdrawal from or changing in social connections/situations
  - Recent increased agitation or irritability
  - Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
  - Changes in sleep (increased or decreased)

### RESPONDING TO WARNING SIGNS

Any school staff member must follow the procedures for Mental Health Emergencies as described in the Safety/Emergency Manual should they observe or be made aware of:

- Suicide warning signs
- Any threat of self-harm that is written, drawn, or spoken
- Actual attempt to self-harm
- Any indication or credible suspicion that a student may be contemplating suicide

Under these procedures, the staff member must:

- Immediately notify the Head of Academic Supports
- Stay with the student until an administrator arrives
- Not promise confidentiality to the student

It is important to note that any threat or suspicion, in any form, that students will harm themselves or others will be treated as real and dealt with immediately. In cases of life-threatening situations, a student's confidentiality will be waived. The School will implement crisis response procedures.

### RESPONDING OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL HOURS

If an expressed suicide thought or intention is made known to any school personnel during an afterschool program **and a school leader cannot be reached**, call the Philadelphia Suicide Hotline at 215-686-4420 or national services at 1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-273-TALK for help. Thereafter, immediately inform the Head of Academic Supports of the incident and actions taken.

## **REPORTING BY STUDENTS AND OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Any student, volunteer, or other community member may report risk factors, warning signs, or concerns of suicide directly to the Head of Academic Supports or to any School employee. Employees who receive a report from another community member should immediately connect the individual directly to the Head of Academic Supports if the reporting individual is willing. Otherwise, the staff member must take a detailed report and immediately share all information with the Head of Academic Supports. Do not simply recommend that students contact the Head of Academic Supports and assume that they will do so.

Reporting individuals may request to remain anonymous if they state this at the time of making the report. When requested, the School will take all practical steps to protect the identity of the reporting individual. The staff member taking the report must advise the reporting individual that it may not be possible for the School to maintain the anonymity of the reporter in all situations.

## **INTERVENTION**

### **WARNING SIGNS**

When the School is alerted to a student displaying suicide warning signs, an appropriately qualified and trained individual will be called to meet with the student. In the event that no such school staff member is available, the School may call the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health for assistance at 215-685-6440. If there is an immediate risk to the student's safety, the School will follow the procedures in the Parental Involvement section below to ensure that the student receives the proper immediate care.

### **RISK FACTORS**

When the School is notified of a student having suicidal risk factors, the student will be referred to the emotional support team for a risk assessment. The appropriate staff or approved provider will determine risk and intervention needed by interviewing the student and gathering appropriate supportive documentation from teachers or others who witnessed the expressed suicide thought or intention.

When the assessment identifies the student as being at increased risk of suicide, Freire will create an emotional or mental health safety plan to support a student. The recommendations from the healthcare evaluation which are pertinent to managing the student's risk in school will be shared at a meeting between the student and a School administrator which will result in a written support plan. The School will share all relevant components of the plan with School personnel who are responsible for their implementation. When possible and appropriate, the School will involve the student's family in this process per the Parental Involvement section below.

If the student requires special education services or accommodations or is a student with a disability, the Director of Student Services will be involved in creating the safety plan and take action to address the student's needs in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and Board policy.

### **DOCUMENTATION**

The School will retain a confidential record of all interventions made for any student identified as having suicidal risk factors or displaying suicide warning signs.

### **PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

The School will follow all applicable privacy laws and regulations with regard to reports of students who were reported to exhibit suicide warning signs, communications regarding treatment of students for suicide issues, and all related records. Applicable laws may include but are not limited to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). In non-emergency

situations, a parent or guardian (or student if over 18) must sign a release of information form before a primary care physician or healthcare professional can communicate with School personnel regarding any treatment of a student. If a parent refuses to sign a release form, the School will explain the reasons a release would be advantageous to the student.

## **EXCEPTIONS TO CONFIDENTIALITY**

In compliance with state regulations and in support of the school's suicide prevention methods, information received in confidence from a student may be revealed to the student's parents or guardians, a school leader, or another appropriate authority when the health, welfare, or safety of the student or other persons is at risk. Communications without signed releases in emergency situations may occur in accordance with HIPPA and FERPA regulations and guidelines.

## **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

Whenever there is an immediate risk to a student's safety, the School will immediately notify a parent or guardian of the student and obtain written assurance that they will bring their child to an appropriate crisis center for immediate care. When a student is displaying risk factors, or in other lower-risk situations, School administrators will use discretion to determine the appropriate level of parental involvement based on the student's individual circumstances. The School will make every effort to notify and involve parents to the greatest degree that is prudent. If any mandated reporter suspects that a student's risk status is the result of abuse or neglect, that individual must comply with the reporting requirements of the Child Protective Services Law.

## **INVOLUNTARY ASSESSMENT**

If the parent or guardian refuses to cooperate and there is any doubt regarding the child's safety, the school personnel **who directly witnessed the expressed suicide thought or intention** will pursue a 302 involuntary mental health assessment by calling the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health at 215-685-6440 to speak with a Mental Health Delegate. The delegate will listen to concerns and advise on the course of action. Under Pennsylvania law, only a first-hand witness can be the petitioner for a 302 involuntary mental health assessment, but they should have support from a School administrator through the process.

## **RESPONSE TO SUICIDE OR SUICIDE ATTEMPT ON CAMPUS**

The first school personnel on the scene of a suicide or suicide attempt must follow the procedures in the School's Safety/Emergency Manual. The School will immediately notify the parents or guardians of the affected student(s).

## **RETURN TO SCHOOL**

In the event of a student's non-fatal suicide attempt or other situation in which the crisis response team is called, Freire will observe the following procedure to facilitate the student's return to school:

- Prior to the student returning to school, schedule a meeting between designated school staff from the crisis team and parent or guardian to discuss possible arrangements for support services and to create an individual re-entry plan.
- Be familiar with the basic information of the case.
- Maintain regular contact with the family.
- Serve as a liaison between the student, family, and teachers with family permission.
- Monitor the student's progress.
- Closely monitor the student's re-entry into school and maintain contact with the student's parent or guardian and mental health provider.

- If the student is unable to attend school for an extended period of time, determine how to help them complete course requirements. Assistance can include, but is not limited to, homebound instruction and/or a 504 plan to assist with accommodations.

## **RESOURCES FOR YOUTH SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION**

Youth suicide prevention resources with more information are available from the following sources:

- The Pennsylvania Department of Education - [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov)
- PA Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative - <http://payspi.org/>
- Oct. 2014 Dear Colleague Letter related to peer harassment of students with disabilities - <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/publications.html#Section504>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center - <http://www.sprc.org/>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - <http://www.afsp.org/>