

Identifying the Emotionally At-Risk Student

We ALL must do our part.

What ALL Staff Should Look For:

- Students displaying drastic personality changes. (For example, traditionally a neat and tidy student suddenly comes to class unclean and unkempt.)
- Students displaying bizarre behavior. (Behavior does not match the social context or seems “over the top”.)
- Students responding to internal stimuli (hallucinations). (For example, during a conversation with a student, the student continuously appears to have difficulty focusing or shakes his head repeatedly.)
- Students displaying depressive symptoms (isolating, crying spells, irritability, mood swings, not eating/eating too much, not sleeping/sleeping too much, hopelessness, helplessness, etc.)
- Students engaging in substance use or abuse.
- Students experiencing crisis/trauma events (juvenile issues, issues with foster parents or displacement of foster home, loss, death, family or friend suicide or anniversary of suicide, etc.)
- Student work indicating hopelessness, morbid thoughts, preoccupation with death, etc.
- Students engaging in high risk behavior. (Behaviors where there is a probability of severe injury or injury, for example, drag racing.)
- Students expressing emotional thoughts or statements like, “I should have never been born. Nothing matters anymore.”
- Students engaging in self-injurious behaviors (i.e. cutting, hair pulling, scratching, hitting, etc.)
- Students who have recently experienced dramatic changes in living conditions, family life, parental loss of job, parent separations or divorce.
- Students displaying loss of control when frustrated or angry especially if these episodes involve threats or other acts of physical aggression.
- Students who constantly have physical complaints (stomachaches, headaches, etc.)

What Staff Should Do Now When You Suspect a Student Is At Risk?

- Consult or directly refer the student to a counseling professional at your school depending on the behavior or concern.

Recommendations for Counseling Professionals

Counseling professionals (i.e. TRUST Specialist, School Psychologist, School Social Worker, or Guidance Counselor) are to conduct an emotional risk assessment of each referred student.

- A. Parents of student should be notified.
- B. A supportive intervention plan should be developed with the parent and student if such plan is deemed necessary. The plan should designate a primary counseling professional and a back-up counseling professional to follow up with the student.
- C. Appropriate emergency interventions are to be mobilized when and if danger is assessed as imminent. Administration should be informed in these cases.
- D. Crisis Hotline Reports should be made in all pertinent cases where there is suspicion of harm or self-harm (i.e., suicidal/homicidal ideation or gestures, threats, or self-injurious behaviors).
- E. Best practice is to have a list of at least three community mental health resources that can be given to parents at a moment’s notice.

Parents should receive a copy of the parent letter describing warning signs and resources.