

Crisis Guidelines for Mental Health Providers in the School

Best Practices for a Mental Health Crisis in the School Setting

In the school setting, ensuring the well-being of students extends beyond academic success. When faced with a mental health crisis, it is paramount for educational institutions to implement best practice procedures to effectively support students in distress. By establishing clear protocols, fostering a supportive environment, and providing appropriate resources, schools can create a safe space where students feel understood, respected, and equipped with the necessary assistance to navigate challenges related to mental health.

If a school staff member is questioning a student's immediate safety, they need to contact a mental health provider designated to that school. Concerns of safety would specifically include suicidal or homicidal ideations or threats to harm themselves or others. Most importantly, the student of concern should not be left alone during this process.

Once a mental health provider can be face-to-face with the student of concern, these are steps to help navigate what needs to occur next:

- Identification and description of behaviors should be recognized, including any behaviors identified as a harm to self or a harm to others (i.e., verbal threats, physical aggression, property damage, self-injurious behaviors).
 - Direct plan: Are you thinking about harming yourself now? Have you had thoughts of harming yourself in the past? Are you thinking about harming or hurting others?
 - Previous behaviors: Have you ever attempted to harm yourself?
 - Means: How have you thought about harming yourself? What are the student's means?
 - Availability: Are those methods or weapons easily available and does the student have access to them at school? At home?
- Isolate the student to a safe environment, if possible, and **always keep adult supervision of the student** for safety purposes.
- Inform school administration on site of the current situation/circumstances.
- Contact the student's parent/guardian to notify them of the situation, where the student is currently, that the student is safe, and Youth Mobile Crisis is being notified/dispatched, if deemed necessary.
 - Typically, Youth Mobile Crisis will request for the parent to be present or able to be easily contacted if they need to assist with a potential evaluation.
- A call to [Youth Mobile Crisis](#) will need to be made if deemed necessary by the results of the pre-screening.
 - [Crisis services](#) are designated across the state of Tennessee for all youth.
 - If you are unsure of which organization covers your specific area, there is a map of the [Youth Mobile Crisis services across Tennessee](#).
- Contact appropriate supervisors from the District Office to notify them of the current situation. If a student receives special education services, contact the SPED Consultant.
- After the initial call to Youth Mobile Crisis, and if they believe a full evaluation needs to occur, they will either set up a digital link to complete a virtual interview with the student and themselves or

they will arrive in person to complete the evaluation.

Other crucial factors to consider:

- The individual who contacts Youth Mobile Crisis should stay with the student from the beginning of the crisis to the end (i.e., student is transported to another facility or moved off campus).
- Law Enforcement should ONLY be contacted if there is a current threat of harm to self/others (i.e., physical aggression) or the student runs out of the school's building (i.e., deemed as a "runaway"). This decision needs to be made by the school's administrator on site.
- If crisis is called to come out to the school due to the severity of the situation, then the student will need to remain on school grounds until the crisis counselor, pre-screening individual, sheriff's office, or the EMT personnel deem it appropriate for the student to be transported to a different location.
- If Youth Mobile Crisis is backed up and unable to go to the school for a crisis, a legal parent/guardian, EMT personnel, or law enforcement are the only approved individuals who would be able to transport the student to their home or a local hospital. (Each situation will be determined on a case-by-case basis.)
- It is important to follow your local school board policies and procedures and, when necessary, consult with your local board attorney on specific situations.

Follow-Up of Crisis Situation:

- For Best Practice, contact the student's parent/guardian and the student within the next 24 hours.
 - Ensure the current safety of the student and any needs or questions that the student/parent/guardian may have regarding your role with the crisis event.
- Within the span of your control, address any barriers that the student may have regarding crisis treatment, if needed.
- Mental Health providers may also provide a list of mental health resources that are available for the student (and family) in the surrounding community to help support the student.
- With confidentiality in mind, notify the school's administration of the current status of the student and the future treatment plan(s) that the parent/guardian has decided on with the student.
 - Inform the administration of your role with the student's care for the future.

For more information, please see [Crisis Services \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/crisis-services).

For more information on trainings in addressing crisis situations in the school setting, please visit [Training for General Population \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/training-general-population), [Training for Mental Health Providers \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/training-mental-health-providers), and [Training for School Personnel \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/training-school-personnel).