



## PROVIDING COUNSELING SERVICES FROM VIRTUAL PLATFORMS

As we've all learned from recent circumstances, the possibility of schools being out for extended periods of time is a new reality. The Tennessee School Counselor Association (TSCA) has drafted some tips and pointers for these circumstances.

### Pre-Planning

- Having a school or district team for this planning is essential. With the administration as the lead, key teachers, counseling staff, school nurse, school psychologist/social worker, school resource officer, and possibly someone from food service would be valuable members for this team. Districts may also have a team that would take the lead and help schools coordinate the planning and delivery.
  
- The school and or district team should address equity and access issues of the students and come up with a plan for work completion and grading.
  
- Discuss with your administrator how to ensure the security of student records, and how those records should be accessed.
  
- Have discussions with your administrator and district supervisors to identify resources, delivery platforms, and responsibilities for keeping students and parents informed.
  - Prepare handouts, announcements, etc. ahead of time to have ready
  - Create a calendar of meetings for the faculty with the administration so updates/check ins can be shared. Specific dates are not necessary; something as simple as "Mondays are faculty meetings; Tuesdays are meetings with the counseling department; Wednesdays are team meetings", etc. can help create continuity of communication and forward motion.
  
- Discuss with your administrator and district the expectations of the counseling department.
  - Clearly define the scope and function of your role in concrete terms.
  - Develop alternative plans in the event of illness and/or changes in leadership/staff
  - Develop an informed consent document that includes the benefits and risks of virtual school counseling.



- Identify with administration the ways the counseling program can assist in the transition to virtual learning.
- Prepare handouts, resources and other information ahead of time to have ready.
- Review your district's social media policies.
- If your district requires specific procedures for talking with students from a virtual platform in the event of a shut-down, discuss how to get those procedures enacted with appropriate stakeholders and when the best time would be to do so.
  - Determine which virtual platforms have been approved by your school district.
- Get training on virtual counseling (webinars, online courses, TSCA or ASCA presentations). (See Appendix for links)
- Make a list of items that you want to bring home for your school counselor activities (i.e. DCS referral information, suicidal ideation paperwork, referral/resource list, phone number of emergency personnel, ASCA Code of Ethics, your building's Crisis Manual). Make sure you have a secure location to store any documents containing personal information.
- Considerations to help ensure confidentiality:
    - Use headphones with a microphone and suggest students do as well (if they have one available.)
    - Use a white noise machine to prevent others hearing private information.
  - Prepare lessons that students can do from home both with or without the internet. Prioritize the most critical academic, career and social/emotional lessons. Review the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors (see Appendix) to align lessons with the needs of students who may be dealing with increased stress, such as:
    - M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being
    - M 2. Self-confidence in ability to succeed
    - B-SMS 7. Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem
    - B-SMS 9. Demonstrate personal safety skills
    - B-SMS 10. Demonstrate ability to manage transitions and ability to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities
    - B-SS 9. Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment



- Include information about how and when you can be contacted so everyone knows how to reach you in case of need (e-mail, text messaging, phone, virtual platform.)
- Secondary and Multilevel school counselors: discuss how senior grades, graduation, prom, and awards night should be handled.
- Put important forms and documents into electronic formats with which the staff is familiar so people who need them can get easy access (i.e. meeting forms, forms for student issues such as suicide, abuse, etc.).
  - o Consider creating a list or spreadsheet of all electronic documents/forms with details about who can and should access what (include their role, as well as name). Share this list with your administrator or supervisor.
- Put copies of all-important forms, manuals, information on a flash drive as a back-up.

### **PROTOCOL FOR ONLINE/VIRTUAL SERVICES**

- Identify the district/building guidelines on student contact and devise a plan for connecting with students based upon those guidelines that values available methods and honors counselors' private information
  - Obtain informed consent from students and parents/caregivers.
- Provide lessons and/or videos and websites
  - Participate in virtual meetings as determined by your administrators/school district.
  - Assist families in accessing free internet services. Determine how you will contact and provide services for families who do not have internet service.
  - Let students/families know how to reach you through text, phone or email. Make clear the days and times you will be available.
  - Schedule a weekly check-in with administrators to address any concerns.
- Be sure to follow the guidelines set up by your district. Online meetings/Counseling sessions may be restricted by your district or may require you to use specific platforms. Clarify the expectations of your district and administrators regarding your responsibilities, limitations, accountability, and liability.



•Dress and act professionally and expect the same from those you are meeting with. If a student or parent is dressed or behaving inappropriately, let them know that you will call them back at a later time and end the call. Document what happened and report any incidents to your administrator.

- If appropriate, have another educator in the meeting who can be a witness to what was said or not said during the meeting.
- If your district allows virtual counseling sessions, consider requiring an adult to be home when you are meeting with the student. This is especially important in crisis situations.
- Keep information/photos/images confidential just as you would in the school building. Do not share any photos or information online without explicit permission from the parent, student, and administrator.

## **HANDLING CRISES FROM VIRTUAL PLATFORMS**

Schools and districts should update their policies and procedures for crisis response to include a virtual setting. Adapted from: ASCA FAQ's Virtual School Counseling Ethics, March 25, 2020 <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors/legal-ethical/faqs-virtual-school-counseling-ethics>

### Pre-Planning

- Having a school or district team for this planning is essential. With the administration as the lead, key teachers, counseling staff, school nurse, school psychologist/social worker, school resource officer, and possibly someone from food service would be valuable members for this team. Districts may also have a Crisis Response Team that would take the lead and help schools coordinate the planning and response.
- With your administrator and/or district team, develop a list for continuity of operations that includes who the primary and backup individuals are for the responsibilities outlined in your planning.
- Make a list of items that you want to bring home for your school counselor activities (i.e. DCS referral information, suicidal ideation paperwork, referral/resource list, phone number of



emergency personnel, ASCA Code of Ethics, your building's Crisis Manual). Make sure you have a secure location to store any documents containing personal information.

- Get training on suicide prevention. (See Appendix for links)
  
- Consider creating a document with pertinent information that can be easily referenced (e.g., a shared Google drive). Suggestions for information to include in this document:
  - Emergency procedures, including a clear directive to call 911 if there is an emergency
  - Emergency phone numbers and other resources, including child abuse and neglect hotline information
  - Your "office hours" and how you can be reached
  - Any activities you will be providing
  - Any activities you will not provide (Your district may restrict certain activities such as group counseling, crisis counseling, etc.)
  
- Have discussions with your administrator and crisis team to identify resources and responsibilities for keeping students and parents informed.
  - Determine how you will deliver the school counseling program virtually (work with your administrators, other counselors, and district leaders to determine best practices.)
  - Consult with your administrator and other school stakeholders to determine how vulnerable students will be identified and monitored. Determine how to check-in with these students, how often check-ins will occur, and who is responsible for contacting the students.

## **STUDENTS EXPERIENCING SUICIDAL CRISIS**

TN HB1354 requires each state institution of higher education to do the following: develop and implement a suicide prevention plan for students, faculty, and staff; and provide the plan to students, faculty, and staff at least once each semester.

TN HB0036 requires that once every four years social workers, marriage and family therapists, professional counselors, pastoral counselors, alcohol and drug abuse counselors, and occupational therapists must complete an approved suicide prevention training program.

TN HJR001 Recognized teen suicide as a health crisis in Tennessee.



- Always follow your districts protocol and required documentation
- If a student is experiencing a suicidal crisis follow these steps:
  - Establish therapeutic alliance and trust
  - Help de-escalate student's emotions
  - Determine if a student has active suicidal ideation with a plan and intent to act.
    - Ask about the student's current state of mind
      - *Have you had any thoughts about hurting yourself? Killing yourself?*
    - Ask if the student has tried to self-injure or commit suicide before
      - *Did you ever do ANYTHING to try to kill yourself or hurt yourself on purpose?*
    - Ask about suicidal thoughts and if they have a plan to commit suicide
      - *Have you thought about how you would do that? What did you think about?*
    - Ask how and when the student intends to carry out the plan
      - *When you thought about killing yourself, did you think that this was something you might actually do?*
      - *Have you ever planned out how you would do it?*
      - *What was your plan?*
      - *When you made this plan was any part of you thinking of actually doing it?*
  - Inform parents and contact emergency services
    - Maintain video/voice contact with the student while contacting the parent if possible.
    - Let the parent or guardian know that you are calling 911 or Mobile Crisis for further evaluation. Ask the parent to remain with the student until help arrives.
    - If you believe the student is in imminent danger or if you are unsure, call 911. If you do not believe the student is in imminent danger but needs an evaluation, call Mobile Crisis (800) 681-7444
  - If the parent is not available, the student is alone, or the risk is high:
    - Verify the student's address and phone number
    - Call 911 and ask for a wellness check at the address where the student is currently (use another phone so you can stay online with the student)
    - Stay on the line with the student until first responders arrive
    - Give first responders the parents' names and contact information
    - Continue trying to contact the parents



- Document all information and actions taken
  - Document statements made by the student, family, parents, other adults, 911 operators, and first responders
  - Document the time you spoke to the student, the time when you called parents, 911, and/or Mobile Crisis
  - Contact your administrator and let them know about the situation and the actions that were taken

### **DEATH OF A STUDENT OR TEACHER**

- Follow the district or school protocol already in place
  - Collaborate with crisis team members via a virtual platform to determine:
    - Who needs information about the death (faculty, students, parents). Consider informing faculty prior to informing parents/students so they have time to process the information.
    - Speak to the family of the deceased to determine their wishes regarding what information is disseminated
    - How the information will be shared
    - Who will share the information
    - Check in with vulnerable students, including those most affected by the death
    - Share office hours and the hours of the others who would be appropriate for counseling/support. Consider extending office hours for a period of time.
    - Consider including grief specialists from the community and provide contact information for community resources
    - Discuss opportunities for grief sharing (such as a virtual memorial wall)
    - Debrief with the crisis team and discuss what worked or did not work

### **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR COUNSELORS**

- Engage in self-care.
  - If you try to be available 24/7 you will burn out. Set specific office hours and abide by them.
  - Exercise every day.
  - Keep a regular sleep schedule.
  - Practice healthy habits (moderate use of tobacco, alcohol, social media, screen time.)



- Connect with others.
- Work on a hobby you enjoy.
- Develop your spiritual side with meditation, prayer, or mindfulness.

## APPENDIX

### **COUNSELOR TRAINING and RESOURCES**

Ways to Connect With Students Online <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Remote Counseling During Closures

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-90hIM6obmDtOHJHsZVWKmzsKpNBLFaw>

Differences Between HIPAA and FERPA

[https://www.cdc.gov/php/docs/hipaa-ferpa-infographic-508.pdf?fbclid=IwAR19FeeCyBqk1-YDMxHkRjIRhIFiEEj2y-pINtRXe0Sw\\_SduPjK8eurJ4Lk](https://www.cdc.gov/php/docs/hipaa-ferpa-infographic-508.pdf?fbclid=IwAR19FeeCyBqk1-YDMxHkRjIRhIFiEEj2y-pINtRXe0Sw_SduPjK8eurJ4Lk)

Zoom and FERPA Compliance

<https://zoom.us/docs/doc/FERPA%20Guide.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2t8wHC4R2A8GMkG4kfXtkEgQ8BlyyASriRXVpql5Ya7v5YEWXPX49Vyu4>

ASCA Virtual Counseling Training

<https://videos.schoolcounselor.org/ethics-virtual-school-counseling>

ASCA School Counseling Ethics in Virtual Settings

<https://videos.schoolcounselor.org/ethical-considerations-school-counseling-in-a-virtual-setting-part-2>

ASCA Teleconferencing Liability Insurance

[https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/member-benefits-info/liability-insurance?fbclid=IwAR0qmU-6YlXWRfWxtpXu-IJxT6X9U-tWsQ4PbINMvo-uLaNyfWCkqWII\\_lc](https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/member-benefits-info/liability-insurance?fbclid=IwAR0qmU-6YlXWRfWxtpXu-IJxT6X9U-tWsQ4PbINMvo-uLaNyfWCkqWII_lc)

ASCA Virtual Counseling Position Statement

[https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/PositionStatements/PS\\_Virtual.pdf](https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/PositionStatements/PS_Virtual.pdf)

ASCA Virtual Counseling Ethics

<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors/legal-ethical/faqs-virtual-school-counseling-ethics>





Tennessee Strategy for Suicide Prevention

<https://tspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/TSPN-Strategy-Pamphlet-2017.pdf>

Suicide Prevention Training for Educators

<https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/suicide-prevention.html>

## **RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

First Aid for Feelings Workbook <http://teacher.scholastic.com/education/coronavirusworkbook/index.html>

How to Talk to Your Child About Coronavirus

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Emotional Well-Being Lessons, Crafts, and Resources

<https://wideopenschool.org/programs/educator/prek-5/emotional-well-being/>

Research-based Mindfulness Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiaUKiwbiHMQDQLCXoPaMMYotIdKIUQCw>

Helpful Family Responses During Stressful Times

[https://consciousdiscipline.com/covid-19-five-helpful-responses-for-families/?fbclid=IwAR2CLQuQJFj5\\_roG0BPRNDccrSuuEht\\_s6MI7ByBmzG9IYz\\_yV-3YZn52yE](https://consciousdiscipline.com/covid-19-five-helpful-responses-for-families/?fbclid=IwAR2CLQuQJFj5_roG0BPRNDccrSuuEht_s6MI7ByBmzG9IYz_yV-3YZn52yE)

Remote Counseling During Closures

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-90hIM6obmDtOHJHsZVWkmzsKpNBLFaw>

YouTube Lesson on Covid-19

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qxL\\_\\_-yTy8&fbclid=IwAR0feRbAdIR6hjFohmeqIO14--Ed9RwFmZD8OtkvRFrtrcMzBQSqvdt8U-s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qxL__-yTy8&fbclid=IwAR0feRbAdIR6hjFohmeqIO14--Ed9RwFmZD8OtkvRFrtrcMzBQSqvdt8U-s)

Emotional Well-Being Lessons and Resources

<https://wideopenschool.org/programs/educator/6-12/emotional-well-being/>

Virtual School Counseling Example

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1csQ37Rlr2m6fxvmk\\_d3eEs\\_NYp-cvA\\_bEsnu7D2hngk/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1csQ37Rlr2m6fxvmk_d3eEs_NYp-cvA_bEsnu7D2hngk/edit)

Informed Consent Example

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1scWlUfBj0up77P9kN6ROtI5x6JlivzEtU45Qoe7mdkl/edit>



Comprehensive School Counseling Model of Practice and Student Standards (Policy 5.103)  
<https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/sbe/rules--policies-and-guidance/policies.html>

COVID-19 Free E- Resources for SEL  
<https://selproviders.casel.org/sel-resources/>

Tennessee Department of Education  
<https://www.us8.list-manage.com/track/click?u=b28b453ee164f9a2e2b5057e1&id=73d2e87f90&e=78143c6d5f>

TDOE COVID-19 Resources  
<https://www.us8.list-manage.com/track/click?u=b28b453ee164f9a2e2b5057e1&id=f4ebb52d51&e=78143c6d5f>