



## SUICIDE PREVENTION POLICY

### Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to protect the health and well-being of all pupils at Epsom College in Malaysia ("ECiM") by having procedures in place to prevent, assess the risk of, intervene in, and respond to suicide.

### 1. Definitions

- **Self-harm:** Self-harm is behaviour that is self-directed and deliberately results in injury or the potential for injury to oneself. This can be categorized as either non-suicidal or suicidal. Non-suicidal behaviour is covered in ECiM's Self-Harm Policy. Although self-harm often lacks suicidal intent, youth who engage in self-harm are more likely to attempt suicide.
- **Suicidal behaviour:** Suicidal attempts, intentional injury to self, associated with at least some level of intent; developing a plan or strategy for suicide, gathering the means for a suicide plan, or any other overt action or thought indicating intent to end one's life.
- **Suicidal act:** A suicidal act is a self-injurious behaviour for which there is evidence that the person had at least some intent to kill himself or herself. A suicide attempt may result in death, injuries, or no injuries.
- **Suicide risk assessment:** An evaluation of a pupil who may be at risk for suicide, conducted by the appropriate school staff (e.g., College Counsellor, staff trained and certified with suicide risk assessment or external mental health professional). This assessment is designed to elicit information regarding the pupil's intent to die by suicide, previous history of suicide attempts, presence of a suicide plan and its level of lethality and availability, presence of support systems, and level of hopelessness and helplessness, mental status, and other relevant risk factors.
- **Suicide risk:** Likelihood/warning signs that a suicidal act may be imminent. A pupil who is defined as high risk for suicide is one who has made a suicide attempt, has the intent to die by suicide, or has displayed a significant change in behaviour suggesting the onset or deterioration of a mental health condition. The pupil may have thought about suicide including potential means of death and may have a plan.

## **2. Scope**

This document describes the school's approach to preventing suicidal behaviour and response to a suicidal behaviour or a suicidal act at ECiM. Self-harm without suicidal intent is covered in the College's separate Self Harm Policy.

## **3. Aims**

The aims of this Policy are to:

- increase understanding and awareness of suicidal behaviour, suicide risk, and suicidal acts;
- alert staff to warning signs and risk factors of suicidal behaviour;
- provide guidance to staff and thus encourage preventative action in case of suicide risk; and
- provide guidance to staff and ensure proper after-care in the event of a suicidal act at ECiM.

## **4. Guiding principles**

Epsom College in Malaysia:

- recognises that physical, behavioural, and emotional health is an integral component of a pupil's educational outcomes, overall development and future success as individuals professionally and personally;
- further recognizes that suicide is a leading cause of death among young people;
- has an ethical responsibility to take a proactive approach in preventing deaths by suicide; and
- acknowledges the school's role in providing an environment which is sensitive to individuals and societal factors that place youth at greater risk for suicide and one which helps to foster positive youth development.

Toward this end, the policy is meant to be paired with other policies supporting the emotional, mental and behavioural health of pupils more broadly.

## **5. Creating an environment which reduces suicide risk**

ECiM is committed to the creation of a school environment that helps to build protective factors within our pupils and school community that will reduce the risk of a pupil resorting to suicidal behaviour. This includes activities, policies and programs that help to build:

- connectedness - a sense of belonging with others and connectedness to our school;
- resilience - the development of capacities within a person that promote positive outcomes, including personal coping skills and strategies for dealing with adversity, such as problem- solving, communication and social skills, optimistic thinking and help seeking; and
- a sense of personal safety - through the implementation of our Anti-Bullying Policy.

## **6. Knowledge & awareness of suicidal behaviour and prevention**

ECiM is committed to training and developing ECiM staff to build and maintain knowledge and awareness of suicidal behaviour, suicide prevention, risk assessment and after-care:

- ECiM provides internal basic training to staff on risk factors, warning signs, protective factors, response procedures, referrals, and resources regarding youth suicide prevention.
- ECiM provides internal basic training for selected staff to assess and refer pupils at risk of suicide to appropriate services (gatekeeper training).
- Staff members are informed on the suicide crisis response procedures at ECiM.
- Procedures are in place for medical emergency treatment. Medical staff are trained to provide basic medical emergency treatment in the case of suicide attempts.

## **7. Actions to be taken in the case of suicidal threat:**

- staff member Informs Housemaster/mistress (“HMM”)/Head of Prep;
- staff member who learns of the threat will locate the individual and arrange for or provide constant adult supervision until a risk assessment has taken place;
- any staff member who is originally made aware of any threat or witnesses any attempt towards self-harm, that is written, drawn, spoken or threatened, will immediately notify the HMM/Head of Prep;
- any threat in any form must be treated as real and dealt with immediately;
- no pupil should be left alone, nor confidences promised. Thus, in cases of life threatening situations a pupil’s confidentiality will be waived.

### **Risk Response Team is set up**

The HMM/Head of Prep will set up a risk response team and appropriate supportive documentation from teachers or others who witnessed the threat.

The Risk Response Team will include:

- The Housemaster/mistress/Head of Prep School
- College Counsellor
- Deputy Head Pastoral
- The Senior Nurse

The Deputy Head Pastoral decides whether the Second Master/Headmaster needs to be informed. In the case the pupil cannot be located within the school, parents/guardians should be notified as soon as possible.

The Deputy Head Pastoral is also the Child Protection Officer in the Risk Response Team. Suicide is not Child Protection, but Child Safeguarding. If it is decided that parents cannot be informed about suicide risk because it will cause more harm to the welfare of the child then this becomes a Child Protection issue in which case it has to be documented and followed up by the Child Protection Team.

## **8. Suicide Risk Assessment by College Counsellor**

The College counsellor will determine risk and intervention needed by interviewing the pupil and will inform the Risk Response Team on the estimated risk and actions to be taken:

### **a) Low Suicide Risk**

In the event the College Counsellor deems suicide risk to be low, the following steps are taken:

- Housemaster/mistress/Head of Prep School informs parents/guardians on performed risk assessment unless there are reasons not to inform parents/guardians. Decision on whether or not to inform parents/guardians is made by the College Counsellor in consultation with the Risk Response Team.
- All recommendations to the parent/guardian are put in writing (letter or e-mail) and a file copy of the letter is maintained in a secure and appropriate location. Risk Response Team members are put in BCC.
- Parents are offered an appointment with the College Counsellor in case they have questions or are in need of further guidance or psychological education.
- If deemed beneficial – the College Counsellor offers ongoing counselling for pupil and advises Risk Response Team on how to support pupil. Note: The College can make it compulsory for counselling in/out of school until counsellor deems no longer at risk (even low).
- If the pupil is known to be currently in counselling by an external mental health professional, the College Counsellor will liaise with this provider to confer with / inform the treatment provider of what occurred, actions taken and course of action.
- If a parent/guardian refuses to engage appropriate medical/psychological treatment, and there is any doubt regarding the pupils' safety, the College will treat the situation as a Child Protection case and the Deputy Head Pastoral will take the lead in this.

### **b) Moderate to High Suicide Risk**

In the event the College Counsellor deems suicide risk to be moderate to high, the following steps are taken:

In cooperation with the College Counsellor the HMM/Head of Prep School will:

- Contact the parent/guardian asap to apprise them of the situation and next steps as formulated in the ECiM Suicide Policy, unless informing the parents may increase the Suicide risk (i.e. abuse at home). In this case the Risk Response Team will treat this as a Child Protection Case and take steps according to the ECiM Child Protection Policy.
- In the case of moderate to high risk parents will be invited in by the College Counsellor for a meeting with the aim to psycho-educate the parents/guardians on warning signs, protective factors and how to support their child. In this meeting the College Counsellor will also discuss the steps taken by the College in order to support their child. A step can be referral to a psychiatrist for an additional medical perspective and/or a psychiatrist's evaluation to determine if medication is required in order to keep the pupil safe while therapy continues with the counsellor.

- Put all recommendations to the parent/guardian in writing (letter or e-mail). A file copy of the letter is maintained in a secure and appropriate location. Risk Response Team members are put in BCC.
- Pupil needs to have regular counselling until the College Counsellor/external mental health professional considers the suicide risk as low.
- If suicide risk is deemed high ECiM will refer Pupil to an external mental health professional for a Suicide Risk Assessment. The psychiatrist will inform ECiM whether it is deemed safe to continue boarding / day school. In other cases pupil and parents can make use of College Counselling, or if preferred work with an external mental health professional.
- If the pupil is known to be currently in counselling by an external mental health professional, the College Counsellor will liaise with this provider to confer with/inform the treatment provider of what occurred, actions taken and course of action.
- If a parent/guardian refuse to engage appropriate medical/psychological treatment, and there is any doubt regarding the pupils' safety, the Housemaster/mistress will involve the Deputy Head Pastoral and treat the situation as a Child Protection case.
- In all matters pertaining to a pupil who is deemed a potential suicide risk (whether low, medium or high risk) the Headmaster and Second Master must be informed of the risk. Whilst the advice of external psychiatrists will be sought and listened to, only the Headmaster (in consultation with the Second Master, Deputy Head Pastoral/Head of Prep School) may decide whether a pupil is able to continue to attend school, both as a boarder and day pupil whilst undergoing treatment. This is to ensure the College meets its duty of care to **all** pupils.

**c) Immediate risk of harm:**

- When risk is perceived to be imminent, pupils should be referred to emergency services.
- The pupil is not left alone and is sent to emergency care or psychiatrist asap. The College Counsellor will inform the Risk Response Team on the estimated Risk and arrange an appointment in cooperation with the Risk Response Team. In the case the pupil cannot be located within the school, parents/guardians should be notified as soon as possible.
- Contact the parent/guardian asap to apprise them of the situation and next steps as formulated in the ECiM Suicide Policy, unless informing the parents may increase the Suicide risk (i.e. abuse at home). If informing parents may increase suicide risk the Child Protection Officer (Deputy Head Pastoral) will take steps according to ECiM Child Protection Policy.
- If the College Counsellor estimates that there is a risk of harm to the Pupil or fellow pupils, the pupil must see a psychiatrist for a suicide risk assessment. The psychiatrist will inform ECiM whether it is deemed safe to continue boarding / day school. The Housemaster/mistress of a boarder or parent of a day pupil makes an appointment for an assessment with a psychiatrist. In the case of imminent risk, emergency services will be directly informed to keep the pupil and fellow pupils safe. The pupil must see a psychiatrist for a suicide risk assessment asap and the psychiatrist will inform ECiM whether it is deemed safe to continue boarding / day school.
- College Counsellor liaises with psychiatrist on action plan and informs Risk Response Team on how to support pupil and parents.
- HMM/Head of Prep School invites parents in for an appointment with the College Counsellor to discuss how parents and the College can support their child.

- If the pupil is known to be currently in counselling by an external mental health professional, the College Counsellor liaises with this provider to confer with / inform the treatment provider of what occurred, actions taken and course of action.
- If a parent/guardian refuses to engage appropriate medical/psychological treatment, and there is any doubt regarding the pupils' safety, the Housemaster/mistress will involve the Child Protection Officer and treat the situation as a child protection case.

**d) Imminent suicide risk when College Counsellor is not on site**

In the case the College Counsellor is not available, the Head of House will conduct a basic risk assessment interview – guided by the College Counsellor over phone- and will gather appropriate supportive documentation from teachers or others who witnessed the threat and share this with the external mental health professional.

If the College Counsellor is not available, the pupil is to be sent directly to an outside mental health professional who has been trained in Suicide Risk Assessment (psychiatrist).

**9. Action to be taken in the case of a Suicidal Act**

- The first staff member on the scene must call the Medical Centre. The College Nurse carries out medical emergency treatment and/or contacts an ambulance if needed, or arranges transportation to the hospital.
- The above-mentioned staff member will immediately inform the Housemaster/mistress who will set up a Risk Response Team, which includes:
  - Housemaster/mistress/Head of Prep School
  - Deputy Head Pastoral
  - College Counsellor (if available)
  - The Senior Nurse
  - Tutor or trusted staff member of school who is in contact with the pupil if available
  - The Headmaster and/or Second Master
- Staff members move all other pupils out of the immediate area and arrange appropriate supervision and support for the pupils. Pupils should not be allowed to observe the scene. The College Counsellor, if available, supported by HMMs and tutors provides first mental health support on site for pupils. HMMs will promptly follow up with any pupils or staff who might have witnessed the attempt, and contact their parents/guardians.
- After a Suicidal act the pupil is always be referred to a Psychiatrist and is sent home to the parents/guardians or an external medical instate. In the case that sending the pupil home to parents/guardians may increase the suicide risk (i.e. abuse at home), the Senior Nurse will involve the Child Protection Officer and treat the situation as a Child Protection case.
- If the pupil is known to be currently in counselling, the College Counsellor will inform their treatment provider of what occurred and the actions taken.
- The HMM/Head of Prep will – in collaboration with the Risk Response Team- document in writing all actions taken and recommendations given. Put all recommendations to the parent/guardian in writing (letter or e-mail). A file copy of the letter is maintained in a secure and appropriate location. Risk Response Team members are put in BCC.

#### **10. Action taken in the case suicidal act has resulted in death**

- Staff members should move all other pupils out of the immediate area and arrange appropriate supervision and support for the pupils. Pupils should not be allowed to observe the scene. The College Counsellor, if available, supported by Housemasters/mistresses and tutors provide initial support on site for pupils. Housemasters/mistresses will promptly follow up with any pupils or staff who might have witnessed the attempt, and contact their parents/guardians.
- In the case of death, the Headmaster/Second Master will notify the police. Note: The coroner's or medical examiner's office must first confirm that the death was a suicide before any school official may state this as the cause of death.
- The Headmaster/Second Master will contact parents/guardians and decide on the next course of action together with the parents, Medical health coordinator and College Counsellor.
- Media representatives should be referred to the appropriate appointed College spokesperson; in this order the Headmaster/Second Master. School staff should make no statements to the media. Note: The coroner's or medical examiner's office must first confirm that the death was a suicide before any school official may state this as the cause of death.

#### **11. Returning to School after Suicide Risk / Suicide Attempt**

For pupils returning to school after a moderate to high suicide risk or externally assessed suicide risk, the College Counsellor will request written documentation from a psychiatrist, prior to a pupil's return to school stating that the pupil is mentally fit and able to attend school and no longer a danger to themselves or others. The College Counsellor and external mental health professional will verbally agree a course of action which is confirmed in writing by the College Counsellor to the external mental health professional.

However, the final decision to permit such a pupil to return to College is at the discretion of the Headmaster who, in consultation with the Second Master, Deputy Head Pastoral/Head of Prep and Housemaster/mistress, will decide if the risk can be safely managed whilst the pupil attends school. This may require a change in the status of a pupil from boarding to day.

As counselling support is essential to the process of re-entry into school, in house counselling support is mandatory. Furthermore, the College Counsellor and external mental health professional will maintain contact over the course of the readjustment of the pupil at school.

A designated staff member will periodically check in with the pupil to help him/her readjust to the school community and address any ongoing concerns. This is likely to be the pupil's HMM/Head of Prep School as they will have responsibility for the pupil whilst at school.

For pupils returning to school after a suicidal act the College Counsellor, or, if unavailable, external mental health professional and the Headmaster will meet with the pupil's parents or guardians, and if appropriate, meet with the pupil to discuss re-entry and appropriate next steps to ensure the pupil's readiness for returning to College.

The Headmaster will request written documentation from medical treatment provider (if relevant), as well as an external mental health professional, proving the pupil is medically and mentally able to attend school and no longer a danger to themselves or others, prior to a pupil's return to school. If a written statement cannot be provided, the College Counsellor and external mental health professional will

verbally agree a course of action which is confirmed in writing by the College Counsellor to the external mental health professional.

A return to school has to be agreed in writing between the Headmaster and the College Counsellor. If they do not agree, the Headmaster's decision is final.

A designated staff member will periodically check in with pupil to help the pupil readjust to the school community and address any ongoing concerns. This is likely to be the pupil's HMM/Head of Prep School as they will have responsibility for the pupil whilst at school. As Counselling support is essential to the process of re-entry into school, in house counselling support is mandatory until the College Counsellor decides the pupil is able to continue without counselling.