



Mental Health Guidance for School Counselors, Other Mental Health Professionals and Administrators

The COVID-19 outbreak presents a unique challenge for school counselors, administrators and other mental health professionals in schools. In light of the physical and emotional stressors placed upon us all in these uncertain times, coupled with social distancing, we are called upon to creatively adapt the ways in which we work as we provide services and support to students, families and staff.

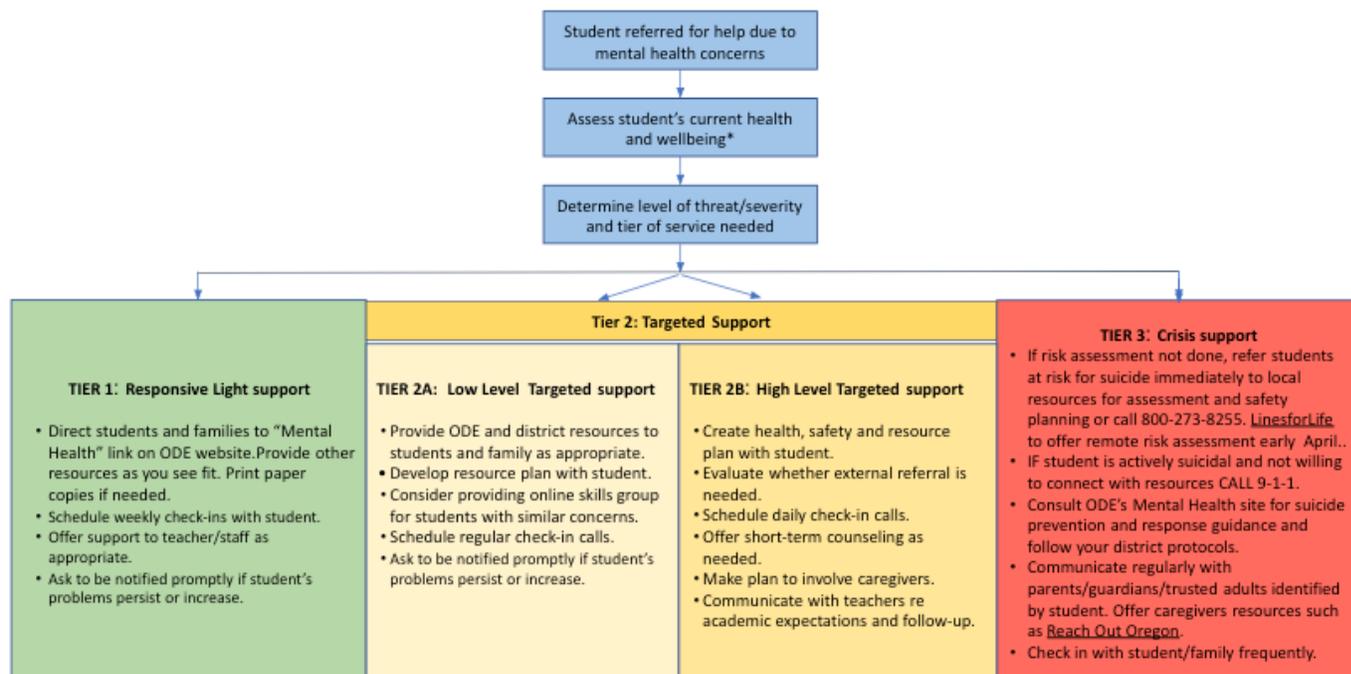
ODE recognizes the depth of expertise and wisdom of those who provide psychological and academic support to Oregon students. We also recognize that districts will vary widely in the availability of resources and services to support families, and that some have existing protocols in place for managing acute, mental health crises and providing support and guidance to students at-risk for behavioral and emotional difficulties. With that understanding, we offer the following procedural information in accordance with Governor Brown's directive *to provide guidance to districts and communities to ensure the continuity of mental health services to children and their families.*

In light of the stresses of the time, and the current need to refrain from in-person contact with people outside of the home, we anticipate that there will be more students and families in need of support, and that guidance will be delivered remotely for the foreseeable future. In light of that, we ask that you:

- Heed the [guidance on tele-counseling and virtual telecommunications](#) to ensure that best practices are followed.
- Be mindful to be culturally-attuned and responsive to student and family needs and strengths including recognizing that some families will have their own internal supports or require translation services.
- Be aware that students will vary in the degree to which they have access to computers, the internet, phone, text or chat capabilities, and respond through a means that is best suited to their strengths.

We encourage counselors and other mental health providers to consider organizing your workload using three tiers: 1-Non-emergent, light support; 2-Low Level targeted support or High level targeted support; or 3-Crisis support. The following recommendations are made by tier (see figure and detailed description below).

Mental Health and Social Supports



Assessment

- 1) Whenever possible, provide a detailed assessment of a child's current psychological health and wellbeing. We suggest including the following dimensions of health: mood, behaviors, health-promoting behaviors, level of stress/distress, substance use/abuse, social and cultural supports, family environment and supports, family distress/violence/abuse/substance use, bullying, harassment, racism/discrimination (in-person and online), suicidal thoughts, plans, ideations, etc. and access to resources (i.e. internet, computer, phone, text, chat).
- 2) Determine the level of threat/severity of a student's presenting symptoms and situation, and determine the appropriate tier of service.
- 3) If a student indicates that he, she, or they are in imminent threat of harm by self or others, we recommend:
 - a) An immediate risk assessing using the [Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale](#) by someone with suicide risk assessment expertise. If that person is not readily available, [LinesforLife](#) will be available to provide risk assessments and safety planning services during regular business hours (8:00am-4:30pm) Monday to Friday (503-575-3760).
 - b) If an immediate suicide risk is identified, please move immediately to Tier 3 Crisis Support guidance below or use your district crisis protocol if one exists.
 - c) If a risk assessment is not available or a student refuses to connect with resources and is in imminent danger call 9-1-1.

Mental Health and Social Supports



Tier 1 - Responsive, light support

Student is demonstrating or reporting very low levels of mood or behavior difficulties or distress.

1. If a student is determined to be in need of minimal support, please direct the student and family as appropriate to the [“Mental Health” link on ODE’s website](#) and/or provide other resources as you see fit. If a student does not have internet or smart phone access, please print and provide paper copies of resources to students and their families/caregivers.
2. Schedule weekly check-ins with student as needed in their preferred mode of contact.
3. Offer support to teacher/staff as appropriate.
4. Ask teacher to notify you promptly if student’s problems persist or increase.

Tier 2A - Low Level Targeted Support

Student is demonstrating or reporting moderate levels of mood or behavior difficulties or distress.

1. If a student is in need of greater support than in Tier 1, but not in need of one-on-one intervention, please direct the child and family as appropriate to the [“Mental Health” link on ODE’s website](#) and/or provide other resources as you see fit. If a student does not have internet or smart phone access, please print and provide paper copies.
2. Develop a resource plan with student identifying strengths, positive prosocial activities, social supports, and a clear strategy of when to ask for help.
3. Consider providing group skill building supports for students with similar concerns.
4. Schedule regular check-ins with student in their preferred mode of contact at least once per week.
5. Ask teacher to notify you if student’s problems persist, and immediately if they increase.

Tier 2B – High Level Targeted Support

Student is demonstrating high levels of mood or behavior difficulties or distress.

1. Create a health, safety and resource plan with student. Plan should identify strengths, positive prosocial activities, a clear strategy of when to ask for help, and a list of 24/7 resources and supports (including crisis supports).
2. Evaluate if an external referral is needed. If so, connect with community provider to determine availability and facilitate a warm hand-off.
3. Offer short-term counseling if feasible and needed.
4. Make plan to involve caregivers.
5. Communicate with teachers re academic expectations and follow-up.
6. Ask teacher to notify you immediately if student’s problems increase or student is in crisis.

Mental Health and Social Supports



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Tier 3 – Crisis Support

Student is at risk for suicide or imminent harm. Please also see [How to Prevent Suicide](#), and [What to Do If You Suspect Abuse](#) in the "[Mental Health](#)" area on the ODE Website.

1. If you are not able to conduct a formal suicide risk assessment do one of the following:
 - a. Call the National Suicide Hotline for a risk assessment and immediate support (800-273-8255).
OR
 - b. Lines for Life provides a remote suicide risk assessment and safety planning service for schools. Call 503-575-3760.
2. If a student is actively suicidal or at risk for imminent harm and not willing to connect with resources please CALL 9-1-1.
3. Consult [How to Prevent Suicide](#) guidance document in the *Mental Health* section on the ODE website and/or follow your school or district crisis protocols and policies.
4. Communicate regularly with parents, guardians and individuals that the student has identified as trusted adults.
5. Offer caregivers resources such as [Reach Out Oregon](#).
6. Check in frequently with student, family and teacher (as appropriate).