# **Suicide Risk: Tips for Making Parent/Guardian Contact**

Please also refer to Suicide Intervention: *Responding When Students are Experiencing Suicidal Thoughts* on the [VDOE Suicide Prevention webpage](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/prevention/suicide/index.shtml) for additional information.

1. Begin by letting the parents/guardians know that the student is safe.
2. Ask parents/guardians how their child has been doing, and if they have noticed any changes in their child’s behavior.
3. State what you have observed in their child’s behavior and ask how that fits with what they have seen in their child.
4. Acknowledge the emotional state of the parents/guardians. Provide empathy for this situation and comment on its scary nature for parents.
5. Acknowledge that it is essential for schools, parents/guardians, and community mental health and medical services to collaborate to help a suicidal child, as no one can do this alone.
6. Advise parents/guardians to remove lethal means from the home, as their child is possibly suicidal.
7. If the parent/guardian appears unwilling to take recommended actions, discuss their beliefs and concerns about youth suicide risk/behavior. Debunk any myths they may have about suicide. Be respectful of and explore any cultural, religious, or other concerns that might reduce the parent or guardian’s acceptance of mental health treatment for their child.
8. When possible, align yourself with the parent/guardian. It is important for them to understand the stress and depression that their child is likely experiencing. Discuss with the parents/guardians ways to manage stress and accessing mental health assistance for their child.
9. Ask if the student is currently working with a mental health provider. If so, request that the parent/guardian sign a release of information form so that designated school personnel can speak directly with the provider to coordinate intervention efforts. If not, provide to the parent/guardian with community resources that offer mental health treatment.
10. If deemed necessary by risk level, refer parents/guardians to the local community services board’s crisis/emergency for a suicide screening/assessment of their child.\* It may be helpful to call crisis prior to the student leaving school to determine the next steps.
11. Discuss the student’s immediate actions steps with parents/guardians and ask for input.
12. If the student will be absent from school, let the parents/guardians know that a follow-up or re-entry meeting will be conducted at school. Collaboration with parents/guardians, student, and any mental health providers is welcome.
13. Document all actions taken and have parents/guardians sign any required forms. If parents/guardians refuse to sign, have another staff member sign that they witnessed the refusal.
14. If parents/guardians ask that their child be allowed to walk home, ride the bus, or drive themselves home, respectfully insist that they come to school to pick up their child.
15. During the school day, some parents/guardians may be difficult to reach. The student should remain under close supervision until they can be transferred to their parent or guardian. If parents or guardians simply cannot be reached, school personnel need to work with local law enforcement and/or mental health personnel to secure the needed supervision for the student.

\*This is a general recommendation. Some school divisions may have agreements within their communities to manage referrals for suicide assessment differently.