

# Student Confidentiality and Parental Rights

School Resources to Support Military-Connected Students is a project by the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness an applied research center at The Pennsylvania State University and is funded by the Department of Defense Education Activity Grant number HE1254-19-0009.

For more information on these resources click on the links below:

<https://schoolresources.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/>

<https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/>

<https://www.psu.edu/>

<https://dodeagrants.org/>

Our goal is to provide school personnel with free, evidence-based resources to support military-connected students. This training is part of our Suicide Prevention series.

## Important Reminders

Before starting this training, please read the items below carefully and check the box in front of each item to indicate your understanding.

- The following content discusses suicide and may be upsetting to some individuals.
- Follow all district, local, state, and federal regulations. This training is **NOT** intended to replace or override existing procedures or laws.

## Introduction

### What is the purpose of this training?

What happens when there is a conflict related to confidentiality and parental rights? First, talk with the student to determine what (if any) information the student is willing to share with parents. If you get permission, there is no conflict. If student does not consent to sharing information, try educating the parent about the counseling process and be sure to reassure parents that if you believed the child was in harm's way they would be informed immediately; if you are legally obligated to share information due to harm, you have to tell against the student's wishes – but this should come as no surprise if confidentiality was covered! Check the school policy, state law, your professional ethics code, and consult with colleagues before deciding what is essential to share. It is recommended to facilitate a joint session with parents and child, when possible.

## Objective

The goal of this training is to increase your confidence in your ability to:

**Balance student confidentiality and parental right to know what is happening with their child.**

*How confident are you in your ability to do this now?*

Please click on the link below to submit your response.

[https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6Gp3iBHlvhcTluR?modulenumber=suicide14](https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6Gp3iBHlvhcTluR?modulenumber=suicide14)

Verify that you have completed each of the tasks below before proceeding with this training.

Answered the survey question in the link.

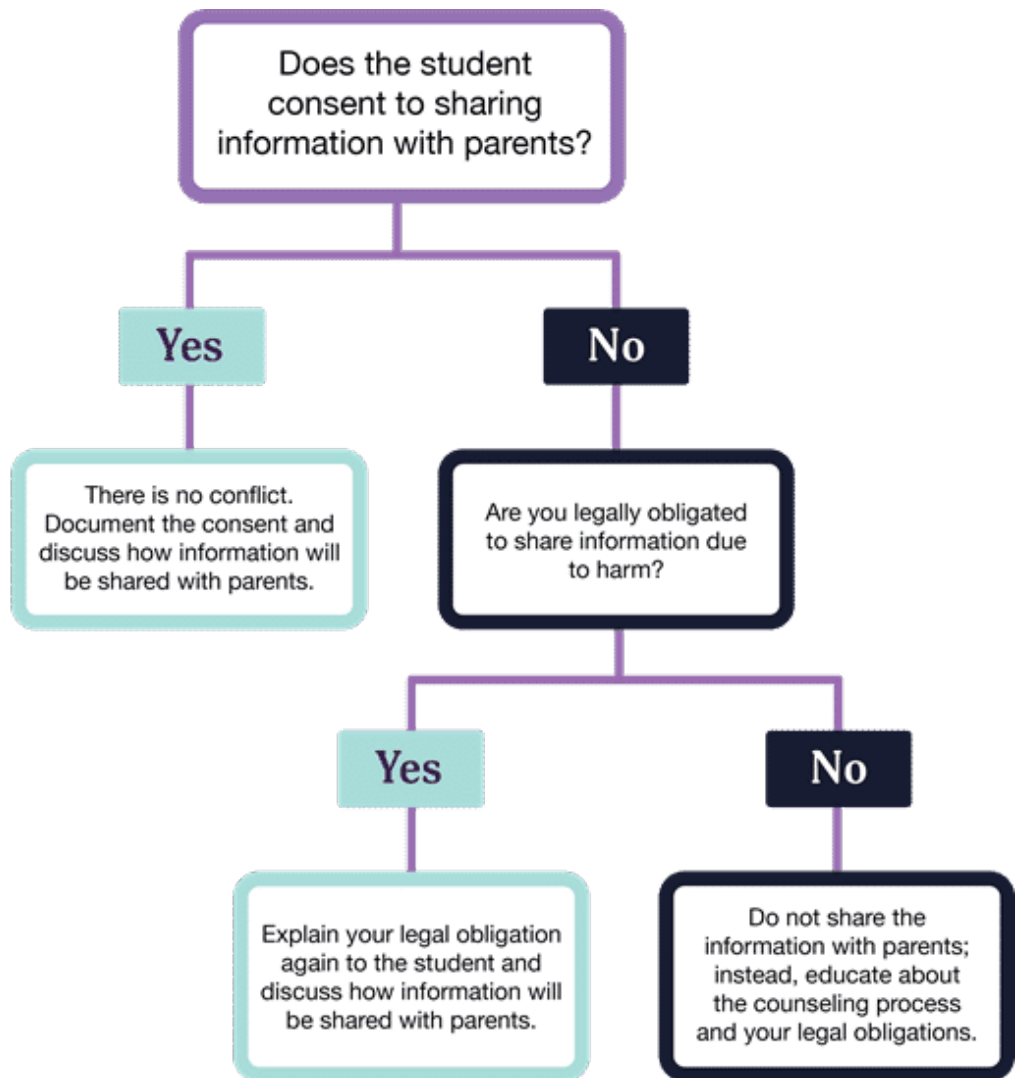
Clicked the arrow underneath the survey question to submit your response.

Recorded the ID number provided after you submitted your answer to the survey question. You will need it to complete the survey at the end of this training.

## Research

### What is most important for me to know?

The chart below illustrates the process to follow when there is a possible conflict related to confidentiality and parental rights.



Parents (or legal guardians/sponsors) must be contacted following a suicide risk assessment regardless of risk level – including when there is no suicide risk – and all actions should be documented.

# Application

How might this look in my professional practice?

Remember that the goal of this training is to increase your confidence in your ability to:

**Balance student confidentiality and parental right to know what is happening with their child.**

Use the link below to open this American School Counselor Association (ASCA) ethical dilemma in a new browser tab. When you have finished reviewing the dilemma and response, return here to continue this training.

[Working Through the Ethical Code | American School Counselor Association \(ASCA\)](#)

## Response to Ethical Dilemma

Take special note of the statement made about *Eisel v. Board of Education of Montgomery County* (1991) and the ASCA Ethical Code references. Consider the options and actions provided. Which would you choose, and at what risk? Remember that if a reasonable person could recognize that a student is in danger – that risk is foreseeable – school administration can be held liable for harm that occurs.

The only exception to notifying parents is when this action could put the student at risk for maltreatment; in this case, local child protective services (CPS) and/or the Family Advocacy Program should be called instead. Beyond notifying parents because it is a requirement, parents are a source of information for a better-informed risk assessment, including prior history of suicide risk, current stressors, and home environment (Erbacher, Singer, & Poland, 2015). Engaging parents also improves long-term outcomes for the student.

Usually, it is the role of the principal, school psychologist, or other school personnel with a special relationship with the student or family to notify the parent. Regardless of who is responsible for notification, that person should be sensitive toward the family's culture and consider attitudes related to suicide, mental health, privacy, and help-seeking (SAMHSA, 2012). In many cases, it may be appropriate to offer the student a choice of whether to talk with the parents together or for the school personnel to notify the parent alone.

[Student Suicide: Legal and Ethical Implications | American School Counselor Association \(ASCA\)](#)

# Implementation

How can I effectively implement this content in my professional practice?

Please review the considerations below regarding potential implementation strategies, barriers to implementation, and collaboration strategies related to this content. This will help you coordinate the next steps as you begin to incorporate the information presented in this training into your professional practice.

**This information can also be found on a handout that you will be able to download at the end of this training.**

## Implementation Strategies

- Explicit, documented, and regular training related to the school's own suicide prevention plans and crisis procedures should be a routine part of school personnel professional development/ professional training.
- If you do NOT have an established ethical decision-making procedure for your own practice, it is important that you adopt one from your professional association for your role (counselor, psychologist) and follow it.

## Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

- Regular consultation with colleagues is the cornerstone of ethical decision- making.
- Be sure to document in your notes your ethical decision-making process and all interactions, including consultation.

## Collaboration Strategies

- All teachers and staff should know who to contact and what to do if they suspect, or are informed of, suicidal thoughts or behaviors from any student.
- Be sure that you have a list of contacts ready for when you may need consultation about students at-risk.

## Resources

### Are there any resources available to help me implement this content?

Click on the link below to download a tool that you can use to implement this content in your professional practice.

<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:9a6fd067-91d6-4511-ade8-7cef79e2caa3>

## Feedback

### How can I help improve this training?

The objective of this training was to increase your confidence in your ability to:

### Balance student confidentiality and parental right to know what is happening with their child.

Answer the questions in the link below to let us know how well this training increased your confidence in your ability to accomplish this objective. Once you have answered all of the questions, click the blue arrow button underneath to submit your responses.

[https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_d771mLr9ZgW3kyx?modulenumber=suicide14](https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d771mLr9ZgW3kyx?modulenumber=suicide14)

Verify that you have completed each of the tasks below.

Answered all of the survey questions above. You may have to scroll to see all of the questions.  
Clicked the arrow underneath the last survey question to submit your responses.

## Additional Readings

### Where can I learn more about this content?

The following resources were used to create this training. If you would like more information about the information presented in this training, we encourage you to start here.

Erbacher, Terri & Singer, Jonathan & Poland, Scott. (2015). Suicide in schools: A practitioner's guide to multi-level prevention, assessment, intervention, and postvention.

Williams, R., Ed.D., LPC, NCC. (n.d.). Working Through the Ethical Code. Retrieved November 09, 2020, from <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/magazine/blogs/july-august-2008/working-through-the-ethical-code>

# Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this training. If you have any questions or comments, please email us at [schoolresources@psu.edu](mailto:schoolresources@psu.edu).

## Proceed to the next training

Click on the link below to move on to the next training titled *Protocol for Handling Suspected Suicide Risk*. In this training, you will increase your confidence in your ability to conduct an initial evaluation of a student who may be experiencing suicidal ideation to determine if a full risk assessment should be conducted.

[https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide\\_15-protocol-for-handling-suspected-suicide-risk\\_201022/](https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide_15-protocol-for-handling-suspected-suicide-risk_201022/)

## Return to the module directory

Click on the link below to return to the module directory.

<https://schoolresources.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/modules/>