

Government Launches Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism

The Government has always attached great importance to the mental health of youth. In view of recent student suicide cases, the Government will implement the Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism through cross-departmental collaboration of the Health Bureau, the Education Bureau (EDB) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) from today (December 1) to January 2024 in all secondary schools in Hong Kong, working together with schools, parents and other stakeholders in society to ensure early identification of and support for students at high risk.

A Government spokesperson said, "The epidemic in the past few years had caused an unprecedented impact on the mental health of Hong Kong citizens. There was no exception with students. They faced greater adjustment challenges following the full resumption to normalcy. In view of the recent upward trend of student suicide cases, the Government has launched the Mechanism to help schools identify students with higher suicide risk early and provide appropriate support to these students as quickly as possible, thereby building a stronger safety net for them."

Details of the Mechanism are as below:

(1) The first tier is to assist schools to identify students at an early stage with higher suicide risk or mental health needs with an aim of giving them priority for timely and appropriate intervention. Schools should review the mental health needs of students at school with the school's multidisciplinary team, give priority to caring for and counselling students at higher risk of suicide, and provide timely assistance and seek professional counselling or treatment services for them.

(2) The second tier is to organise an off-campus support network through cross-departmental, cross-professional and cross-sectoral co-operation to enhance external support for schools in the short term. If schools have difficulty in deploying manpower to meet the needs of students, the EDB will assist in referring the cases to the off-campus support network team, which is co-ordinated and arranged by the SWD, for follow-up action. The team will contact the students concerned as soon as possible and arrange follow-up services, including emergency intervention services covering assessments, support and counselling in individual, group or online format. It will also refer the students to other services according to their individual needs.

(3) For the third tier, school principals can refer students with severe mental health needs to the psychiatric specialist services of the Hospital Authority (HA). After triage and screening, those students in urgent cases will be accorded priority. In addition, the HA has set up a telephone consultation hotline specifically for school principals to provide them with professional advice.

The EDB has issued a circular letter to all secondary schools to inform them of the details of the Mechanism. The Government will monitor the operation of the Mechanism closely.

To strengthen parents' support for their children, the EDB will co-organise a face-to-face parent seminar on December 9 (Saturday) with the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations in 18 districts and regional school heads associations. The bureau has also been organising "gatekeeper" training regularly for parents every year, proactively promoting parent education on an ongoing basis.

The Government strives to bring all sectors of the community together to build a support network and cultivate a culture of acceptance and care to support students in coping with different challenges along their growth journey, thereby enhancing their physical and psychological wellbeing.