

# Deschutes County Behavioral Health

## Safe Schools Assessment Process

Deschutes County Behavioral Health (DCBH) is a member of the Deschutes County Safe School Alliance whose goal is preventing violence in schools. As a member, DCBH provides Safe School Assessment (SSA) services to Bend-La Pine, Redmond, and Sisters area public schools who request this service when they identify a student who may be a risk to others.

### **SSA – Direct School Referrals**

Participating schools perform a preliminary risk screening when a student has presented threatening, aggressive, or violent behavior in or connected to the school. If a school determines that the student needs a more thorough assessment, the student is referred to DCBH for a SSA by contacting the SSA identified point of contact (POC).

To facilitate a referral, participating schools have been provided with SSA referral forms that detail the process and required materials. These forms are available through the school district contacts. They are also available at DCBH if necessary.

DCBH will not assign and schedule an assessment until ALL referral materials have been received from the school. Those materials are:

- Fully completed referral form including detailed information about the event for which youth was referred and contact information for the family/guardian of the youth
- Completed Risk Screening/Assessment
- Legally sufficient Request for Information from the school to DCBH
- Copies of school records, including: attendance for past 2 years; grades for past 2 years; behavioral reports as far back as possible; IEP/504 if applicable; any psycho-educational testing the district has conducted on the youth.

**Note:** *If information is missing from the referral packet, the school administrator, psychologist, or counselor that conducted the Risk Screen/Assessment will be contacted immediately to obtain missing information or forms.*

Upon receipt of a complete referral, the DCBH POC assigns the SSA to staff trained in the SSA protocol, a Safe School Evaluator (SSE). The SSE proceeds with an in depth assessment process that involves the following steps:

- Intensive interview of the student and his or her family members

- Collection and review of available collateral information from the school and other sources (mental health therapist, coach, mentor, law enforcement, etc.)
- Formulation of a preliminary assignment of risk level in identified domains
- Consultation with the school staff or identified team members, including parents when appropriate, to provide information about risk and establish a risk mitigation plan
- Completion of a detailed written report which includes a scale of elevated risk factors based on information collected, a summary of assessed needs of the student, and a written risk mitigation plan
- Submission of the report to the school

If DCBH is unable to schedule a family for an initial interview within five (5) business days from receipt of the referral, the SSE will contact the school to inform the school that an assessment has not been scheduled. SSAs are voluntary. Neither the youth nor their family is required to participate, unless there is a court order requiring them to do so. If a youth or his/her family declines to participate, SSE will contact the school immediately and inform them of the youth/family's decision. Sometimes parents want to set up a Safe School Assessment for their child because they have heard about the process and are seeking help. However, only participating schools, or the Juvenile Department if the youth is in custody, can make a referral for a SSA. DCBH does not conduct SSAs for youth in private schools or by individual referral.

SSAs are offered at no cost to the family. Participating school districts cover the cost and are billed directly.

***Note:*** *School staff or identified school teams – not the SSE – ultimately determines whether the student may return to school or receive an alternate school placement*

### **SSA for Criminally Charged Youth**

If a crime is committed and the youth is taken to detention and held, Detention staff contacts the DCBH POC to inform them that a youth is in custody. Juvenile staff must have a signed release of information from the parent/guardian prior to contacting DCBH for an SSA. The POC assigns the SSA to a SSE. The SSE attempts to interview the youth within 24 hours of contact (or prior to their first court appearance). SSEs will work with detention staff to make sure an interview room is available for a minimum of two hours. Detention staff are responsible for informing the parent/guardian of the interview time and ensuring the custodial parent/legal guardian will be present for the assessment.

Detention staff provides the parent/guardian with the Application for Services and Consent for Treatment information. Detention staff members have copies of required

paperwork, but SSEs also carry copies of necessary forms to the interview. These include the service application, consent for treatment and release of information forms.

Following the assessment at the Juvenile Department, the SSE contacts the assigned Juvenile representative (currently Jen Palmer) to provide a verbal report of the evaluation including concerns regarding whether the youth could be a risk to the community if released.

**Note:** *For youth in custody, the school does not need to perform a risk assessment. However, the SSE will need to obtain a release of information from the youth's school in order to have access to important school documents and history.*

If a crime is committed and the youth is taken to detention but not held, Detention staff will call to inform the SSA POC that a youth has been brought in on a Safe School issue. The assigned SSE will attempt to complete the SSA process within two weeks or before youth's scheduled court date.

**Note:** *If a youth commits a crime on school grounds but is only cited and not transported to detention, the school must conduct a Risk Screening/Assessment and provide a referral to DCBH to in order to initiate the SSA process.*

**Safe School Assessment Process:** Specific assessment procedures, tools and materials are spelled out in the SSA Protocol. Generally, the process has the following components.

**Prior to Initial Interview:** The SSE obtains signed documents from the custodial parent or legal guardian of the youth, consent forms, waiver forms and releases of information to the school, school district, District Attorney (if applicable), and other treatment providers or involved entities.

**Interview(s):** The SSE typically schedules a two-hour block to meet with the family. Assessment interviews may vary in length from one to four hours depending on the dynamics in the family and complexity of the case. The SSE determines whether to interview the child and parents together or separately. On rare occasions, a youth may need to come in twice to complete the assessment if it is difficult to obtain information at the first appointment or the youth is unwilling/unable/unsafe to cooperate. In the event that a youth presents as too unstable to participate in the interview process, the SSE will staff the case with a supervisor or manager to determine next steps and communicate those with the school as indicated.

During the interview the youth and family are oriented to the SSA process and respond to a series of questions based on the "Safety Assessment Worksheet for Youth: Comprehensive Evaluation" developed by the Oregon Forensic Institute.

**Note:** *When the initial interview is completed, the SSE contacts the school to alert them to schedule a Risk Level & Mitigation Consult. This process varies in different schools. In some cases the SSE may consult solely with the school administrator/psychologist that made the referral. In others, the school may have identified a team to review these kinds of assessments. Wherever possible, review with a team is a best practice. The SSE should determine the members of the team to ensure that Releases of Information cover all participants.*

**Collecting Additional Information:** Additional information is collected through collateral contact interviews and a thorough review of relevant documents. These may include contacts with or review of documents from mental health providers, school staff, DHS caseworkers, juvenile probation officers, non-custodial parents, family members, attorneys for the youth, and others as appropriate.

**Note:** *ROIs are required for all collateral sources and must be obtained in advance of contacting a collateral source.*

**Staffing:** The SSE staffs their findings with an appropriate clinical supervisor prior to participating in Risk Level & Mitigation Consultation steps.

**Risk Level & Mitigation Consult with School/Referring Entity:** Once the evaluation steps are completed, the SSE participates in a consultation conversation with either the individual that referred the case or a team convened by the school. The purpose of the consultation is to convey information about the overall level of risk and to have a collaborative discussion of recommendations and plans for mitigating risk.

**Written Report:** The SSA report summarizes the assessment steps, the findings in each domain of risk, and provides recommendations for the family and school that incorporate, to the degree appropriate, any risk mitigation activities identified during the consultation. The school receives a copy of the report and the SSA case is closed.

## **Safe School Assessment Timeline (Approximate):**

- Day 1                    **Referral:** SSA Point of Contact receives referral packet and reviews for sufficiency within 24 working hours. Assigns assessment to staff.
- Day 1 to 3             **Contact and Scheduling:** Contact with family attempted and interview scheduled within next 5 working days. If contact unsuccessful, school receives information about attempts to contact.
- Day 1 to 5             **Preparation:** SSE may contact school and other collateral sources prior to interview if desired to collect information about incidents, history, concerns, etc.
- Day 5 to 7             **Interview:** Youth and parents interviewed and assessment tools applied. School notified interview complete and consult with service team scheduled by school. "Team" may be comprised of school staff, other mental health providers, other agency providers connected to the youth, and the parent/guardian(s) when appropriate.
- Day 7 to 10           **Consultation & Planning:** Risk Assessment and Mitigation Consultation Meeting convenes. SSA staff attends in person or by phone. SSA staff shares assessment finding to date, facilitates risk mitigation planning and captures details of plan for written report.
- Day 14 to 21         **Completion of Assessment:** Written report is completed, reviewed and signed by clinical supervisor, and provided to the school. SSA staff is available for follow up clarification of any written recommendations. File is "closed." Written report is recorded in SSA data file.