

Suicide Postvention Key Elements

One of the more challenging types of crisis response is a death by suicide. Given the intensity of the crisis and the risk of contagion, suicide postvention requires careful planning and preparation. For the crisis responder, there are 4 goals of postvention: 1) Assist survivors in the grief process, 2) Identify and refer individuals who may be at risk following the suicide, 3) Provide accurate information while minimizing the risk of suicide contagion, and 4) Implement ongoing prevention efforts. This infographic provides an overview of the key elements involved with suicide postvention. All crisis team members must seek out training and information related to best practice approaches to suicide postvention.

Planning and Preparation



- This upfront work must focus on establishing the processes, procedures, and training necessary to establish your team's readiness to respond to a death by suicide.
- Training: Team members should be trained in conducting suicide assessments and best practice crisis interventions (i.e., PREPaRE).
- Develop an Incident Action Plan
- Establish collaborative relationships with community partners to assist with crisis response and with assisting students who are struggling with suicidal ideation (i.e., law enforcement, community mental health, local medical community, and private practitioners)
- Establish your bank of informational documents to include the warning signs of suicide and local emergency numbers as well as hotlines and text numbers.
- Download the After a Suicide: A Toolkit for School, 2nd Edition

Verifying Information and Communication



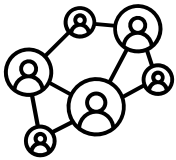
- Confirm the cause of death: confirmed suicide or unconfirmed cause of death.
 - If confirmed suicide, then communication can proceed indicating death was by suicide.
 - If unconfirmed, then indicate that the cause of death is still being investigated and information passed on once it is verified and received.
- Must be ready to address rumors and posts on social media – remind students and adults the harm rumors can be to those who are grieving.
- Notify school staff members – current and former teachers of the deceased, other staff who had connections with the deceased, and others who work with suicide survivors.
- If able, when sharing information with students:
 - Delivering information during school wide assemblies or sharing information of the public announcement (PA) system.
- Communication must promote help seeking behaviors, include a referral number, and information about local crisis intervention services.

Activating the Crisis Team and Response



- Activate the crisis intervention team.
- Evaluate the suicide's impact on the school and determine the level of crisis response.
 - Identify students and staff significantly impacted by the suicide.
- Contact the family of the suicide victim and of sympathy & support, identify other who may need assistance, discuss the postvention response, and discuss family wishes as it relates to how and what information will be shared and funeral services.
- Conduct faculty planning session to share information about the death and discuss plan for the day.
- After evaluating the impact deliver crisis intervention to those demonstrating need

Social Media and Messaging



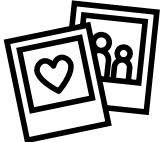
- Establish a social media manager to assist the public information officer.
- Utilize students as "cultural brokers" to help staff understand social media use of youth.
- Train students to be gate keepers by teaching them to identify what suicide risk looks like on social media and how to tell a trusted adult.
- Designate staff to monitor social media and to promote safe messages.
- Educate families about social media and have them get involved with their child's social media.

The Media



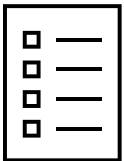
- Must not romanticize or sensationalize the death.
- Avoid photos of location, method of death.
- Avoid over-simplifying suicide, it is never caused by a single incident.
- Must include information about community resources, hotlines, and text.

Memorials



- Must develop a memorial policy, at minimal memorial guidelines.
- All deaths should be treated the same.
- Encourage living memorials, discourage permanent memorials.
- Avoid romanticizing and glorifying the death.

Documentation and After Incident Review



- Plan actions and identify students for follow up.
- Review and evaluate the response.
- Self-care opportunity for your team
 - Check in with each other and offer support if needed

Care for the Caregiver



- Utilize your self-care plan – physical, emotional, and social.
- Care for your team

Additional Considerations



- Response must consider immediate, short term, and long-term needs and monitoring.
- Consider who is a suicide survivor – do not forget other staff who may have connections with the deceased or who may have experienced a death by suicide in their lives.

Resources



After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools, Second Edition
<https://bit.ly/3zm6Zcy>

NASP School Climate, Safety, and Crisis Resources

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis>

Youth Suicide Warning Signs

<https://www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org/>

References

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, & Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2018). *After a suicide: A toolkit for schools (2nd ed.)*. Waltham, MA: Education Development Center.
- Brock, S. E. & Fernandez, B.S. (2019). *School Suicide Postvention*. Documented session presented at the National Association of School Psychologists 2019 Annual Convention, Atlanta, GA.
- Brock, S. E., Nickerson, A. B., Louvar Reeves, M. A., Conolly, C. N., Jimerson, S. R., Pesce, R. C., & Lazzaro, B. R. (2016). *School Crisis Prevention and Intervention: The PREPaRE Model*. Bethesda: National Association of School Psychologists.

This handout is aligned with the NASP PREPaRE School Safety and Crisis Curriculum. Author: Benjamin S. Fernandez. MS Ed., School Psychologist, School Safety Crisis Response Committee and NASP PREPaRE Master Trainer