

Multi-Tiered School Suicide Prevention

6 Key Suicide Prevention Components

School suicide prevention is most effective when it brings together a variety of prevention strategies that ensure no youth falls through cracks in the system.

Taking steps to prepare your whole school community to prevent and respond to suicide can save lives. A multi-faceted approach that trains school staff in essential suicide prevention knowledge, develops supportive school climates, and puts in place policies that ensure youth are effectively supported can prevent suicide. Learn about each of our six key components for multi-tiered school suicide prevention below.



6 Key Components

Written Protocols for Helping Students at Risk for Suicide

A system-wide approach to school suicide prevention will include written protocols for supporting youth who are at risk for suicide (suicide risk response protocols). Schools should have protocols in place to guide interventions and follow-up when a young person is in crisis. Schools should invest in protocols staff can follow when a student screens positive for suicide risk or a student expresses suicide intent. These protocols should include roles and responsibilities of key school staff, chains of communication, linkages with community mental health services, and re-entry guidance for youth who return to school after a crisis.^{1,3}

Written Protocols for Response After a Suicide

When a death by suicide occurs, some youth within the school system may be at increased risk for suicide. The school's response after a suicide (also called 'postvention') can mitigate this increased suicide risk while acknowledging the community's need to grieve the loss. Schools should create protocols before a death by suicide occurs, including information on communicating with stakeholders and the news media, mobilizing a response team, providing youth and staff with appropriate support services, and incorporating safety considerations around memorials and social media.^{2,3}

Identification of Youth Who Are At Risk for Suicide

Several evidence-based strategies can be used to identify youth who are at risk of suicide, ranging from screening tools and suicide risk assessments to trainings that educate teachers, staff, and youth about the warning signs of suicide and how to support students at risk. It is essential to choose trainings and strategies that are a good fit for your school, and that your protocols are included in the training to ensure the school is prepared to support youth identified as at risk for suicide. All school staff, students, and the broader school community should engage in trainings and be familiar with protocols for supporting youth identified as at risk.^{3,4,5,6,7}

Promoting Protective Factors

School systems that support multi-tiered development of positive mental health, social emotional skills, and trusted relationships with adults are also developing key elements of a system-wide approach to suicide prevention. Education systems and community climates that promote positive youth development are increasing protective factors against suicide. Schools and staff can embrace trauma-informed practices and policies which help to establish a safe and supportive school environment for young people.^{4,8,9}

Engaging Key School Stakeholders

Every member of a school community - teachers, administrators, families/guardians, counselors, and others -- has a role to play in school suicide prevention. Schools are best positioned to provide these efforts in suicide prevention when the whole community is engaged. In addition to any trainings around identifying and supporting youth who are at risk for suicide, these stakeholders require a clear understanding of school suicide prevention protocols and resources.^{3,4,5,10}

Developing Community Partnerships

To provide effective prevention, schools must develop and maintain strong relationships with community stakeholders, including mental health providers, healthcare agencies, crisis centers, and community suicide prevention advocates. These partnerships provide access to local resources and area experts who can support protocol development and implementation of prevention strategies. These partners can also provide crisis or counseling services when a young person is struggling or after a suicide death.^{3,4}

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