

K–12 Suicide Prevention Toolkit

Getting Started Guide

About This Guide

School teams vary widely in their current capacity, staffing, partnerships, and experience with youth suicide prevention. Some schools are just beginning to build shared understanding and staff readiness. Others already have strong practices in place and are looking to strengthen coordination, improve consistency, or sustain their efforts over time.

This guide is designed to help school teams decide where to begin in EDC’s K–12 Suicide Prevention Toolkit based on their current needs and capacity. It is not a formal assessment. Instead, it offers short reflection statements that can help teams identify the sections, tools, and resources that may be most useful for their first or next steps in implementing comprehensive suicide prevention efforts within their school systems.

Discuss and complete the questions in this guide with administrators, school mental health staff, student support staff, educators, nurses, school safety staff, district leaders, youth advisors, family partners, and/or community partners who help shape suicide prevention efforts in your school or district.

Need more tailored support?

EDC’s Education and Wellbeing team provides consultation and technical assistance to help school teams integrate suicide prevention into policies, practices, partnerships, and everyday youth support efforts.

Visit us at go.edc.org/MTSP to learn more.

GUIDE COMPONENTS

- [Readiness Snapshot](#)
- [Quick Reference: Where Should Our School District Start?](#)

Readiness Snapshot

Read the descriptions of the three readiness levels below: Foundational, Developing, and Sustained/Advanced. You may find that your district fits more than one level. Choose the level that best reflects your overall current capacity and staff knowledge of suicide prevention concepts.

Then, use the Quick reference table on the next page to connect your readiness level to practical starting points. Each row on the table is color coordinated to match the readiness level it most closely supports: blue for Foundational, gold for Developing, and purple for Sustained/Advanced.

Foundational Readiness

Your school team is building a basic shared understanding, staff awareness, and early infrastructure for effective suicide prevention in your school community.

Developing Readiness

Your school team has some suicide prevention practices in place, but policies need to be clarified, strengthened, formalized, or better coordinated across staff, district systems, and external partnerships.

Sustained/Advanced Readiness

Your school team already has strong practices and policies in place to identify and support youth at risk for suicide and provide a timely response to suicide deaths. You want to improve the quality of your efforts, strengthen sustainability, and deepen impact.

Use the [MTSP Environmental Assessment](#) to guide your district understanding of your current readiness level to implement different components of multi-tiered school suicide prevention.

Quick Reference: Where Should Our School District Start?

There is no single correct place to begin your efforts. The best starting point is the section of the toolkit that helps your school team take the next practical step toward safer, more coordinated, and more supportive practices for youth in your school community.

The chart below offers a quick reference for where your school team might get started. Read each statement in the first column and identify the ones that most closely match your school team's current needs. You can return to this table and other sections of the toolkit as your needs change.

If your school team is not yet sure what its current needs are or does not yet have enough context about its existing suicide prevention efforts to choose a starting point, consider first completing EDC's freely available [MTSP Environmental Assessment](#) and then return to this table to identify the sections of the toolkit that best match your results and priorities.

If this statement sounds like your school team...	Start here in the Toolkit	Focus on
My school team needs to develop a shared foundation and common language around suicide prevention, identification, response, and recovery after a suicide death.	- Section 1: What is Effective School-Based Suicide Prevention? - Section 5: Written Policies and Protocols for After a Suicide Death - Section 7: Promoting Protective Factors - Resource 5: Multi-Tiered Suicide Prevention for Schools Key Components - Resource 1: Risk and Protective Factors Handout - Resource 2: Warning Signs of Suicide Flyer - Resource 17: Risk and Protective Factor Impact Planning Model	- Building a shared understanding of effective school-based suicide prevention and how suicide prevention aligns with Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) - Staff education on risk and protective factors and warning signs for suicide - Core components to get in place to support your school community in safely grieving its loss

My school team needs a clearer understanding of which school staff, students, families, and community members should be involved in suicide prevention and what role each group should play.	■ Section 2: Engaging School Community Members ■ Section 3: Community Partnerships ■ Section 4: Written Policies and Protocols for Identifying and Supporting Students at Risk	■ Clarifying staff roles in your policy and protocols for identifying and responding to youth at risk ■ Engaging student, families, and community members to identify their needs and capacity to support
My school team needs to strengthen universal prevention by building protective factors, improving school climate, and supporting student wellbeing before a crisis occurs.	■ Section 7: Promoting Protective Factors ■ Resource 1: Risk and Protective Factors Handout ■ Resource 17: Risk and Protective Factor Impact Planning Model	■ Building a shared understanding of the impact of protective factors and environments on reducing suicide risk ■ Promoting connectedness, belonging, supportive environments, and other protective conditions that reduce suicide risk across your school community

My school team needs stronger community partnerships and clearer referral pathways so students and families can connect to support quickly and appropriately.	■ Section 3: Community Partnerships ■ Section 4: Policies and Protocols for Identifying and Supporting Students at Risk ■ Section 5: Written Policies and Protocols for After a Suicide Death ■ Resource 7: Sample MOUs	■ Mapping local resources and identifying key community partners (e.g., Asset Mapping) ■ Formalizing partnerships as needed ■ Outlining referral pathways and documentation process in protocols
My school team needs written policies and protocols for what school staff should do when a student may be at risk for suicide.	■ Section 4: Policies and Protocols for Identifying and Supporting Students at Risk ■ Resource 9: Tools for Identification, Response, and Postvention Policies ■ Resource 10: Risk Response Quick Reference Guide ■ Resource 11: Model Agenda Protocol Development	■ Developing or revising written policies for suicide identification and response ■ Clarifying staff actions based on role in written policies ■ Creating or revising district or school-specific protocols

My school team needs practical guidance for what to do when a student shows warning signs, discloses suicide risk, returns to school after a crisis, or needs ongoing support.	▪ Section 6: Identification and Support of Youth Who Are at Risk for Suicide ▪ Resource 10: Risk Response Quick Reference Guide ▪ Resource 2: Warning Signs of Suicide Flyer ▪ Resource 3: Recommended Suicide Prevention Trainings & Programs ▪ Resource 14: Screening and Assessment Considerations ▪ Resource 15: Safety Planning with Elementary Youth Primer ▪ Resource 16: Lethal Means in Suicide Prevention	▪ Identifying staff training needed based on differing roles to effectively respond to suicide risk ▪ Strengthening procedures that outline day-to-day response, screening and assessment decision-making, safety planning, follow-up, and reentry support
My school team needs guidance for responding after a suicide death in ways that support healing and reduce the risk of contagion.	▪ Section 5: Written Policies and Protocols for After a Suicide Death ▪ Resource 9: Tools for Identification and Response Policies ▪ Resource 11: Model Agenda Protocol Development ▪ Resource 13: National Grief Support Resources	▪ Developing or revising written policies and protocols for after a suicide death ▪ Effectively supporting youth, staff, and families as they process their grief with appropriate tiered supports based on their levels of need ▪ Ensuring staff are aware of safe messaging guidance ▪ Identifying grief support available for impacted students, staff, and families

My school team needs help deciding what suicide prevention training different staff roles should receive and how to build professional development over time.	■ Section 2: Engaging Key School Community Members ■ Section 9: Sustaining Multi-Tiered School Suicide Prevention ■ Resource 3: Recommended Suicide Prevention Trainings & Programs	■ Identifying which staff need foundational versus more specialized training ■ Establishing process for regularly training staff and sequencing learning over time
My school team needs to collect better data, monitor implementation, and use information to improve our suicide prevention efforts over time.	■ Section 8: Assessing and Monitoring Districtwide Suicide Prevention Efforts ■ Section 9: Sustaining Multi-Tiered School Suicide Prevention ■ Resource 17: Risk and Protective Factor Impact Planning Model ■ Resource 18: Suicide Prevention Data Sources ■ Resource 19: Data Tracking List	■ Identifying data sources based on your desired suicide prevention outcomes ■ Establishing feasible processes that support data tracking and continuous quality improvement ■ Using data to guide decision-making and update policies/procedures as needed
My school team needs to make its suicide prevention work more sustainable over time through leadership, planning, staffing, and funding.	■ Section 2: Engaging School Community Members ■ Section 9: Sustaining Multi-Tiered School Suicide Prevention ■ Resource 20: Sustainability Handout	■ Incorporating specific suicide prevention responsibilities into staff roles ■ Embedding suicide prevention into routine school structures and practices ■ Establishing processes for long-term planning and leadership support for suicide prevention activities