

# Best Practices to Promote a Safe School Climate

School Resources to Support Military-Connected Students is a project by the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness an applied research center at The Pennsylvania State University and is funded by the Department of Defense Education Activity Grant number HE1254-19-0009.

For more information on these resources click on the links below:

<https://schoolresources.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/>

<https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/>

<https://www.psu.edu/>

<https://dodeagrants.org/>

Our goal is to provide school personnel with free, evidence-based resources to support military-connected students. This training is part of our Suicide Prevention series.

## Important Reminders

Before starting this training, please read the items below carefully and check the box in front of each item to indicate your understanding.

- The following content discusses suicide and may be upsetting to some individuals.
- Follow all district, local, state, and federal regulations. This training is **NOT** intended to replace or override existing procedures or laws.

## Introduction

### What is the purpose of this training?

Positive climate and safe interactions allow for smoother transitions to classroom activities, facilitate academic readiness, and decrease negative peer interactions that could lead to safety violations (e.g., targeted physical aggression, bullying, or harassment related to gender, grade level, race or ethnicity, student group membership, or other characteristics). Students who are targets of aggression often feel isolated and disconnected from their peers. The CDC identified one major goal in reducing and preventing suicidal behavior: promoting connectedness between individuals, families, communities, and institutions. The idea behind connectedness is to foster environments of positive social support. Behavioral structure, effective supervision, and respectful student-school personnel interactions are key to ensuring that schools foster connectedness and provide a safe environment. Therefore, ensuring school safety takes a school-wide effort.

## Objective

The goal of this training is to increase your confidence in your ability to:

**Identify and implement best practices to provide a safe school climate.**

*How confident are you in your ability to do this now?*

Please click on the link below to submit your response.

[https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6Gp3iBHlvhcTluR?modulenumber=suicide07](https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6Gp3iBHlvhcTluR?modulenumber=suicide07)

Verify that you have completed each of the tasks below before proceeding with this training.

Answered the survey question in the link.

Clicked the arrow underneath the survey question to submit your response.

Recorded the ID number provided after you submitted your answer to the survey question. You will need it to complete the survey at the end of this training.

## Research

### What is most important for me to know?

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) provided guidance on the development of a school-wide behavioral framework. A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools specifically outlines policy recommendations and best practices for fostering a safe school environment. In terms of policy changes that may promote safety, NASP recommends that schools be proactive, flexible, and organized. It is important for schools to consider their financial situation and to be flexible in both providing and receiving funds for programming and resources. Additionally, schools should be aware of the unique services that their staff members can provide—especially during times of crisis. For example, if a few staff members have additional training in crisis response or as EMTs, identification of those individuals in advance could greatly support crisis response planning.

It would also be helpful for schools to form partnerships with centers in the community to collaborate and prepare for any potential crises. This may involve providing incentives for encouraging collaboration within and between agencies. In fact, integrating services through collaboration with stakeholders is one of the best practices for creating safe and successful schools.

It is valuable for schools to have strong connections with mental health services in the local area, as it is critical that physical safety is balanced with psychological safety. This cannot be accomplished through community connections alone but must also include the school system itself. Schools may implement a multi-tiered system of support to ensure that all students are meeting behavioral safety expectations and receiving targeted and intensive intervention when necessary. Schools should also employ effective positive school discipline. Moreover, these best practices and policy changes can help to ensure that students are safe and successful in the school environment.

Given the potential threats to students and school personnel, it is essential to develop a safe and positive school climate. When students and school personnel build a culture of connectedness and trust, students who are at risk for harming themselves or others, and students who may observe potential warning signs of threats, are more likely to seek help (Lieberman, Poland, & Cowan, 2006).

Therefore, efforts to increase suicide and violence prevention must be focused at the universal level and target all students.

A number of cultural issues can influence the appropriateness and effectiveness of strategies and programs. These cultural issues may include school-community environment, the degree to which service(s) students' families are connected, the prevalence of students who speak English as a second language, the socio-economic status of the students, and other factors. These factors may influence the language or vocabulary you use, the approach you take to implementing school safety practices, and the way in which you engage with both parents and community members.

## Application

### How might this look in my professional practice?

Remember that the goal of this training is to increase your confidence in your ability to:

#### **Identify and implement best practices to provide a safe school climate.**

In the activity below, you will see policy recommendations to support effective school safety and best practices for creating safe and successful schools from the National Association of School Psychologists (Cowan et. al., 2013). Make note of the recommendations and best practices that you feel your school should prioritize for improvement.

- “Allow for blended, flexible use of funding streams in education and mental health services”

- “Improve staffing ratios to allow for the delivery of a full range of services and effective school–community partnerships”
- “Develop evidence-based standards for district-level policies to promote effective school discipline and positive behavior”
- “Fund continuous and sustainable crisis and emergency preparedness, response, and recovery planning and training that uses evidence-based models”
- “Provide incentives for intra- and interagency collaboration”
- “Support multitiered systems of support (MTSS)”
- “Fully integrate learning supports (e.g., behavioral, mental health, and social services), instruction, and school management within a comprehensive, cohesive approach that facilitates multidisciplinary collaboration.”
- “Implement multitiered systems of support (MTSS) that encompass prevention, wellness promotion, and interventions that increase with intensity based on student need, and that promote close school–community collaboration.”
- “Improve access to school-based mental health supports by ensuring adequate staffing levels in terms of school-employed mental health professionals who are trained to infuse prevention and intervention services into the learning process and to help integrate services provided through school–community partnerships into existing school initiatives.”
- “Integrate ongoing positive climate and safety efforts with crisis prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery to ensure that crisis training and plans: (a) are relevant to the school context, (b) reinforce learning, (c) make maximum use of existing staff resources, (d) facilitate effective threat assessment, and (e) are consistently reviewed and practiced.”
- “Balance physical and psychological safety to avoid overly restrictive measures (e.g., armed guards and metal detectors) that can undermine the learning environment and instead combine reasonable physical security measures (e.g., locked doors and monitored public spaces) with efforts to enhance school climate, build trusting relationships, and encourage students and adults to report potential threats. If a school determines the need for armed security, properly trained school resource officers (SROs) are the only school personnel of any type who should be armed.”
- “Employ effective, positive school discipline that: (a) functions in concert with efforts to address school safety and climate; (b) is not simply punitive (e.g., zero tolerance); (c) is clear, consistent, and equitable; and (d) reinforces positive behaviors. Using security personnel or SROs primarily as a substitute for effective discipline policies does not contribute to school safety and can perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline.”
- “Consider the context of each school and district and provide services that are most needed, appropriate, and culturally sensitive to a school’s unique student populations and learning communities.”
- “Acknowledge that sustainable and effective change takes time, and that individual schools will vary in their readiness to implement improvements and should be afforded the time and resources to sustain change over time.”

## Implementation

### How can I effectively implement this content in my professional practice?

Please review the considerations below regarding potential implementation strategies, barriers to implementation, and collaboration strategies related to this content. This will help you coordinate the next steps as you begin to incorporate the information presented in this training into your professional practice.

**This information can also be found on a handout that you will be able to download at the end of this training.**

## Implementation Strategies

- Complete any and all training necessary when implementing a new program.
- Ensure and engage support from all stakeholders including parents, administrators, teachers, and community members.

## Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

- Engage in ongoing communication with stakeholders about what your programming entails, why it is important, and what they can do to help support your efforts.
- Consider your timeline carefully for implementation of any new programming. For example, if your district plans on rolling out a new math curriculum in a given school year, it may not be an ideal time to add additional programming. Timing for implementation can help make your efforts more effective.

## Collaboration Strategies

- Engage parents and community members to rally ongoing support.
- Regularly consult with and coach teachers and other staff when implementing new programming.

## Resources

### Are there any resources available to help me implement this content?

Click on the link below to download a tool that you can use to implement this content in your professional practice.

<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:960ddb8e-1da6-41f2-81e3-bd2bafca4c06>

## Feedback

### How can I help improve this training?

The objective of this training was to increase your confidence in your ability to:

#### **Identify and implement best practices to provide a safe school climate.**

Answer the questions in the link below to let us know how well this training increased your confidence in your ability to accomplish this objective. Once you have answered all of the questions, click the blue arrow button underneath to submit your responses.

[https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_d771mLr9ZgW3kyx?modulenumber=suicide07](https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d771mLr9ZgW3kyx?modulenumber=suicide07)

Verify that you have completed each of the tasks below.

Answered all of the survey questions above. You may have to scroll to see all of the questions.  
Clicked the arrow underneath the last survey question to submit your responses.

## Additional Readings

### Where can I learn more about this content?

The following resources were used to create this training. If you would like more information about the information presented in this training, we encourage you to start here.

Cowan, K. C., Vaillancourt, K., Rossen, E., & Pollitt, K. (2013). A framework for safe and successful schools [Brief]. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Lieberman, R., Poland, S., Cowan, K. (2006). Suicide Prevention in the Schools. *Principal Leadership*, 7(2), 11-15.

## Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this training. If you have any questions or comments, please email us at [schoolresources@psu.edu](mailto:schoolresources@psu.edu).

### **Proceed to the next training**

Click on the link below to move on to the next training titled *Programs to Improve School Climate*. In this training, you will increase your confidence in your ability to identify evidence-based programs to improve school climate.

[https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide\\_08-programs-to-improve-school-climate\\_201022/](https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide_08-programs-to-improve-school-climate_201022/)

### **Return to the module directory**

Click on the link below to return to the module directory.

<https://schoolresources.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/modules/>