

Memorials, Anniversaries, and the New Normal

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 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

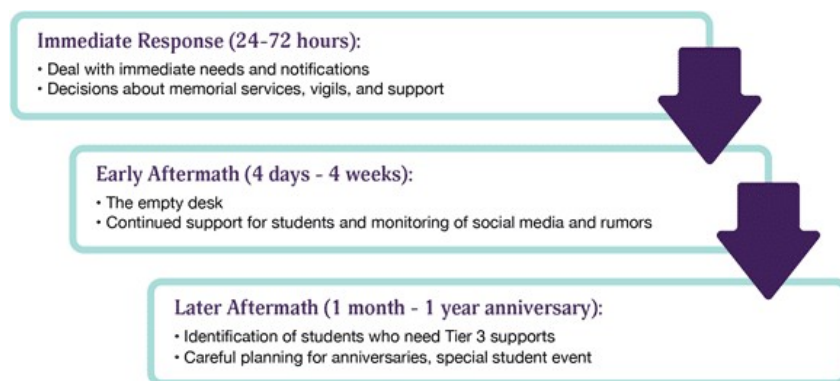
Before starting this training, please read the items below carefully and check the box in front of each item to indicate your understanding.

- 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?

When planning for the aftermath of a crisis such as a death by suicide, efforts typically focus on being prepared for the first 24-72 hours, with less emphasis on the weeks and months to come. See below for a conceptualization of the aftermath and its related tasks and grief processes.



Objective

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

Identify and implement best practices related to memorialization in the aftermath of a student suicide.

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=suicide37

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?

Immediate Response

Many students and school professionals will probably want to participate in funerals, memorials, or other events to remember the deceased and seek comfort. It is important to participate in these events to the degree that they are meaningful and comforting. Participation should be encouraged and supported, but, when considering memorialization efforts for a death by suicide, there are some special considerations. It is important to consider the pain and shock being experienced by family and loved ones, while minimizing the risk for potential suicide contagion. This can be a delicate balance. According to the Crisis Plan, it is very important not to glamorize suicide in any way. The following are recommendations by the American Association of Suicidology (AAS, 1998).

- Do not dismiss school or encourage funeral attendance during school hours.
- Do not dedicate a permanent memorial to the deceased.
- Do not hold a large assembly to notify the school community members of the suicide.
- Do not announce the death over the public announcement system or conduct a moment of silence.
- Avoid school sanctioned tributes, memorials, or events.
- If students or staff wish to remember the deceased in a special way they should be encouraged to do so in a quiet way that celebrates life such as collecting donations for a suicide prevention program, purchasing videos on suicide prevention and/or positive problem solving, or starting a scholarship.
- Try to maintain a hardline policy on memorializing suicide victims. If exceptions are made, do so only after very careful thought and planning. Always involve parents and/or family members when planning any kind of memorializing activities.

Early Aftermath

It is important neither to “rush” the process of erasing memories of students who died by suicide, nor to glamorize the death or the decedent. It is recommended that the student’s belongings, desk, locker, and other personal items remain in the school (unless requested specifically otherwise by the family of the deceased) until after the memorial service or funeral. This is usually about 5-7 days after the death. It may be helpful for students to contribute cards that can be included with the return of belongings. Sometimes, as a way to participate in the process of saying goodbye and continuing with grief work, students themselves may help to gather the belongings. In addition, during this time, be sure to incorporate follow-ups with individual students of concern.

Late Aftermath

Generally, and depending on a number of factors, it is agreed that grieving can last from one to two years. Anniversaries, proms, graduations, birthdays, and other poignant events may be additional triggers for grief following this kind of loss.

Students and school professionals will need to balance sensitivity and help to make healthy decisions about how to manage anniversary and calendar effects. They must be designed to remember the deceased without glamorizing them in the process. Positive ways to memorialize might include fundraisers for suicide prevention organizations, a favorite cause or charity of the deceased, or organizing community events focused on prevention efforts (e.g., 5K run/walks, dance marathons, etc.). Permanent memorials such as planted trees with placards, benches, or other permanent products are NOT recommended. Your crisis team should be aware of upcoming anniversaries and, as needed, be prepared to monitor students at risk. Individual monitoring may include a check-in-check-out procedure in the days surrounding anniversaries or other significant dates. Identified personnel may find it useful to speak with teachers or parents about how students have been doing as part of monitoring.

Application

How might this look in my professional practice?

The objective of this training is to:

Identify and implement best practices related to memorialization in the aftermath of a student suicide.

Below is you will see a series of statements related memorialization of the deceased student Indicate whether you agree that the action should be performed by the school or whether you disagree and that the action should NOT be performed by the school.

1. To avoid glamorizing suicide, memorial events should never take place at school.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: b) False

2. It is important to wait until after a funeral to remove student belongings.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: a) True

3. It is okay to plant a tree as a memorial as long as there is no name placard.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: b) False

4. An announcement over the loudspeaker can be appropriate at a large school.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: b) False

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

- As part of planning in your crisis team, procedures can be laid out in advance that can be communicated to the parents/ family, students, and others to avoid confusion or hurt feelings. For instance, if procedures are laid out in advance, if a student or family member suggests a permanent memorial, the issue can be addressed quickly and the crisis team can offer alternative suggestions.

Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

- Ensure that the media liaison identified by your crisis team is prepared with clear and concise messaging to the public to avoid glamorizing the death or decedent.
- Social media posts should be used with caution and the posts of members of the school faculty should also be monitored in case they unintentionally contribute to contagion.

Collaboration Strategies

- Ongoing training and reminders to the school faculty and other stakeholders will assist with appropriate handling of a death by suicide.

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:1474cfb1-6207-4c95-a7cf-f1fd251f0947>

Below you can find other supplemental materials that may be helpful for you in your professional practice.

Sample Memorial Policy

Click the link below to download a sample memorial policy developed by Dr. Terri Erbacher.

<https://erbacherconsulting.com/>

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 related to memorialization in the aftermath of a student suicide.

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?modulenummer=suicide37

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.

American Association of Suicidology. (n.d.). Retrieved October 27, 2020, from <https://suicidology.org/>

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.

Proceed to the next training

Click on the link below to move on to the next training titled *Signs and Symptoms of Burnout*. In this training, you will increase your confidence in your ability to identify signs of professional burnout in yourself and colleagues.

https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide_38-signs-and-symptoms-of-burnout_201022/

Return to the module directory

Click on this button to return to the module directory.

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