

Personal Beliefs Related to Suicide

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?

Student support personnel (i.e., school psychologists, school counselors, and school nurses) in schools must be trained in interviewing at-risk students to assess and determine risk levels. This can be stressful and uncomfortable, especially if self-harm and suicide risk are rare in your building. However, as part of a reflective practice, it is imperative to consider your own biases, discomfort, and need for additional training and practice in advance.

Objective

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

Identify and develop a plan to manage personal biases, discomfort, and need for additional training and practice related to working with students at increased risk of 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=suicide03

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?

We all have personal beliefs about death and suicide as a result of our upbringing, life experiences, and training. However, it is our professional responsibility to identify and manage them.

One strategy for doing so is to engage in practice sessions with other student support personnel in your building on a regular basis to ensure that when you do need to engage in a risk assessment, you are more focused on what the student is saying than on your own skills or feelings. As you practice, keep the following recommendations (Barrett, 1985) in mind.



1. Do not let your own attitudes toward death or suicide interfere with your ability to be reasonably comfortable with the topic.
2. Be careful not to exhibit anxiety or irritation with an individual who is at risk.
3. Be sure to manage your own feelings of insecurity or lack of confidence regarding skills for risk assessment before and after the risk assessment with another student support provider, or with a supervisor.

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 develop a plan to manage personal biases, discomfort, and need for additional training and practice related to working with students at increased risk of suicide.

Below is an activity in which you will be given prompts to help you examine your personal biases, discomfort, and need for additional training or practice related to working with students at increased risk for suicide. Read the statements below, identify any that you believe accurately describe yourself or your beliefs, and click on them to reveal strategies for managing the belief so it does not impact your ability to work with students at risk.

At the conclusion of this training, you will be provided with a tool to help you create a plan to manage any personal biases, discomfort, or misconceptions that you may have.

Myth	Fact
Students who make suicidal statements are not at risk of killing themselves; often, they are just looking for	Whether or not students are “really” planning on killing themselves, a student who is functioning normally is unlikely to make a suicidal statement. All

attention.	students deserve attention, especially students who are making concerning statements.
People who kill themselves are extremely selfish.	While it is normal for people left behind by someone who completes suicide to feel angry, students who are feeling suicidal likely understand that hurting themselves will likely hurt others and that is not their intent. Students who are suicidal need help with problem solving and emotional regulation, not to feel guilty about their potential to hurt others.
If you know a student is religious, a good deterrent strategy might be to remind them of how negatively suicide is viewed in their religion.	For people who are suicidal, shame is likely to already play a big part in their lives. Try to keep religion out of the conversation unless the student mentions it. Students need supported to, not guilted into, making safe decisions.
Students who engage in self injurious behavior are similar to students that make suicidal statements in that they both are thinking about dying.	While self-injury is very concerning and indicates that the student is in need of services like counseling, it does not necessarily indicate suicidal intent. Self-injury is never an appropriate response to stress and should be evaluated, but there are a variety of reasons students might engage in self injury.
Students who threaten self-harm are probably being abused or have uncaring parents and you should always make a mandated report.	Although children who are abused or traumatized are at increased risk of self-harm, a suicidal thought or gesture is not necessarily reason to make a mandated report. If a student discloses that they have been abused or neglected during a suicide risk assessment, then a mandated report must be made.
Girls use less dangerous means for trying to kill themselves. This means that we do not need to be as concerned with girls reporting intent to self-harm.	Although more men and boys die by suicide, attempts made by girls are no less serious. Even overdoses of medication can lead to lifelong health effects. It is important that all student threats of self-harm are taken seriously.
Asking about and talking about suicide is really what is putting these ideas into kids' heads. Everything nowadays is blown out of proportion.	There is no empirical evidence to support that asking students about suicide makes non-suicidal students think of self-harm. Although there can be a contagion effect when a person dies by suicide, this this is not a reason to not assess for suicide, know the warning signs, and create an open environment where students can talk about their problems.

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

- Provide ongoing training regarding the facts, and dispelling myths, about suicide and self-harm behavior.
- Create safe spaces for teachers, student support personnel, administrators, and other staff to discuss suicide prevention.

Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

- Conduct a needs assessment (via interviews or surveys) to better understand the readiness, self-efficacy, and beliefs of school personnel.
- Utilize findings from that needs assessment to create supplemental training and support for school personnel.

Collaboration Strategies

- Create discussion groups for teachers and other school personnel to be able to process their beliefs, concerns, and fears about helping students with suicide and self-harm.
- Be sure that ALL personnel have a clear understanding of how to recognize suicide and self-harm, who to talk to, and how to manage students when they are concerned.

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:027dcdfl-48b6-496e-ab7b-8309befc09f2>

Feedback

How can I help improve this training?

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

Identify and develop a plan to manage personal biases, discomfort, and need for additional training and practice related to working with students at increased risk of suicide.

Answer the questions 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=suicide03

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.

Barrett, T. C. (1989). *Youth in crisis: Seeking solutions to self-destructive behavior*. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

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 *Crisis Management Processes*. In this training, you will increase your confidence in your ability to assist your school's crisis management team in auditing an existing crisis management plan or developing a written crisis management plan to guide school staff in responding to a critical incident or crisis event.

https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide_03-crisis-management-processes_201022/

Return to the module directory

Click on this button to return to the module directory.

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