

Readiness to Respond to a Completed Student 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?

We advocate a suicide prevention model that includes a comprehensive view of creating ongoing conditions that support prevention, early identification, and effective intervention for students at behavioral or emotional risk. The Crisis Response Model similarly emphasizes preparation, but there are other considerations that may be useful in your school.

Objective

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

Evaluate your school's current level of preparedness to respond to a completed 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=suicide04

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 following list of suggestions includes a few additional items related to school climate that may be useful in response to death by suicide, as well as on an ongoing basis. Consider the following recommendations by Erbacher, Singer, & Poland (2015). Some of these ideas represent practical/logistical considerations, and others are more related to communication and community relations.

Communication Preparedness

1. **Telephone and Communication Trees.** Events such as student suicides may happen “after hours,” so it is critical for school personnel to know the home or mobile numbers of staff members, and to notify them using the phone rather than email or text messaging. This allows you to be more sensitive to individual reactions, and help to control for miscommunication and misinformation. Your tree should also include contact information for other mental health professionals from the community who are prepared to assist your school during crisis situations.
2. **Social Media Use.** Schools who have established a social media presence before a crisis occurs may better be able to reach parents and community members in emergencies. Social media policies and protocols should be carefully considered (i.e., these tool(s) should not solely be used to deliver information that is negative or emergency-oriented). It is also a good idea to teach STUDENTS AND STAFF about appropriate and sensitive use of social media.
3. **Media Relations.** Remember that the Crisis Response Plan specifies that the Public Affairs Office (or other designated department or staff) is the ONLY point of contact for media inquiries. Review your Crisis Response Plan and be sure you know who your Media Liaison is, so that media inquiries can be transferred easily.

Logistics and Building Preparation

1. **Meeting Rooms and Safe Spaces.** Designate spaces for counseling students, as well as for unannounced parent pick-ups.
2. **Prepare Go-Kits.** Go-Kits may include backpacks, bins, or other portable cases with emergency supplies for safe rooms. Go-Kits should contain tissues, water, non-perishable snacks, sign-in sheets, and passes for students to return to class. They may include other helpful items such as writing paper, supplies for creating sympathy cards, and paper bags to remedy hyperventilation.

Training and Climate Preparation

1. **School-wide Crisis Preparedness.** Training such as SEAS: Zero Suicide—in combination with Crisis Response training—is critical so that all staff understand their roles in a student suicide situation.
2. **Cultural Diversity and Awareness.** Each school is different in terms of the communities in which they reside and the kinds of families they serve. This affects the values and beliefs of the students, school personnel, and families touched by a student suicide. For this reason, it is important that your school engage in ongoing assessment, training, and discussion about cultural diversity, which should include issues that may distort or impede effective communication, such as diversity of languages, socioeconomic status, smartphone or computer access, and values about grief, death, and suicide.

Application

How might this look in my professional practice?

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

Evaluate your school’s current level of preparedness to respond to a completed student suicide.

Consider your school’s current level of preparation and preparedness. Reflect on the following list of practices.

Telephone and Communication Trees

- School personnel know the home or mobile numbers of staff members.
- Notification system uses the phone rather than email or text messaging.

- Includes contact information for other mental health professionals from the community who are prepared to assist your school during crisis situations.

Social Media Use

- School has carefully considered social media policies and protocols.
- Social media is not solely be used to deliver information that is negative or emergency-oriented.
- Students and staff know about appropriate and sensitive use of social media.

Media Relations

- Public Affairs Office (or other designated department or staff) is the **ONLY** point of contact for media.

Meeting Rooms and Safe Spaces

- School has determined designated spaces for counseling students.
- School has determined designated space for unannounced parent pick-ups.

Prepare Go-Kits

- Go-Kits are assembled using backpacks, bins, or other portable cases with emergency supplies for safe rooms.
- Go-Kits contain tissues, water, non-perishable snacks, sign-in sheets, and passes for students to return to class.
- Careful thought has gone into deciding what other items to include, including writing paper, supplies for creating sympathy cards, and paper bags to remedy hyperventilation.

School-wide Crisis Preparedness

- School staff has been trained in suicide prevention.
- School staff has been trained in crisis response.

Cultural Diversity and Awareness

- School engages in ongoing assessment, training, and discussion about cultural diversity topics, such as diversity of languages, socioeconomic status, smartphone or computer access, and values about grief, death, and suicide.

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

- Crisis team members should be selected and trained regularly.
- Creation of forms, protocols, gathering supplies, and coordinating with stakeholders should be an ongoing process.
- Crisis team members should meet at least quarterly to review procedures, examine ways to improve, and discuss any concerns. The crisis team should also debrief after a crisis to determine if changes to protocol may be helpful.
- Cross-train crisis team members for maximum redundancy in the event of a crisis if a person is on leave, resigns from the district, or is otherwise unable to carry out their responsibilities.

Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

- Regular visibility of the crisis team and their efforts should be shared at faculty and staff meetings by providing updates and reviewing procedures. Knowing the who, what, when, where, and why of the crisis team is important for collaboration and coordination in the event of a suicide.

Collaboration Strategies

- All school personnel should have familiarity with crisis team procedures and know who is the primary point of contact in the event that they are the first person to become aware of a student death by suicide.
- Regular consultation and meetings with community stakeholders and support persons such as clergy, law enforcement, and mental health professionals are important ways to build capacity for additional assistance when needed in the event of a student 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:280d2984-baf7-4935-b196-34e17e199594>

Feedback

How can I help improve this training?

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

Evaluate your school's current level of preparedness to respond to a completed 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?modulenumber=suicide04

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.

Erbacher, T. A., Singer, J. B., & Poland, S. (2015). School-based practice in action. Suicide in schools: A practitioner's guide to multi-level prevention, assessment, intervention, and postvention. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

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 *Legal Issues Related to Student Suicide for Schools*. In this training, you will increase your confidence in your ability to respond appropriately to the possible outcomes on the suicide risk screening tool.

https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide_05-legal-issues-related-to-student-suicide-for-schools_201022/

Return to the module directory

Click on this button to return to the module directory.

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