

Suicide Risk Assessment Best Practices

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 conducting a risk assessment, students at risk should always be under supervision of two adults who maintain a line of sight with the student while keeping an appropriately professional distance. Personnel should utilize the crisis screening tools as directed by school policy and any injuries must be treated, documented, and reported immediately. Student support personnel who are working with students at risk must be prepared to communicate effectively with students while being prepared to respond immediately to any increases in threat level or aggression.

Objective

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

Identify and implement best practices for conducting suicide risk assessments.

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=suicide12

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 information provides more detail on monitoring a student at risk for suicide according to best practices.

Step 1

The student is never left unattended.

- In order to maintain a safe environment for the student, as well as the school personnel, a minimum of two staff members should be present at all times.
- Do not dismiss any threat of self-harm, violence, and/or harm to others—even for those students who do not appear to pose an imminent danger to themselves or others.
- When suicidal ideation emerges during the course of a counseling session, continue the session without disruption until a safety plan is established. The safety plan should include completion of the screening, and involvement of other staff members as needed.

Step 2

Maintain line- of- sight with the student and keep an appropriate professional distance as the situation warrants.

Maintain a relaxed, non-threatening environment and tone.

- Avoid aggressive body movements.
- Avoid staring at or physically crowding the student.
- Never allow a student to be between yourself and a door whenever possible.
- Encourage “psychic space” by keeping verbal behavior even and calm.

Step 3

Ask open-ended questions.

- Learn to be comfortable with silence to increase a student’s opportunity to respond or elaborate.
- Avoid verbally dominating the interview.

Step 4

Do not negotiate with the student but be honest about your desire to help the student.

Example responses:

- Bad example (coercive and inappropriate): “I’m sorry that you feel this way, but I don’t have a choice but to call your parents. It will be fine.”
- Good example (demonstrates message of caring): “I know it must be hard to talk about this and calling your parents may seem scary, but my most important job is keeping you safe. I’ll walk you through every step.”

Step 5

If at any time, the safety of the student or staff becomes a clear concern, then take appropriate steps.

For example, separate the student from backpack/purse belongings and have them empty their pockets to avoid the possibility of the student producing a weapon and harming themselves or others.

Example statements:

- “I don’t want to invade your privacy, but I’m concerned that you may hurt yourself. I am going to keep your backpack here on my desk where you can still see it. If you want something out of it, let’s get it together just so that I know you’re safe.”
- “Do you have anything in your pockets or backpack that you may use to harm yourself? Can we look together?”

Application

How might this look in my professional practice?

The objective of this training is to:

Identify and implement best practices for conducting suicide risk assessments.

Below is you will see a series of statements related to conducting risk assessments. Identify the statements as true or false.

1. It is okay for an at-risk student to be left unsupervised, briefly, when a peer is in the room with them.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: b) False

2. "Why was that so hard?" is an example of an open question because the student could say anything.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: b) False

3. It's important to stay calm, even if a student is saying intense or scary things.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: a) True

4. It is illegal for school personnel to ask a student to empty his or her pockets in order to help keep them safe; only law enforcement can do this.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: b) False

5. Even if a student's behavior is not life-threatening, like in the case of minor self-injury, parents still need to be contacted.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: a) True

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

- Educate all front office staff, teachers, school resource officers, and others regarding safety procedures.
- Role play safety procedures on a regular basis in order to ensure understanding.

Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

- Speak openly with school personnel about their fears, concerns, or confusion about how to engage with students at risk.
- Ensure that all school personnel have information ready in the event of a crisis. One such strategy is including the crisis procedures on a card that attaches to their ID badge lanyard.

Collaboration Strategies

- Continue to engage in regular conversation before, during, and after any crisis. Those involved should have a safe space to talk about what they anticipate, what is presently occurring, and what happened (and what could be done differently).
- Be sure to offer access to community resources and employee assistance programs for faculty and staff in the event that they are experiencing difficulty after a crisis.

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:50143cc2-a177-4774-9846-9f060fd3372d>

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 for conducting suicide risk assessments.

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=suicide12

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 *Reflective Listening in Times of Crisis*. In this training, you will increase your confidence in your ability to effectively utilize motivational interviewing techniques with students in times of crisis.

https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide_13-reflective-listening-in-times-of-crisis_201022/

Return to the module directory

Click on this button to return to the module directory.

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