

## Suicide Prevention Training Priority Topics Guidelines

The following content topics are consistent with best practice training guidelines in youth suicide prevention. These topics are designed to focus trainings with school personnel. It is not expected that any trainer would be able to cover all of the topics sufficiently within a 1-2 hour training window. Thus, this guideline is simply to serve as a resource for developing content specific to an individual school district's needs. Trainers may combine topics to build a customized training length.

Each topic has a rationale explaining the value of including the content. Additionally, and importantly, each topic also includes a list of resources that have the best, most accurate information about that content. In most cases, these are the best practices resources in the field. Please do not deviate from these resources, as it is important to have a standard set of training material that is consistent with the most current information available from experts in youth suicide prevention. This resource document will be updated periodically when new information is available and deemed a best practice resource.

Finally, trainers are encouraged to include case scenarios whenever possible in trainings. Case scenarios allow educators to examine the application of new skills and techniques in practical ways. Case scenarios may include examples provided by the trainer that demonstrate any of the other content above and how it is resolved or they may include case scenarios provided by the trainer where the educators then discuss how to resolve the cases and share their responses in small groups or with the larger group.

### Training Topics

#### **Topic 1:** Suicide Prevention 101 and Debunking Myths

**Rationale:** Unfortunately, some educators are more familiar with myths about suicide than actual facts and data. It is important to help debunk myths about suicide, so that educators can better understand their role, their response, and their impact. But how myths are debunked is critically important. There are new data suggesting that focusing on myths may be counterproductive. Trainings that cover this area should focus almost exclusively on the accurate information and not attend to the myth much at all.

#### **Resources:**

1. Joiner, T. (2010). *Myths about suicide*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
2. Nelson, R. E., & Galas, J. C. (2006). *The power to prevent suicide: A guide for teens helping teens*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
3. PAYSPI website at <http://payspi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Myths-about-Suicide.pdf>
4. Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2012). *The Role of High School Teachers in Preventing Suicide*. Available at <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/Teachers.pdf>

#### **Topic 2:** School-Related Epidemiology

**Rationale:** Teachers are inundated with professional development opportunities and requirements. It is critical that the impact of suicide on schools is clearly stated and there are data to support that impact. It is also important to include relevant information on topics that may be related to suicide (as risk factors), such as relationship between suicide and bullying, substance abuse, and/or sexual preference.

#### **Resources:**

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *Preventing suicide: A high school toolkit*. Available at [www.store.samhsa.gov](http://www.store.samhsa.gov).
2. Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2012). *The Role of High School Teachers in Preventing Suicide*. Available at <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/Teachers.pdf>

3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014). *The Relationship between Bullying and Suicide: What We Know and What It Means for Schools*. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying-suicide-translation-final-a.pdf>
4. Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2014, July). *Suicide prevention among LGBT youth: A workshop for professionals who serve youth*. [Rev. ed.]. Waltham, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. Available at <http://www.sprc.org/webform/suicide-prevention-among-lgbt-youth-workshop-professionals-who-serve-youth>
5. NAMI Fact Sheet on Mental Illness – emphasizes the life span impact and the possibility for early intervention [http://www2.nami.org/factsheets/mentalillness\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www2.nami.org/factsheets/mentalillness_factsheet.pdf)
6. National Youth Behavior Survey Results – current data on depression and suicide <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6304.pdf>

**Topic 3: Risk Factors vs Warning Signs**

**Rationale:** It is critically important that trainers make a distinction between risk factors for suicide and warning signs for suicide. Educators need to be familiar with both, but it is this distinction that prompts the appropriate action steps.

**Resources:**

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *Preventing suicide: A high school toolkit*. Chapter 1 – Getting started. Available at [www.store.samhsa.gov](http://www.store.samhsa.gov).
2. Suicide Prevention Resource Center, & Rodgers, P. (2011). *Understanding risk and protective factors for suicide: A primer for preventing suicide*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. Available at <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/RiskProtectiveFactorsPrimer.pdf>
3. Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2012). *The Role of High School Teachers in Preventing Suicide*. Available at <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/Teachers.pdf>

**Topic 4: Risk and Protective Factors**

**Rationale:** Some factors increase the risk for suicidal behavior in youth. It is important that educators are aware of these risk factors and can identify them in youth. Additionally, it is important to understand that risk factors do not necessarily mean that one may engage in suicidal behaviors.

**Resources:**

1. Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2012). *The Role of High School Teachers in Preventing Suicide*. Available at <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/Teachers.pdf>
2. Ryan, C. (2009). *Supportive families, healthy children: Helping families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, & transgender children*. San Francisco, CA: Family Acceptance Project, Marian Wright Edelman Institute, San Francisco State University.
3. National Center for the Prevention of Youth Suicide at <http://www.suicidology.org/Portals/14/docs/Resources/FactSheets/Youth2012.pdf>

**Topic 5: Warning Signs**

**Rationale:** While it is important to understand that some factors place students at higher risk for suicidal behavior than others, it is critical that educators understand which factors are truly warning signs that would prompt an immediate response.

**Resources:**

1. [www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org](http://www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org) (supposed to go live very soon – before next school year)
2. [www.payspi.org](http://www.payspi.org)

3. Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2014). *Warning Signs for Suicide*. Available at [http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/RS\\_warningsigns.pdf](http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/RS_warningsigns.pdf)

**Topic 6:** Review of School District Policies and Procedures

**Rationale:** Beginning in school year 2015-2016, every school district in Pennsylvania is required to have a set of policies and procedures related to working with students at risk for suicide. It is important that educators are aware of their school district's policies and procedures and what their roles are in compliance.

**Resources:**

1. Please review your school districts policies. Both PDE and PSBA have sample policies available on their websites.
2. American School Counselors Association Model Policy (in collaboration with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and The Trevor Project). Available at <http://www.afsp.org/news-events/in-the-news/afsp-partners-with-trevor-project-and-others-on-model-school-policy-on-suicide-prevention>

**Topic 7:** How Educators Can Respond to Youth about Whom They are Concerned

**Rationale:** Educators work with students with emotional and behavioral struggles on a daily basis. It is helpful to provide guidance on how best to respond and interact with youth with whom they are concerned. Remember their responses should be in sync with school district policies.

**Resources:**

1. Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2012). *The Role of High School Teachers in Preventing Suicide*. Available at <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/Teachers.pdf>
2. [www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org](http://www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org)
3. Mayo Clinic video "How 2 Talk with Ur Kid About Suicide"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BByqa7bhto>
4. Refer to SAP guidelines on responding to behavioral concerns

**Topic 8:** Safe Messaging

**Rationale:** Districts that are more aggressively taking steps to prevent suicide in their schools may engage in a variety of strategies. It is critical that educators and school personnel who are leading these initiatives are fully aware of current safe messaging guidelines. Even with our best intentions, failing to follow these guidelines may have unintended negative consequences.

**Resources:**

1. SPRC Safe Messaging Guidelines: <http://www.sprc.org/library/SafeMessagingfinal.pdf>
2. Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide (<http://reportingonsuicide.org/>) comes from a collaborative effort of many of the nation's leading organizations. It is a useful tool and guideline for not only working with the media but also in the development of PSAs and other messaging at schools.
3. National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention's Framework for Successful Messaging: <http://suicidepreventionmessaging.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/>

**Topic 9:** Postvention Practices in Schools

**Rationale:** In the event that a student dies by suicide, educators need to understand their role and response to other students in the school district.

**Resources:**

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *Preventing suicide: A high school toolkit*. Chapter 3 - Available at [www.store.samhsa.gov](http://www.store.samhsa.gov). This includes preparing for what to do in the unfortunate occurrence of a student suicide death.
2. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2011). *After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. Available at <http://www.sprc.org/webform/after-suicide-toolkit-schools>. This is a resource to turn in the event of a student death by suicide, especially if there have been no prior preparations and/or crisis plan in place.
3. Kerr, M.M., Brent, D.A., McKain, B., & McCommons, P.S. (2003). *Postvention Standards Manual: A Guide for a School's Response in the Aftermath of a Sudden Death*. University of Pittsburgh, Services for Teens at Risk (STAR-Center), Pittsburgh, PA.

#### **General Resources:**

1. Pennsylvania Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative ([www.payspi.org](http://www.payspi.org))
2. National Center for the Prevention of Youth Suicide (<http://www.suicidology.org/ncpys/resources>)
3. SAMHSA – Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools (free download at <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Preventing-Suicide-A-Toolkit-for-High-Schools/SMA12-4669>)
4. The Trevor Project – resources for LGBTQ youth (<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>)
5. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention ([www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org))
6. American Association of Suicidology ([www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org))
7. Suicide Prevention Resource Center ([www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org))
8. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *Preventing suicide: A high school toolkit*. Available at [www.store.samhsa.gov](http://www.store.samhsa.gov).
9. Erbacher, T., Singer, J. B., & Poland, S. (2014). *Suicide in Schools: A Practitioner's Guide to Multi-level Prevention, Assessment, Intervention, and Postvention*, New York: Routledge.
10. Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2012). *The Role of High School Teachers in Preventing Suicide*. Available at <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/Teachers.pdf>
11. Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2014, July). *Suicide prevention among LGBT youth: A workshop for professionals who serve youth*. [Rev. ed.]. Waltham, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. Available at <http://www.sprc.org/webform/suicide-prevention-among-lgbt-youth-workshop-professionals-who-serve-youth>
12. The Best Practices Registry for Suicide Prevention, Suicide Prevention Resource Center – locating training curricula. <http://www.sprc.org/bpr>
13. American School Counselors Association Model Policy (in collaboration with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and The Trevor Project). Available at <http://www.afsp.org/news-events/in-the-news/afsp-partners-with-trevor-project-and-others-on-model-school-policy-on-suicide-prevention>