

Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program

Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention Guidelines

For Substance Abuse/Mental Health Agencies

Substance abuse and mental health agencies provide services and support to youth that are at elevated risk for suicide because of their behavioral disorder(s). Staff is also very likely to play a key role in the aftermath of a suicide in the community. The person who dies might be a client in their program, the peer of youth who participate in their program, or an adult or public figure known to the youth in the community. The impact of suicide can be devastating on those left behind. As such it is important that agencies establish protocols for: 1) how to inform themselves about youth suicide; 2) how to appropriately respond to suicidal behavior; and, 3) how to manage the aftermath of a suicide crisis.

All staff in these substance abuse and mental health organizations need to be very clear about their professional roles/boundaries and personal/organizational liability issues when responding to these type of events. *All* staff needs to be educated about the suicide contagion factor as it relates to suicidal behavior and suicides. Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to suicide contagion. The likelihood of contagion can be reduced when schools, media, youth programs, faith communities, friends and family all take the responsibility for following suicide prevention guidelines.

Many activities advance suicide prevention including education about suicide and advanced planning for a suicide related crisis. The Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program has been asked to provide guidance to schools and youth serving agencies in developing suicide prevention, intervention and postvention protocols. The following questionnaire has been designed to help you assess what has already been done and things which need to be considered in order to help prevent youth suicide. *This questionnaire is only a starting point.* The intention is not to provide definitive declarations for what agencies/programs should do because each will vary in its ability to implement and maintain suicide prevention guidelines. It is of utmost importance to consult with your supervisor and attorney to fully understand your obligations and limitations.

Administrative Questions:

Prevention refers to a variety of coordinated, wide-ranging and concrete steps designed to help prevent youth suicide.

1. Does the agency have an up-to-date crisis response plan?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
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2. Does the crisis response plan have solid administrative support?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
3a. Does the crisis plan have written protocols on how to manage suicidal (youth and/or staff) behavior?	a. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
3b. Attempt on site?	b. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
3c. Attempt off site?	c. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
4. Has a lead person been designated (with a back-up person identified) to handle/coordinate the agency response to suicidal behavior?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
5. Have the individuals in #4 been provided with crisis response training?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
6. Are copies of the agency crisis plan readily accessible to all personnel?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
7a. Is there an established method for disseminating protocols that includes who should receive them?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
7b. Is there a plan for providing new staff with the protocols?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
8. Has administration provided clear direction about the legal rights and obligations of administrators and staff in assisting with a suicidal youth?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
9. Has a policy for maintaining confidentiality of sensitive information been created and disseminated to all	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:

personnel?	
10a. Does the agency have a formal Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the local crisis service provider(s) outlining the services to be provided such as risk assessments, crisis management, and/or debriefing staff in the aftermath of a crisis?	a. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
10b. Does the agreement include debriefing parents and community members in the event of a suicide?	b. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
11. Does the MOA include guidelines for how the agency receives feedback on the outcome of the referrals that are made?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
12a. Have administrators and staff received education and training in suicide prevention within the last 3 years?	a. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
12b. Has a plan been developed for educating new hires?	b. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:

Intervention refers to an outline of specific actions to be implemented in response to suicidal behavior.

13. Do your protocols identify key people as contacts to help when suicidal behavior occurs?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
14. Has someone been designated to contact the parent/guardian when suicide risk is suspected?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
15. Have procedures been developed if the parent/guardian is unreachable? (Note: If a youth is a minor you will need parental/guardian consent to have the youth evaluated. In a life threatening emergency situation you do not need the permission of the parents/guardian to provide treatment.)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
16a. Have steps been developed to encourage parents to get help for their children including the removal of lethal means?	a. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
16b. If the parent refuses?	b. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:

<p>(Note: In the event that a staff member determines that a student under age 18 appears to be at-risk of attempting suicide and the parent/guardian refuses to obtain services for him/her, a report should be made to DHHS 1-800-452-1999 for neglect—failure to seek necessary mental health treatment, which may place the child at-risk of serious harm.)</p>	
<p>17. Are there protocols concerning how to help a youth re-enter the program after an absence or hospitalization for mental illness including suicidal behavior?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:</p>
<p>18. Are there systems/teams in place to support/address the needs of youth who are exhibiting high risk behaviors such as substance abuse, depression, deliberate self-harm, etc.</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments</p>

Postvention refers to a sequence of planned support and interventions carried out in the aftermath of a suicide with the intention of preventing suicide contagion.

<p>19a. Do the protocols include a section about working with the media?</p> <p>19b. Has a spokesperson been designated?</p>	<p>a. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:</p> <p>b. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:</p>
<p>20a. In the event of a suicide, are there established methods for identifying close friends/other vulnerable youth and plans to support them?</p> <p>20b. Are there established methods for identifying staff that might be affected either due to their relationship with the youth or their own experience of suicide in their family?</p>	<p>a. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:</p> <p>b. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:</p>
<p>21. Has a plan been developed that explicitly details what to do following a suicidal crisis to avoid copycat behaviors?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:</p>

22. Are there clear parameters around the agency's role following any youth/staff death (for any reason) that take into consideration the fact that following a suicide, permanent memorials are NOT recommended?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
23. Are there guidelines about who must be identified about a suicide attempt or death? (i.e. executive director, State Agencies, etc.)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
24a. Have plans been developed about informing the staff member(s) who worked directly with the individual?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
24b. Do these plans include additional support for this individual(s)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
25. Is there an identified process to inform other staff?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
26. Has someone been designated to secure the chart/file of the deceased client?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
27. Has a procedure/checklist been developed to document any additional follow up steps?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
28a. If the client participated in group therapy, is there a process to inform other group members?	a. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
28b. Does it include reinforcing the need for confidentiality?	b. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
29a. Are there clear guidelines for staff about what contact, if any, is allowed with the family?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
29b. Attending the wake or funeral service?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
29c. Other memorial activities?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:

30. Will staff be available to assist the community with grief issues/counseling?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:

Staff Related Questions

1. Has ALL staff received training about suicide prevention?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
2. Has ALL staff been provided with the agency protocols?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
3a. Have trained Gatekeepers (and back-ups) been identified as contacts for when suicidal behavior occurs?	a. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
3b. Has everyone in the building been informed who the Gatekeepers are?	b. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
4. Does staff know what to do in the event that they come upon or hear about a suicide event?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
5. Have the confidentiality guidelines been provided and discussed with ALL staff?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
6. Do protocols guide staff on what to look for and what to do if they learn of youth work/messages that focus on death or suicide? (i.e. artwork, doodling, journal entries, notes, etc.)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
7. Do agency personnel understand that it is not their responsibility to assess the seriousness of a situation but that all suicidal behavior must be taken seriously and reported using the agency protocols?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
8. Has staff been informed about what to do if there is any reason to suspect a weapon is present/readily available?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
9. Are procedures in place to brief and debrief staff in the event of a crisis?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:

10. Are parents provided with a list of community resources and agencies to contact if they are concerned about their son or daughter being suicidal?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:

Parent Related Questions

1. Are opportunities provided for parents to learn about suicide prevention?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
2. Are there efforts to actively communicate with parents about risk factors, warning signs, and the importance of restricting access to lethal means?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
3. Have parents been told what the agency is doing to prevent and address the issue of suicide, what will be done if their son or daughter is thought to be at risk of suicide, and what will be expected of them?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:

Youth Related Questions

1. Do youth know whom to go to if they are worried about a suicidal friend?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Need to consider <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
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