

Intervention Strategies

Establishing a Community Response

Too often the burden of responsibility falls solely upon the shoulders of the school when responding to a crisis situation. While it is critical for the school to have procedures in place for responding to a crisis and for educating staff on how to effectively respond to a suicidal crisis, schools may find it extremely helpful to share the responsibility for successful and comprehensive intervention with the community (5,6,7,8).

A comprehensive suicide prevention program cannot function properly without outside support from the community and this is especially true when addressing intervention (9). Research has suggested that one of the most essential components, if not the central component, for responding to a student potentially at risk for suicide is to have established relations and links to agencies within the community such as mental health agencies, crisis centers, law enforcement agencies, youth health service agencies, psychiatric facilities, the clergy, or the community health department (1,2,4-8,10-12).

Because most educators are not adequately trained, (nor do they have the time), to counsel students longer than would be necessary for an immediate crisis response, only by establishing positive relationships with community agencies in advance will schools be able to effectively respond to a student's suicide attempt or threat (13). Utilizing community agencies increases the people-power necessary to effectively respond to the immediate crisis as well as its long-term consequences (5).

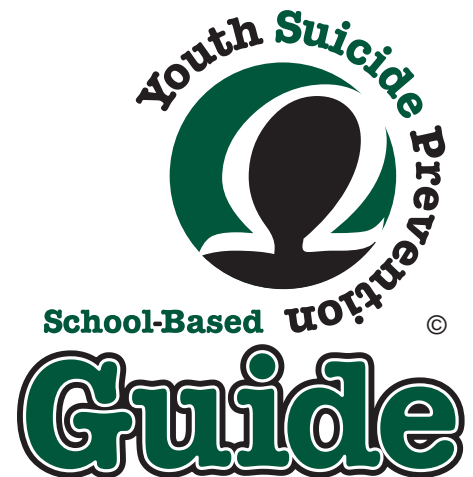
Once these critical links have been established, it is necessary that schools inform staff, as well as students, about the services that these community links provide. This will ensure that should a student experience suicidal thoughts, or should an educator come in contact with (or experience suicidal thoughts themselves) a potentially suicidal adolescent, each will have contact information that could provide critical intervention and potentially prevent a suicidal event from occurring. It is essential that educators in particular understand the importance of making an appropriate referral, as well as how to make an effective referral.

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Issue Brief



Prepared By:

Justin Doan
Katherine Lazear
Stephen Roggenbaum

Design & Page Layout: Bill Leader

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When Making a Referral

Kalafat and Underwood (37) provide some suggestions when making a referral. The Guide has summarized these suggestions.

1. Make sure that you know what problems the student may be having. Although counseling may certainly be appropriate, if one of the student's problems is that he/she was abused by a therapist in the past, the referral to a counseling center should be carefully chosen. Inappropriate or poor referrals will waste time, resources, and may annoy the student so much that he/she refuses to cooperate further.
2. Give the student the opportunity to talk about any reluctance or apprehension he/she may have about accepting the referral. This can usually provide a good opportunity for you to assess how compliant the student will be with regards to treatment.
3. Involve the parents in the referral. This will help you make an appropriate referral. If the counseling center for instance, is forty minutes away, and the family lacks transportation, this referral may not be the best. Also, use a referral that matches the family's and student's background (religious affiliation, cultural background, payment system). It may not be the best idea to refer a low-income family to an expensive, specialized psychiatrist with stringent, expensive services.
4. Limit the number of referrals to one or possibly two. You do not want to overwhelm an already overwhelmed adolescent or his/her family.
5. Provide the family with as much information about the referral as possible. Contact name and number, address, directions, information about cost or insurance coverage. The more information you provide and the easier you make it, the more likely the family is to actually get necessary help.
6. Follow up with both the referral agency and the family. Oftentimes, because of rules of confidentiality, a service provider cannot deny or confirm anything about anyone, unless the student or his/her parents sign a release of information form. This signed form will allow you to check on the progress and compliance of the student.

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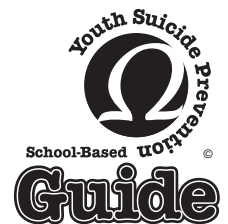
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Notes



The Guide's Research Team at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute/USF:

- Katherine Lazear
- Stephen Roggenbaum
- Justin Doan

The Youth Suicide Prevention Prototype Program's (YSPPP) Research Team at the Institute for Child Health Policy/NSU:

- Deborah Mulligan-Smith, MD FAAP FACEP
Principal Investigator
- Cheng Wang, MSci MA
- Maritza Concha, MA
- Ronald Levant, EdD MBA ABPP
- Steven Campbell, PhD

Contact: Stephen Roggenbaum
roggenba@fmhi.usf.edu
813-974-6149 (voice)