

Youth Suicide Prevention School-Based Guide

The Guide: Overview

The **Youth Suicide Prevention School-Based Guide** is designed to provide accurate, user-friendly information. First, checklists can be completed to help evaluate the adequacy of the schools' suicide prevention programs. Second, information is offered in a series of issue briefs corresponding to a specific checklist. Each brief offers a rationale for the importance of the specific topic together with a brief overview of the key points. The briefs also offer specific strategies that have proven to work in reducing the incidence of suicide, with references that schools may then explore in greater detail. A resource section with helpful links is also included. The Guide will help to provide information to schools to assist them in the development of a framework to work in partnership with community resources and families.

The issue briefs and resource/links section, their content and recommendations will continually evolve as new research is conducted, the best available evidence is evaluated, and prevention programs are utilized and tested.

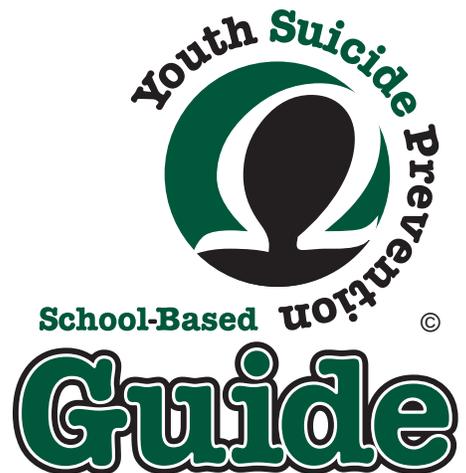
The Guide

- Identifies and defines the elements of a comprehensive, school-based suicide prevention program.
- Examines the scientific literature to determine which of these elements have been proven to work in reducing the incidence of suicide.
- Contains checklists and self-assessment instruments that may be completed by schools to evaluate the adequacy of their suicide prevention programs.

Suggested Citation: Lazear, K., Roggenbaum, S., & Blase, K. (2003). *Youth suicide prevention school-based guide—Overview*. Tampa, FL: Department of Child and Family Studies, Division of State and Local Support, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida. (FMHI Series Publication #218-0)

This publication is also available on-line as an Adobe Acrobat PDF file:
<http://www.fmhi.usf.edu/institute/pubs/bysubject.html> or
<http://cfs.fmhi.usf.edu/cfsinfo/hotpubs.cfm>

Overview



Prepared By:

Katherine Lazear
Stephen Roggenbaum
Karen Blase

Design & Page Layout: Bill Leader

© 2003, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute



Developed by...

The Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida, funded by the Institute for Child Health Policy at NOVA Southeastern University through a Florida Drug Free Communities Program Award.

Events, activities, programs and facilities of The University of South Florida are available to all without regard to race, color, marital status, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, Vietnam or disabled veteran status as provided by law and in accordance with the University's respect for personal dignity.

Youth Suicide Prevention School-Based Guide: Overview

continued

- Provides a guide to help school administrators and their partners add program elements that would result in more comprehensive programs and/or would replace unproven strategies with proven strategies.
- Has been reviewed by national experts in suicide prevention, behavioral and physical health providers, and community-based school personnel, advocates, families and youth. The Guide, annotated bibliography, and literature review will be available on a University of South Florida's website.

The first issue brief in this series is designed to assist in debunking myths that may serve as barriers to implementation of a school-based suicide prevention program. Countering myths with reality and evidence-based statements may enhance confidence and willingness to address youth suicide prevention.

The remaining briefs each cover individual topics related to suicide prevention that are especially pertinent to school administrators and their community partners.

Under separate cover is **The Guide's** Annotated Bibliography, providing a compiled resource of research publications related to suicide prevention and school-based prevention programs to support the development of the Youth Suicide Prevention School-Based Guide. It is available online at <http://www.fmhi.usf.edu/institute/pubs/bysubject.html>

Youth Suicide

Youth Suicide — as stark as the words sound, this phenomenon reflects a silent epidemic too frequently ignored except by those who have been devastated by it. Youth suicide is a critical but under-reported and under-treated public health crisis.

Consider these alarming statistics:

- Suicide accounts for 13% of all adolescent deaths and ranks third as an overall cause of death in adolescents. (1)
- Suicide among children 10–14 increased by 100% from 1980–1996. (2)

- An estimated 3,500 adolescents attempt suicide daily; 35 of them die. (3)
- An average of one youth, under the age of 25, dies by suicide every 2 hours. (4)
- More teenagers die by suicide than die from cancer, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza and chronic lung disease combined. (5)
- Between 1980 and 1995, the suicide rate among African American youth, ages 10–14, increased 233%. The suicide rate for comparable whites increased 120%. (6)
- 90% of teenagers who die by suicide have a mental health problem, usually depression, substance abuse, or both. (7)

As chilling as these statistics are, they do not begin to compare to the grief, anguish, confusion, guilt and devastation felt by the family and friends of an adolescent who dies by suicide. After a suicide crisis, friends and family are at an increased risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorders. (9)

Mental health and mental illness are shaped by age, gender, race, and culture as well as other distinctions of diversity found within all of these population groups — for example, physical disability or a person's sexual orientation. The consequences of not understanding these influences can result in unintentional and harmful effects.

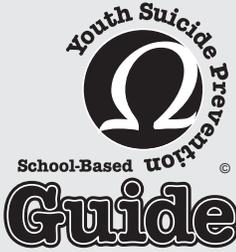
With minority youth more likely to express feelings of alienation, cultural and societal conflicts, academic anxieties, and feelings of victimization, it has become clear that careful attention must be paid to the needs of minority youth and their families within the context of their culture.

While disparities in the health status of people of diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds remains a major problem for all youth, undiagnosed and untreated mental health problems, particularly depression and substance abuse, play a significant role in the prevalence of youth suicidal behavior. (8)

It is likely that suicide is significantly under-reported and that statistics can underestimate the true extent of the problem. Deaths classified as homicides or accidents, for example, where teenagers may have deliberately put themselves in harm's way, are not included in rates.

Youth Suicide Prevention School-Based Guide: Overview

continued

	
Contents	
Overview	
Issue Brief 1	Information Dissemination
Issue Brief 2	School Climate
Issue Brief 3a	Risk Factors: Risk and Protective Factors, and Warning Signs
Issue Brief 3b	Risk Factors: How Can a School Identify a Student At-Risk for Suicide?
Issue Brief 4	Administrative Issues
Issue Brief 5	Suicide Prevention Guidelines
Issue Brief 6a	Intervention Strategies: Establishing a Community Response
Issue Brief 6b	Intervention Strategies: Crisis Intervention Teams
Issue Brief 6c	Intervention Strategies: Responding to a Student Crisis
Issue Brief 7a	Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide: Steps for Responding
Issue Brief 7b	Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide: Responding to and Working with the Media
Issue Brief 8	Family Partnerships
Issue Brief 9	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations
Checklist 1	Information Dissemination in Schools
True/False 1t	Information Dissemination in Schools: The Facts about Adolescent Suicide
Checklist 2	School Climate
Checklist 4	Administrative Issues
Checklist 5	Suicide Prevention Guidelines
Checklist 6	Intervention Strategies
Checklist 7a	Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide: Steps for Responding
Checklist 7b	Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide: Responding to and Working with the Media—Sample Forms for Schools
Checklist 9	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations
Programs	School-Based Suicide Prevention Programs
Resources	Resources and Links
Statistics	American Association of Suicidology Statistics

As chilling as these statistics are, they do not begin to compare to the grief, anguish, confusion, guilt and devastation felt by the family and friends of an adolescent who dies by suicide. After a suicide crisis, friends and family are at an increased risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorders. (9)

Unexpected death is always painful, but perhaps none more so than the self-destruction of a young person and a life, with all its potential and promise, cut short by one desperate and all too final act.

Our nation's schools, in partnership with families and communities, are the obvious places to identify youth at risk of suicide. Healthy, supportive and informed schools can do much to prevent youth suicide, to identify students at risk and to direct youth to prompt, effective treatment. Prevention, education, intervention and postvention (i.e., response to suicide attempts and completions) are the keys to reducing the number of young people who take their own lives. Our nation's schools are clearly essential community settings for suicidal prevention programs. In schools, rather than in the home or community, students' problems with academics, peers and other issues are much more likely to be evident, and suicidal signals may occur here with the greatest frequency. At school, students have the greatest exposure to multiple helpers such as teachers, counselors, coaches, staff and classmates who have the potential to intervene. Research has found that schools provide an ideal and strategic setting for preventing adolescent suicide (10).

Schools need to understand not only the issues of suicide, but also the positive role they can play. However, given the multiple demands on school systems, districts, schools and school staff, they need up-to-date, accurate and user-friendly information, guidelines and tools to assist them in their efforts. Suicide is a public health problem that requires an evidence-based approach to prevention. The public health approach defines the problem, identifies risk factors and causes of the problem, develops interventions evaluated for effectiveness, and implements such interventions widely in a variety of communities.(2) Wading through professional journals, examining the evidence, reviewing and evaluating the literature and then drawing conclusions

References

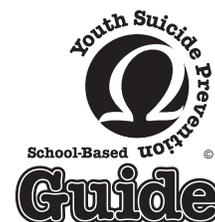
Youth Suicide Prevention School-Based Guide: Overview

1. Goldman, S. & Beardslee, W.R. (1999). Suicide in children and adolescents. In, D.G. Jacobs (Eds.). *The Harvard medical school guide to suicide assessment and intervention* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
2. U.S. Public Health Service. (1999). *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Suicide*. Washington, DC.
3. Opalewski, D. (2001) *Root issues of adolescent suicide: Understanding why a young person would consider suicide, as a solution to problems is the first step toward helping them consider alternatives*. [On-line]. Available: http://www.prponline.net/School/SAJ/Articles/root_issues_of_adolescent_suicide.htm
4. National strategy for suicide prevention: Goals and objectives for action (2001). Rockville, MD; Office of the Surgeon General, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service.
5. National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), (2000). Retrieved August, 2003 from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/>
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] (1998). National Center for Health Statistics. Vital statistics mortality data, underlying cause of death, 1980-1995 {Machine-readable public-use data tapes}. Hyattsville, Maryland: US Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, CDC, 1983-1993
7. Shaffer, D., Wilcox, H., Lucas, C., et al. (1996). *The development of a screening instrument for teens at risk for suicide*. Poster presented at the 1996 meeting of the Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: New York, NY (1996).
8. Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General (1999). Retrieved July, 2003 from <http://www.mentalhealth.org/features/surgeongeneralreport/chapter3/sec5.asp>
9. Lester, D. (2000). *Suicide prevention: Resources for the millennium*. Ann Arbor, MI.: Sheridan Books.
10. King, C.A. (1997). Suicidal behavior in adolescents. In R.W. Marris, N.M. Silverman, and S.S. Canetto (Eds). *Review of Suicidology*. New York, N.Y.: Guilford Press, 61-95.

Overview continued

developing action plans and implementing them describes an often overwhelming course of action for educators, administrators and school systems.

The Youth Suicide Prevention School-Based Guide is a comprehensive, evidence-based guide designed to assist schools, in partnership with families and community partners, in improving their suicide prevention programs or creating new ones. **The Guide** will allow school administrators to assess the adequacy of their suicide prevention program and to improve its scope and effectiveness. **The Guide** builds on reviews of the literature and current research, exemplary plans and initiatives throughout North America; evidence associated with suicide prevention programs; and field-based information from educators, clinicians, families, youth, and advocates.



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)