# Understanding Risk and Youth Suicide

## Strategies for Reducing Youth Suicidal Behavior

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James J. Mazza @ 2012
Postvention – 1st Day before school starts

1. Implement School Crisis Plan – use calling tree to contact all school personnel.

2. Set up school personnel meeting for early the next day before school starts. Go over procedures on how the school will function, resources available to students & staff, and how this information will be disseminated: small groups recommended.

3. School needs to focus on feelings and emotion rather than academics – otherwise school will be viewed as not caring.

4. Provide opportunities for school personnel to vent their feelings and frustrations before the school day starts and before they have to deal with the emotions of their students.

5. Provide a written announcement for teacher regarding the death of the student: facts and school & community resources.
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Strategies for Reducing Youth Suicidal Behavior

### Postvention – 1st Day School Starts

1. Announcement regarding the death of the student should occur at the same time. Teachers should read the provided sheet. Principal should use the PA system to inform teachers when they should read their announcements.

2. Within the classrooms, teachers should provide students with the facts, resources available today, and the school day structure.

3. Let students talk about their feelings. Important to emphasize that no one is to blame. The person with all the answers is unfortunately no longer with us.

4. Offer support to the family and work with them regarding funeral arrangements. School & funeral should not compete for students’ time.

5. Memorials and plaques should be downplayed. Media contact needs to be carefully planned and follow recommended guidelines.

James J. Mazza @ 2012
### Postvention – 1st Day (Cont)

6. Have crisis team, counselors, and school psychologists identify any students who seem to be at particularly high risk for suicidal behavior (i.e., close friends, siblings, girlfriend/boyfriend, & past attempters).

7. School schedule should be reimplemented after school principal, staff, and crisis team feel appropriate time has been given for expression of feelings and communication. Tests should be rescheduled for another day & no repercussions for missing class.

8. Empty chair strategy following student’s schedule – crisis response person or person trained in handling crisis situations.

9. A designated room/office should be available for students still struggling with this event. This office should be available for these students for the rest of the week.
### Postvention – 2nd & 3rd Days

1. Crisis team remains in the school and counselors/school psychologist should still offer small group discussions if students come down to the designated room/office.

2. Announcements in the morning should include the available of resources for students who continue to struggle with the tragic news. If a funeral time has been reached by the family, included this as well. Ideally, the best time is in the late afternoon or evening.

3. Counselor & school psychologists should develop a checklist of those who are still struggling and check-in with those people each day.

4. Maintain contact with family – offer support and provide community resources for them.

5. Keep everyone updated on the situation: community, family, and school.
III. Specific DO’s and DON’Ts for Suicide Postvention

- **DO’s**
  - Do reach out to Parents and provide support for them
  - Funeral should not compete with school
  - Do provide a flexible school schedule
III. Specific DO’s and DON’Ts for Suicide Postvention

❖ DO’s (cont 2)

➢ Do answer students’ questions honestly
➢ Do explain that suicide is often a result of mental health issues
➢ Do stress that suicide is preventable and everyone can help
III. Specific DO’s and DON’Ts for Suicide Postvention

- **DO’s (cont 3)**
  - Do provide resources for students who are feeling at risk for suicide
  - ✓ provide crisis hotline numbers
    - Teen line - 866 TEENLINK
    - National Hotline - 800 273-TALK
  - Do stress the positive strategies going on at the school
III. Specific DO’s and DON'Ts for Suicide Postvention

- **DO’s (cont 4)**
  - Do make sure all students hear the news at the same time
  - Do identify others who could be at additional risk

- **✓ Friends, siblings, and past students who have attempted suicide**
III. Specific DO’s and DON’Ts for Suicide Postvention

- DO’s (cont 5)
  - Do send a letter home to all parents regarding the situation. Include
    - What the school is doing/offering
    - Community resource numbers
    - Warning signs for suicidal behavior
    - Example of how parents can talk to their teens about suicide
III. Specific DO’s and DON’Ts for Suicide Postvention

❖ DO’s (cont 6)

➢ Do remember anniversary dates

✓ Identify those that may be affected by the anniversary date

➢ Close friends/relationship partners

➢ Siblings, even if they attend a different school
III. Specific DO’s and DON’Ts for Suicide Postvention

- **DO’s (cont 7)**

  - **Do return the school back to its regular schedule as soon as possible**
    - Students need the consistent and predictable structure school offers
    - Helps students regulate their emotions
CRISIS INTERVENTION FOR SUICIDE

III. Specific DO’s and DON’Ts for Suicide Postvention

❖ DON’Ts

➢ Do not hold an all school assembly
➢ Do not announce news over the PA system
➢ Do not plan any memorials
➢ Do not deny access of information to media
III. Specific DO’s and DON’Ts for Suicide Postvention

- DON’Ts (cont 2)
  - Do not punish students for taking extra time to deal with the crisis
  - Do not judge S’s past behavior
  - Do not report the suicide as unexplainable or blame anyone
III. Specific DO’s and DON’Ts for Suicide Postvention

- DON’Ts (cont 3)
  - Do not try to answer the question “why” because you do not know
  - Do not print pictures of the deceased
  - Do not print story on front page and avoid details of methods
National Resource and Information Numbers

- American Association of Suicidology
  - [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)
  - 202 237-2280

- National Suicide Hotline
  - 800 273-TALK