

# Indiana Suicide Prevention Resources Toolkit

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Published December 2020



**Indiana**  
Department  
of  
**Health**



# Introduction

Death rates for suicide have continued to rise both nationally and in Indiana, despite efforts to curtail these trends. Based on recent data (2018), suicide is a top 10 leading cause of death in Indiana for people aged 10-64 years, and is the 11th overall leading cause of death for all ages.<sup>1</sup> While each suicide death or attempt is different, there are ways to address the multiple factors involved. Suicide prevention efforts must utilize different strategies, require a wide range of partners, coordinate community response language, and draw on a diverse set of resources and tools.

This toolkit is aimed to help address the need for practical, and when possible, Indiana-specific tools for various sectors/professionals. Within this document, the first portion details new suicide trends based on 2018 data and the second portion includes best practice tools for the following professional groups: healthcare, first responders, government, stakeholder groups, justice, employers, faith-based, media, coroners, family, education, and populations of special consideration.

This toolkit was developed in partnership between the Suicide Learning Collaborative, a multi-disciplinary working group addressing suicide in Indiana, and the Indiana Department of Health's Fatality Review and Prevention Division. Throughout the development process, members of the Collaborative were asked to supply relevant tools to their topical area as well as provide feedback on proposed tools.

The hope for this document is that professionals from these various subgroups can utilize these tools in their work. While none of these sections are fully comprehensive for suicide prevention, there are many toolkits that specialize in just one of these topics. This toolkit serves as a simplified, action-oriented version of the other toolkits. The tools highlighted in this toolkit are primarily based off of existing national toolkits and best practice guides. We do recommend professionals read through other profession-specific toolkits referenced for further context and detail.

# Education

## Introduction

Among our neighboring states, Indiana has the highest percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide and the highest percentage of students who made a suicide plan. Per the Indiana Youth Institute's Data Book, 33.5% of Indiana high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless in the past year. Needless to say, there is ample room for education to intervene.<sup>15</sup>



Suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention are complex issues to tackle, regardless of the setting, but especially in schools. Schools already have numerous competing requirements, they are under resourced, and with students the majority of the day. That is why we have put together an assortment of various tools for those in education to use when addressing suicide prevention.

## Education Resources:

- Indiana Requirements for Youth Suicide Prevention
- Suicide Prevention in Schools Poster
- Suicide Prevention Ideas
- Model School District Policy Checklist and Sample
- Suicidal Ideation Protocol
- Re-Entry Protocol
- Sample Guidelines for Staff Meetings after a Suicide
- Sample Death Notification Statements for Students
- Dos and Don'ts when Talking to your Students about Suicide
- Parent Letter Script
- Suicide Resources: Schools

# INDIANA REQUIREMENTS FOR YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

When thinking through different prevention and intervention strategies to pursue, it is vital that Indiana schools know what is required from them legally. Below are the various policies that must be followed when it comes to suicide prevention.



## Suicide Prevention Policy (IC 20-26-5-34.4)

Per IC 20-26-5-34.4, school corporations shall adopt a policy addressing measures intended to increase child suicide awareness and prevention.

The policy must address the following:

1. Counseling services for the child and the child's family related to suicide prevention.
2. Availability of referral information for crisis intervention to children, parents, and school corporation staff.
3. Increasing awareness of the relationship between suicide and drug and alcohol use.
4. Training on warning signs and tendencies that may evidence that a child is considering suicide.
5. Availability of information concerning suicide prevention services in the community.
6. Cooperation among the school corporation and suicide prevention services in the community.
7. Development of a plan to assist survivors of attempted suicide and to assist children and school corporation staff in coping with an attempted suicide or death of a student or school employee.
8. Development of any other program or activity that is appropriate.



## Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training (IC 20-28-3-6)

Per IC 20-28-3-6, superintendents, principals, teachers, librarians, school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, and school social workers employed at schools that provide instruction to students in grades 5-12, are required to participate in at least 2 hours of youth suicide awareness and prevention training every 3 school years. The training must be during the employee's contracted day or at a time chosen by the employee; shall count toward professional development requirements; must be demonstrated to be an effective or promising program and recommended by the Indiana Suicide Prevention Network Advisory Council.

# Suicide Prevention in Schools

Information for Teachers and School Staff

## WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

### TALK

If a student talks about.....

- Being a burden
- Feeling unbearable pain
- Having no reason to live
- Feeling trapped or hopeless
- Killing themselves

### BEHAVIOR

If a student shows.....

- Drastic changes in behavior or academics
- Acting recklessly; getting in trouble
- Withdrawing from activities
- Giving away possessions; telling people goodbye
- Alcohol/drug use

### MOOD

If a student shows.....

- Drastic change in mood
- Depression
- Loss of interest
- Irritability
- Anxiety

## TALK WITH AT RISK STUDENTS

### 1. ASK

Pull the student aside and share what you have noticed. Ask them if they are experiencing suicidal ideation.

"I've noticed \_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes when someone is \_\_\_\_\_ they are thinking about suicide. Are you thinking about suicide?"

### 2. LISTEN

Listen to what the student shares with you. Validate and acknowledge their feelings.

"Let's talk about this."  
"Tell me more."  
"It sounds like you're going through a really difficult time."

### 3. CONNECT

If the student shares they are experiencing suicidal ideation or you suspect they are in danger of hurting themselves, connect them with someone to help keep them safe.

**DO NOT** leave the student unsupervised.

# Suicide Prevention and Education Activities

Review the student's safety plan with the student and family before the student returns to school

Education on warning signs and symptoms

Develop a referral process to inpatient or outpatient therapeutic services

Set aside a regulation room

Integrate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into classroom settings

Develop a culture that validates emotions and feelings, creating a rapport with students

Require diversity and racism training for students and staff

Teach emotional regulation, daily emotional check ins, teach coping skills

Create a suicidal ideation protocol including a mental status assessment / self-harm assessment (i.e. Columbia suicide rating scale)

Require all teachers to complete an online suicide training module or an in-person training

Develop partnerships with Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) and other local provider organizations

Hire a school counselor, school psychologist, and a youth social worker

Have a Bully Box and anonymous tip line for students

Be aware of a child's background, supports, and family dynamics

Designate a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) coordinator

## MODEL SCHOOL SUICIDE POLICY CHECKLIST AND SAMPLE

If school districts already have suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention protocols, the district can measure their plan against the list below.

- Requirement for training — ideally at least one hour every year for all school staff, including bus drivers, cafeteria staff, coaches, security, etc. — on suicide prevention, including education about mental health and warning signs or risk
- Consideration of populations at high risk for suicide, such as LGBTQ+ youth
- Requirement for a designated school suicide prevention coordinator
- Description of all suicide prevention team member roles and responsibilities, and the flow of communication and tasks
- Designation of the process for suicide risk assessments (either with school-employed mental health professionals or by arrangement with a community mental health professional)
- Requirement for continuously updated referral list that has, at the minimum, emergency contacts such as local hospitals and their mental health clinics and referral numbers
- Procedures for in-school suicide attempt, including re-entry processes
- Consideration of out-of-school suicide attempts and how parents should be informed and involved
- Postvention procedures that follow the After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools recommendations and safely discuss a suicide attempt or death with the school community

If the district has yet to develop a policy, they can access model school policy in Appendix B of “Suicide Prevention & Response: A Comprehensive Resource Guide for Indiana Schools,” developed by the Indiana Department of Education, found here: <https://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/sebw/suicide-resource-guide-indiana-schools-4.pdf>. A sample policy and protocol from Hamilton Southeastern Schools can be found on the subsequent pages.

## Sample Suicide Prevention Policy

The Board of School Trustees of \_\_\_\_\_ recognizes that suicide is one of the leading causes of death for Indiana youth. This policy is meant to increase the awareness and prevention of child suicide. The Board believes there must be a partnership between families, the community, and \_\_\_\_\_ to effectively support our students with mental health needs.

To that end, the Board partners with the broader community including local and regional suicide prevention services. Information regarding such suicide prevention services located in our community can be found on our website or by contacting the school counselor in any of our schools. Further, information regarding crisis intervention referral is available to students, parents, and \_\_\_\_\_ employees by contacting school counselors, the \_\_\_\_\_ Mental Health Coordinator, or Student Support Services at the \_\_\_\_\_ central office by calling (317) 594-4100. In cases of emergency please dial 911 for immediate assistance.

\_\_\_\_\_ Schools provides school counseling services for students and families related to suicide prevention.

\_\_\_\_\_ Schools also refers students and families to in-school mental health counseling/therapy.

\_\_\_\_\_ Schools recognizes the relationship between suicide and drug and alcohol use. The plan, training, and any other program authorized under this policy will address awareness of this correlation. \_\_\_\_\_ Schools will make certain that employees meet training requirements consistent with Indiana law on suicide prevention and awareness. All \_\_\_\_\_ teachers are to be trained in suicide prevention. The training addresses warning signs and tendencies that may indicate a student is considering suicide. Teachers, school counselors, and staff are also trained on specific procedures to follow if they are concerned about a student.

Consistent with Indiana law, the Superintendent or his/her designee shall develop a plan to assist survivors of attempted suicide and to assist students and \_\_\_\_\_ Schools employees in coping with a suicide or attempted suicide. The Superintendent or his/her designee may develop any other program or activity appropriate for increasing awareness and prevention of child suicide.



# SUICIDAL IDEATION PROTOCOL

When a student expresses suicidal ideation, it is important to have a procedure in place. Hamilton Southeastern Schools shared their procedural response for purposes of this toolkit. Dependent on the different types of school personnel available, some of these steps may be completed by different individuals

|                             |                                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Student Name:</b>        | <b>Date:</b>                   |
| <b>School:</b>              | <b>Grade:</b>                  |
| <b>Student referred by:</b> | <b>Interview conducted by:</b> |
| <b>SRO Involvement:</b>     |                                |

**Reason for referral:**

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1. Inform student that it is required to report harm to self or others
2. Date and time of student interview:
3. Summary of interview:
4. Notification of necessary parties:
 

|                                       |                 |                 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| a. Name of Parent/Guardian Contacted: | Date Contacted: | Time Contacted: |
| b. Name of Building administrator:    | Date Contacted: | Time Contacted: |
5. Result of Columbia Suicide Screener for Schools:  
*\*Note: Always ask #1 and #2 on the Columbia Suicide Screening\**
6. Parent follow-up: Select:
  - a.  Parent Contacted
  - b.  Scheduled parent in person meeting      Date:
  - c.  Parent refused; additional referral needed
  - d.  Parent and School in agreement: NO FURTHER ACTION NEEDED

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**If further evaluation or support is needed complete the following steps:**

7. Meeting with Parent/Guardian instructions prior to student leaving school:
  - a. Keep student under direct supervision at all times during the process. **Do not send the student home on the bus or release to drive home alone or with other students. Advise parents it is a district policy.**
  - b. School staff will share with parent that staff believes that the student needs to be assessed by a mental health provider to discuss a possible evaluation/hospital placement regarding the student's risk level and suicidal ideation. The school requests, but does not require, a written report (safety plan) from the mental health provider be provided to the school prior to the student's return so that the school can make a plan to support the student. If the student is already working with an outside mental health provider, the family may choose to have the student evaluated by them.

- c. *Seek a signed Release of Information granting permission to contact and discuss student's needs with the outside mental health provider, unless a release is already on file.*
- d. *School staff contact a SRO to make necessary arrangements if parents are refusing to come to the school.*

**Notes:**

**8. Prior to returning to classes the school counselor will discuss with parent/guardian and student a transition/safety plan to be implemented while student is in attendance or on school property.**

**a. Date and time of meeting**

**Attended by:**

**Student:**

**Parent/Guardian:**

**School Counselor:**

**Other: Title:**

**Other: Title:**

**Reviewed Student's Safety Plan:**

**b. Transition/School Safety plan (choose the options that best applies to the student:**

- a)  Check-in with a school staff member

*Staff Member:*

*Frequency of Check-in:*  Daily  Weekly  Bi-Weekly

- b)  Involve student in a group led by school counselor (i.e. social skills, friendship group, coping strategies)

- c)  Referral to Mental Health Provider

- d)  Referral to Youth Assistance Program

- e)  Supervised transportation to and from school:

- f)  Escort plan outlining all aspects of the day, including student drop off and pick up from school, restroom, lunch, passing periods, extracurricular activities:

- g)  Student shall remain under direct supervision for a determined amount of time

*Follow-up review scheduled for:*

- h)  If applicable, plan for student to attend field trips

- i)  Working with crisis liaison \_\_\_\_ (name) \_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_ (local health system) \_\_\_\_

- j)  Student added to Student Assistance Team

**9. Notify school personnel (i.e. classroom teachers) to be alert of specific behaviors or discussions based on information shared in the safety plan:**

**10. Long-term plan to monitor student risk once direct supervision lifted:** *As data is collected and deemed necessary, based on patterns of behavior and continued needs, please consider eligibility for a 504 plan or Special Education referral if this becomes a pattern or there is a medical diagnosis. Please consult with the school psychologist assigned to your building as well as Special Education Administrators as needed.*

**Notes:**

**11. Send completed form to the following Central office personnel as notification:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Re-Entry Protocol

Re-entry meetings are for students that have been out of school due to suicide ideation, suicide attempt, and/or psychological hospital treatment. This meeting will take place prior to the student's return to discuss systems of care/support and determine the best course of action to meet the needs of the student. The re-entry process is vital to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students who have previously attempted. This process reduces the risk of another attempt.



**Who should be at the re-entry meeting?** (not all of the below staff need to be at the meeting but do need to be looped into the coordination, planning, and final outcome of the re-entry meeting)

- School administrator
- Suicide Prevention Coordinator; School Counselor/Social Worker/Mental Health Provider
- Parent/Guardian and student, if parent/guardian deems ready
- Other appropriate attendees include: School nurse; school psychologist; outside family therapist/counselor; teacher; coach (someone that is a key support to the student)



**Purpose of re-entry meeting**

- Review family's course of action since becoming aware of suicide ideation
- Discuss the existing resources and supports in place for the student and family
- Discuss any additional supports or resources the family/student may need
- Family is encouraged to share any assessments/notes from outside therapy and/or services that the family obtained
- Family is encouraged to bring any recommendations from outside mental health providers and/or treatment facility so school can work to provide continuous care
- Discuss absences and missing homework/tests to begin developing a plan with the family and student to make-up any required assignments/tests
- Review the Safety Plan that was previously developed and make necessary adjustments. Discuss the below items to gauge if they need to be included in the revised Safety Plan.
  - o Will the student check-in before and after school?
  - o Will the student be supervised during passing periods?
  - o Will the student be supervised in the bathroom?
  - o Does the student need to be supervised at lunch?
  - o Does the student need a quiet area at lunch time? Is the cafeteria loud/ busy?
  - o How does the student access the nurse if they need to see the nurse?
  - o Who does the student feel the most comfortable talking to if they are feeling anxious/stressed/depressed?
  - o Does the student need supervision after school hours?
  - o How often will the Suicide Prevention Coordinator check-in with the student? *During these check-ins, a suicide risk monitoring tool will be used.*
  - o What is the duration of the safety plan?
- Fill out the "Safety Plan: Instructions for Teachers/Support Staff," provided on the next page.

Safety Plan: Instructions for Teachers/Support Staff (Template)

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Staff Member Preparing Safety Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (Student's name) has a Safety Plan. While the student is in your classroom or under your supervision, please follow the procedures marked below. This plan is confidential and will stay in place until further notice. If the student has permission to leave your class unsupervised to use the bathroom or visit another classroom, please monitor the time the student is gone. Call the office at extension \_\_\_\_\_ if you are concerned that the student has been gone too long. If he/she is visibly upset or expressing thoughts of unsafe behavior, call the office at extension \_\_\_\_\_. Please escort the student to the office or wait until the office can send an escort for the student. It is important to never allow the student to be unaccompanied when you are concerned about his/her wellbeing.

*Please remember to include this document with your sub notes when you are absent.*

[Insert items from the student's safety plan]

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

Thank you for all you do to support students!

Student's School Counselor: \_\_\_\_\_

## SAMPLE GUIDELINES FOR STAFF MEETINGS AFTER A SUICIDE

When a suicide completion occurs, a school needs to be ready to respond. The initial staff meeting (outlined below) should be held as soon as possible, ideally before school starts.

### Goals of Initial Meeting (allow at least one hour to do the following):

- Take attendance and make note of any staff who are not present and plan to reach out or contact those staff members
- Share accurate factual information about the death, honoring the family's request for privacy.
- Have a trained professional present that the meeting so that staff may access them for support if needed.
- Allow staff an opportunity to express their own reactions and grief; identify anyone who may need additional support and refer them to appropriate resources.
- Have substitute teachers available to replace any teachers who are too upset to teach (a task for the principal or designee).
- Remind staff of the school's policy or response following a student death and any considerations specifically for a suicide death.
- Share with staff how to handle parent inquiries and plans for communicating with parents, including who parents should contact for further information and resources.
- Explain plans for the day, how classroom meetings will be conducted, and locations of crisis counseling rooms or other supports that will be present in the building.
- Remind all staff of the following:
  - How they respond to the crisis can have a strong impact on their students. They need to project that they are in control and are concerned about their students' mental health, if their emotions become too strong encourage them to reach out to admin for support and classroom coverage.
  - They can play an important role in identifying changes in students' behavior. Discuss a plan for handling students who are having difficulty.
- Brief staff about identifying and referring at-risk students as well as the need to keep records of those efforts (letting school counselor know of students of concern).
- Remind staff to be on the lookout for rumors and to notify an individual leading the crisis response immediately if they hear rumors. Staff should not engage in discussions that may contribute to the spread of rumors.
- Remind staff to limit use of social media and to avoid tagging those who may be close to the incident. Furthermore, encourage staff to wait to post information so family, students, and staff can be made aware before learning about the incident on social media.
- Identify which Crisis Response Team member has been designated as the media spokesperson and instruct staff to refer all media inquiries to them.

## SAMPLE DEATH NOTIFICATION STATEMENT FOR STUDENTS

Depending on how the school wants to address the suicide death, they may want to make an announcement to students. This death notification statement should be shared with students in small groups, such as homerooms or advisories, not in assemblies or over loudspeakers.

### Option 1: When the Death Has Been Ruled a Suicide

"I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. I'm also very sad to tell you that the cause of death was suicide.

Many of you may also feel very sad. Others may feel other emotions such as anger or confusion. It's okay to feel whatever emotions you might be feeling. When someone takes their own life, it leads to a lot of questions, some of which may never be completely answered.

While we may never know why [NAME] ended [HIS/HER] life, we do know that suicide has many causes. In many cases, a mental health condition is part of it, and these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you're not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option.

Rumors may come out about what happened, but please don't spread them. They may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and [HIS/HER] family and friends. I'm going to do my best to give you the most accurate information as soon as I know it.

Each of us will react to [NAME]'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Some of us may have known [NAME] well, and some of us may not. But either way, we may have strong feelings. You might find it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork for a little while. On the other hand, you might find that focusing on school helps take your mind off what has happened. Either is okay.

I want you to know that your teachers and I are here for you. We also have counselors here to help us all cope with what happened. If you'd like to talk to one of them, just let me or one of your teachers know or look for the counselors in [NOTE SPECIFIC LOCATION] between classes or during lunch.

We are all here for you. We are all in this together, and the school staff will do whatever we can to help you get through this."

## Option 2: When the Cause of Death is Unconfirmed

"I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. The cause of death has not yet been determined.

We are aware that there has been some talk that this might have been a suicide death. Rumors may begin to come out, but please don't spread them. They may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and [HIS/HER] family and friends. I'm going to do my best to give you the most accurate information as soon as I know it.

Since the subject has been raised, I do want to take this chance to remind you that suicide, when it does occur, is very complicated. No one single thing causes it. But in many cases, a mental health condition is part of it, and these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you're not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option.

Each of us will react to [NAME]'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Right now, I'm feeling very sad, and many of you may feel sad too. Others may feel anger or confusion. It's okay to feel whatever emotions you might be feeling. Some of us may have known [NAME] well, and some of us may not. But either way, we may have strong feelings. You might find it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork for a little while. On the other hand, you might find that focusing on school helps take your mind off what has happened. Either is okay.

I want you to know that your teachers and I are here for you. We also have counselors here to help us all understand what happened. If you'd like to talk to one of them, just let me or one of your teachers know, or you can seek out the counselors in [NOTE SPECIFIC LOCATION] between classes or during your lunch. We are all here for you.

We are all in this together, and the school staff will do whatever we can to help you get through this."

### Option 3: When the Family Has Requested the Cause of Death Not Be Disclosed

“I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. The family has requested that information about the cause of death not be shared at this time.

We are aware that there has been some talk that this might have been a suicide death. Rumors may begin to come out, but please don’t spread them. They may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and [HIS/HER] family and friends. I’m going to do my best to give you the most accurate information as soon as I know it.

Since the subject has been raised, I do want to take this chance to remind you that suicide, when it does occur, is very complicated. No one single thing causes it. But in many cases, a mental health condition is part of it, and these conditions are treatable. It’s really important if you’re not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option.

Each of us will react to [NAME]’s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Right now, I’m feeling very sad, and many of you may feel sad too. Others may feel anger or confusion. It’s okay to feel whatever emotions you might be feeling. Some of us may have known [NAME] well, and some of us may not. But either way, we may have strong feelings. You might find it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork for a little while. On the other hand, you might find that focusing on school helps take your mind off what has happened. Either is okay.

I want you to know that your teachers and I are here for you. We also have counselors here to help us all understand what happened. If you’d like to talk to one of them, just let me or one of your teachers know, or you can seek out the counselors in [NOTE SPECIFIC LOCATION] between classes or during your lunch.

We are all here for you. We are all in this together, and the school staff will do whatever we can to help you get through this.”





## Further Information

This guide was developed as a part of the Suicide Learning Collaborative Toolkit. To find out more about suicide prevention in Indiana and nationally, please visit:

[In.gov/issp](http://In.gov/issp)  
[In.gov/isdh/21838.htm](http://In.gov/isdh/21838.htm)  
[Indiansuicideprevention.org](http://Indiansuicideprevention.org)  
[afsp.org](http://afsp.org)  
[sprc.org](http://sprc.org)

This information was found in SPRC's "After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools," which can be found here:  
<https://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/AfteraSuicideToolkitforSchools.pdf>

# Dos and Don'ts When Talking to Your Students about Suicide

## Youth Warning Signs

### If you see the following behavioral changes...

1. Withdrawal from or change in social connections or situations
2. Changes in sleep (increased or decreased)
3. Anger or hostility that seems out of character
4. Recent increased agitation or irritability

### .....then take these recommended steps right away:

1. Ask the student if they are having thoughts of suicide.
2. Express your concern about what you are observing in his or her behavior.
3. Listen attentively and nonjudgmentally.
4. Reflect what the student shares and let the student know he or she has been heard.
5. Tell the student that he or she is not alone.
6. Let the student know that help is available
7. If you or the student are concerned, guide him or her to additional professional help, or to call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

### If you see the following suicide risk signals....

1. Talking about or making plans for suicide
2. Expressing hopelessness about the future
3. Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress

### .....then take these recommended steps right away:

1. Do not leave the student alone and unsupervised. Make sure the student is in a secure environment supervised by caring adults until he or she can be seen by the school mental health contact.
2. Make sure the student is escorted to the school's mental health professional.
3. Provide any additional information to the school's mental health contact that will assist with the assessment of the student.

**Suicide is a difficult topic for most people to talk about. This tool suggests ways to talk about key issues that may come up when someone dies by suicide.**

#### Give accurate information about suicide.

Suicide is a complicated behavior. It is not caused by a single event.

In many cases, mental health conditions, such as depression, bipolar disorder, PTSD, or psychosis, or a substance use disorder are present leading up to a suicide. Mental health conditions affect how people feel and prevent them from thinking clearly. Having a mental health problem is actually common and nothing to be ashamed of. Help is available.

Talking about suicide in a calm, straightforward way does not put the idea into people's minds.

#### By saying....

"The cause of [NAME]'s death was suicide. Suicide is not caused by a single event. In many cases, the person has a mental health or substance use disorder and then other life issues occur at the same time leading to overwhelming mental and/or physical pain, distress, and hopelessness."

"There are effective treatments to help people with mental health or substance abuse problems or who are having suicidal thoughts."

"Mental health problems are not something to be ashamed of. They are a type of health issue."

#### Address feelings of responsibility.

Help students understand that they are not responsible for the suicide of the deceased.

Reassure those who feel responsible or think they could have done something to save the deceased.

#### By saying....

"This death is not your fault. We cannot always see the signs because a suicidal person may hide them."

"We cannot always predict someone else's behavior."

#### Do not focus on the method

Talking in detail about the method can create images that are upsetting and can increase the risk of imitative behavior by vulnerable individuals.

The focus should not be on how someone killed themselves but rather on how to cope with feelings of sadness, loss, anger, etc.

#### By saying....

"Let's talk about how [NAME]'s death has affected you and ways you can handle it."

"How can you deal with your loss and grief?"

#### Address blaming and scapegoating

It is common to try to answer the question "why?" after a suicide death. Sometimes this turns into blaming others for the death.

#### By saying....

"Blaming others or the person who died does not consider the fact that the person was experiencing a lot of distress and pain. Blaming is not fair and can hurt another person deeply."

#### Address anger.

Accept expressions of anger at the deceased and explain that these feelings are normal.

#### By saying....

"It is okay to feel angry. These feelings are normal, and it doesn't mean that you didn't care about [NAME]. You can be angry at someone's behavior and still care deeply about that person."

#### Promote help-seeking.

Encourage students to seek help from a trusted adult if they or a friend are feeling depressed.

#### By saying....

"Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness."

"We are always here to help you through any problem, no matter what. Who are the people you would go to if you or a friend were feeling worried or depressed or had thoughts of suicide?"

"If you are concerned about yourself or a friend, talk with a trusted adult."

## PARENT LETTER SCRIPT

In cases of either a student or staff member death by suicide, it is a wise idea to be in communication with parents. In the subsequent pages, there are a few different parent letter scripts, dependent on the ruling of the death and whether the family wants to disclose the cause of death.

### Option 1: Parent Letter Script When Cause of Death is Unconfirmed

Dear Families,

It is with a great deal of sadness that we have learned of the passing of [NAME], a former [ROLE] at [NAME] School. The cause of death is unconfirmed. Our crisis response team is working with building administrators to provide support to students and staff. We encourage you to speak with your student and have provided resources below. Additionally, we will have teachers conducting classroom meetings as well as our counselors available in the coming days and weeks. If you have questions, concerns or need additional support, please contact your child's school counselor.

Everyone processes grief differently and the reaction children may have to a traumatic event is often strongly influenced by the actions and support of the adults around them. Attached and below are additional resources to assist you in supporting your child(ren) during this difficult time.

1. **Children need factual, age appropriate information.** Control rumors and correct any myths they may have heard regarding the event and reactions to it. Limit exposure to news coverage of the event this evening and in the coming weeks. This can be traumatic for children.
2. **Provide repeated opportunities for children to talk.** Use it as an opportunity to talk about what they learned about their community and how people help each other in tough situations. Also make sure the child knows you are listening. Older children may want to journal.
3. **Normalize children's reactions and feelings.** Let them know that their feelings, behavior, etc. are common reactions, even for adults.
4. **Keep routines.** Return to your family's daily routines as soon as possible. This will decrease out of control feelings. Remind your child of what has not changed and most importantly that you have each other.
5. **Identify support systems.** Talk about the family plan for coping and recovery and how long it may take. Help children identify and/or reconnect with their support systems. This may be family members, school staff, coaches, etc.

Please know that supporting our students and staff during this difficult time is our top priority. We wish [NAME] family and friends comfort during this time.

Sincerely,

## Option 2: Parent Letter Script When Cause of Death is Suicide

Dear Families,

It is with a great deal of sadness that we have learned of the passing of [NAME], a former [ROLE] at [NAME] School. The cause of death was suicide. Suicide is a very complicated act. Although we may never know why [NAME] ended [HIS/HER] life, we do know that suicide has multiple causes. In many cases, a mental health condition is part of it. But these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you or your child are not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option. I am including some information that may be helpful to you in discussing suicide with your child.

Our crisis response team is working with building administrators to provide support to students and staff. We encourage you to speak with your student and have provided resources below.

Additionally, we will have teachers conducting classroom meetings as well as our counselors available in the coming days and weeks. If you have questions, concerns or need additional support, please contact your child's school counselor.

Everyone processes grief differently and the reaction children may have to a traumatic event is often strongly influenced by the actions and support of the adults around them. Attached and below are additional resources to assist you in supporting your child(ren) during this difficult time.

1. **Children need factual, age appropriate information.** Control rumors and correct any myths they may have heard regarding the event and reactions to it. Limit exposure to news coverage of the event this evening and in the coming weeks. This can be traumatic for children.
2. **Provide repeated opportunities for children to talk.** Use it as an opportunity to talk about what they learned about their community and how people help each other in tough situations. Also make sure the child knows you are listening. Older children may want to journal.
3. **Normalize children's reactions and feelings.** Let them know that their feelings, behavior, etc. are common reactions, even for adults.
4. **Keep routines.** Return to your family's daily routines as soon as possible. This will decrease out of control feelings. Remind your child of what has not changed and most importantly that you have each other.
5. **Identify support systems.** Talk about the family plan for coping and recovery and how long it may take. Help children identify and/or reconnect with their support systems. This may be family members, school staff, coaches, etc.

Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school. Please know that supporting our students and staff during this difficult time is our top priority. We wish [NAME] family and friends comfort during this time.

Sincerely,

### Option 3: Parent Letter Script When the Family has Requested the Cause of Death not be Disclosed

Dear Families,

It is with a great deal of sadness that we have learned of the passing of [NAME], a former [ROLE] at [NAME] School. Our crisis response team is working with building administrators to provide support to students and staff.

The family has requested that information about the cause of death not be shared at this time. We are aware there have been rumors that this was a suicide death. Since the subject has been raised, we want to take this opportunity to remind our community that suicide, when it does occur, is a very complicated act. No one single thing causes it. But in many cases, a mental health condition is part of it, and these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you or your child is not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option.

We encourage you to speak with your student and have provided resources below. Additionally, we will have teachers conducting classroom meetings as well as our counselors available in the coming days and weeks. If you have questions, concerns or need additional support, please contact your child's school counselor.

Everyone processes grief differently and the reaction children may have to a traumatic event is often strongly influenced by the actions and support of the adults around them. Attached and below are additional resources to assist you in supporting your child(ren) during this difficult time.

1. **Children need factual, age appropriate information.** Control rumors and correct any myths they may have heard regarding the event and reactions to it. Limit exposure to news coverage of the event this evening and in the coming weeks. This can be traumatic for children.
2. **Provide repeated opportunities for children to talk.** Use it as an opportunity to talk about what they learned about their community and how people help each other in tough situations. Also make sure the child knows you are listening. Older children may want to journal.
3. **Normalize children's reactions and feelings.** Let them know that their feelings, behavior, etc. are common reactions, even for adults.
4. **Keep routines.** Return to your family's daily routines as soon as possible. This will decrease out of control feelings. Remind your child of what has not changed and most importantly that you have each other.
5. **Identify support systems.** Talk about the family plan for coping and recovery and how long it may take. Help children identify and/or reconnect with their support systems. This may be family members, school staff, coaches, etc.

Please know that supporting our students and staff during this difficult time is our top priority. We wish [NAME] family and friends comfort during this time.

Sincerely,

## RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS

| Resource   | Description   | Method of Delivery | Target Audience  |
|--|---|--------------------|--|
| <p><b>2018 Suicide Prevention and Response: A Comprehensive Resource Guide for Indiana Schools</b><br/>Indiana Department of Education<br/><a href="https://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/sebw/suicide-resource-guide-indiana-schools-4.pdf">https://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/sebw/suicide-resource-guide-indiana-schools-4.pdf</a></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guide for Indiana schools on prevention, intervention, and postvention</li> <li>• Model school policy language</li> </ul>  | Toolkit            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School administration</li> </ul>                            |
| <p><b>Suicide Prevention among LGBT Youth: A Workshop for Professionals Who Serve Youth</b><br/>Suicide Prevention Resource Center<br/><a href="https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/suicide-prevention-among-lgbt-youth-workshop-professionals-who-serve-youth-0">https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/suicide-prevention-among-lgbt-youth-workshop-professionals-who-serve-youth-0</a></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A free kit of materials to help staff in schools, youth-serving agencies, and suicide prevention programs provide a workshop on suicide prevention among LGBT youth.</li> </ul>              | Toolkit            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School administration and youth-serving agencies</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools</b><br/>Suicide Prevention Resource Center<br/><a href="https://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/AfteraSuicideToolkitforSchools.pdf">https://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/AfteraSuicideToolkitforSchools.pdf</a></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full toolkit on the approach that schools should take to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention</li> </ul>  | Toolkit            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School administration</li> </ul>                            |
| <p><b>Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention: Model Language, Commentary, and Resources</b><br/>American Foundation for Suicide Prevention<br/><a href="https://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/AfteraSuicideToolkitforSchools.pdf">https://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/AfteraSuicideToolkitforSchools.pdf</a></p>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This document outlines several model school district policies around suicide</li> <li>• This can be paired with “After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools”</li> </ul>                          | Toolkit            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School administration</li> </ul>                            |
| <p><b>Equity in Mental Health Framework</b><br/>Equity in Mental Health Framework<br/><a href="https://equityinmentalhealth.org/framework/">https://equityinmentalhealth.org/framework/</a></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations for colleges and universities to fully support the mental health of students of color</li> <li>• How to apply a health-equity mindset to mental health frameworks</li> </ul> | Toolkit            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College and university administrators</li> </ul>            |

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|--|---|----------------|---|
| <p><b>Seize the Awkward Campus Toolkit</b><br/> American Foundation for Suicide Prevention<br/> <a href="https://seizetheawkward.org/docs/STA_Campus_Toolkit.pdf">https://seizetheawkward.org/docs/STA_Campus_Toolkit.pdf</a></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tips on how to help young adults and students who may be struggling with their mental health</li> <li>• Best practices to have supportive conversations about everyday challenges faced by students</li> </ul> | <p>Toolkit</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College and university administrators</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Preventing suicide: Role of high school mental health providers</b><br/> Suicide Prevention Resource Center<br/> <a href="http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/role-high-school-mental-health-providers-preventing-suicide-sprc-customized">http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/role-high-school-mental-health-providers-preventing-suicide-sprc-customized</a></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on recognizing and responding to suicide warning signs, resources about suicide prevention, and other information to help prevent suicide among students</li> </ul>                                | <p>Toolkit</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High school mental health providers</li> </ul>   |