Suicide Prevention:
Training programs for community members, teachers, school staff, and students

Training programs for community members

Publication date: 09/01/1992 http://wonder.cdc.gov/wonder/prevguid/p0000024/entire.htm

The goal of these programs is to train community members to identify young people at risk of suicidal behaviors and to refer them to appropriate sources of help. Most of these programs provide both training and informational materials for parents, teachers, counselors, health-care professionals, clergy, policemen and the general public.

Adolescent Suicide Awareness Program (ASAP)
Contact: Adolescent Suicide Awareness Program (ASAP)
Diane Ryerson, MSW, Director,
Counseling and Education Services
South Bergen Mental Health Center
516 Valley Brook Avenue
Lyndhurst, NJ 07071
(201) 935-3322

Targets: Police, clergy, emergency room personnel, staff of pediatricians' and family practice physicians' offices.
Years in operation: 9
Description: ASAP sponsors a basic training curriculum for police recruits, a 1.5-hour awareness program for all municipal and county police, and an intensive program for juvenile officers. A multitiered training program will be established for clergy, involving seminarians, parochial school teachers, funeral directors, and youth ministers. To supplement instructional units, a "Clergy Specific" information package will be developed and widely distributed. Police were trained in identifying, managing, and obtaining professional help for suicidal teenagers. Specific operating procedures were provided Clergy were trained in crisis intervention skills and increased information, especially in regard to identifying warning signs, will equip clergy with a focused, more effective approach to counseling troubled teens and their families.

Adolescent Suicide Awareness Program (ASAP) -- "Don't Say Goodbye" Media Campaign
Targets: Middle school and high school students, parents, educators, general public, dropouts.
Years in operation: 1
Description: Multimedia public mental health education campaign encourages teens and adults to recognize youths at risk and get them professional help by calling a county psychiatric crisis phone number. Phase 1: Set of six posters, wallet cards, brochures, print ads, and bill boards. Phase 2: Six TV and four radio spots.
Youth Suicide Prevention Program
Contact: Youth Suicide Prevention Program
   Evelyn Hatfield, Youth Suicide Prevention Specialist
   Prince William County Community Services Board
   Prevention Branch (PWCCSB-PB)
   8033 Ashton Avenue
   Manassas, VA 22110
   (703) 792-7730

Targets: Students, parents, professionals, and the general public of Prince William County.
Years in operation: 4
Description: This is a comprehensive community program aimed at promoting positive mental health attitudes. Program staff members train school personnel how to identify and help suicidal youths and help them to develop crisis teams. They will also conduct suicide prevention classes and provide postvention support when asked. Program staffers already work with junior and senior high schools and are starting to move into elementary schools.

There is also a community group on suicide prevention called the "Prince William Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition," whose activities include an annual "Love Life Day" and the providing of grants to schools to establish prevention activities. Another component is a student group ("Friends Are Needed" (FAN) Club) concerned with suicide prevention. School representatives attend training sessions to learn how to initiate suicide prevention programs in their schools. In addition, the coalition produces parent and teen directories of warning signs, actions to take, and sources of help, and is involved in legislative efforts to limit methods of committing suicide.

LivingWorks Education, Inc.
Contact: Bryan Tanney, M.D.
   LivingWorks Education, Inc.
   Suite 704 300 Meredith Road, NE
   Calgary, Alberta T2E 7A8
   Canada
   (403) 242-3397; FAX (403) 268-9201

Targets: Community members, employee assistance staff, mental health caregivers, police, corrections agency personnel, school personnel (at all levels of expertise).
Years in operation: 10
Description: The core of this program is the Intervention Workshop, originally modeled after the American Heart Association's 'Heart Saver' Program. Based on an adult education model of continuing professional education, the program is designed for all caregiver groups, including, but not limited to, often under-served community "gatekeepers." Its content is fully described in the Suicide Intervention Skills Workshop of the California Department of Mental Health also included in this chapter. A "Training for Trainers" course certifies trainers to present the workshop and other components of the program. Other activities are integrated with the workshop presentation and include sensitization and awareness education, bereavement intervention training, advanced treatment seminars, and refresher training.

The core program is a 2-day workshop on emergency first aid in suicide intervention. The first day covers issues related to attitudes and knowledge about suicide. The second day focuses on modeling and practicing intervention skills.

The trainer's program is a 5-day course on instructing the Intervention Workshop. Certified trainers are provided with trainer handbooks, manuals, workshop handouts, audiovisual aids, and ongoing consultation support.

Sensitization materials for community-wide distribution include pamphlets and an audiovisual.

The Awareness Program, intended for a general public audience, can vary from an hour to a day. Different modules cover definition of suicide, magnitude of the problem, warning signs, first aid hints, and policy and program issues. Interested presenters are provided a manual complete with suggested scripts and slides. There is also instructional design information for building additional topic modules.

The bereavement training and the advanced treatment seminars and workshops are 1-day sessions. Refresher training incorporates workshop activities, a helper's handbook, and various self-directed learning activities using audiovisuals.

Suicide Intervention Skills Workshop
Contact: David Neilsen, MSW, Program Coordinator,
California Department of Mental Health
Suicide Prevention Project Division of Community Programs
Room 250 1600 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 323-9296

Targets: Community members, mental health personnel, school personnel, social services personnel, and law enforcement officers.

Years in operation: 5

Description: The "Suicide Intervention Skills Workshop" is identical to the "Intervention Workshop" of LivingWorks Education, Inc., Calgary, Alberta, also described in this chapter. The curriculum features a series of large and small group activities, minilectures, audiovisuals, and role playing exercises designed to help people increase both their abilities and level of confidence when working with suicidal individuals. The workshop includes 14 hours of learning experiences. The first day focuses upon the examination of caregivers’ attitudes and specific assessment skills. The second day concentrates upon intervention strategies and skill building through the use of large group simulations and small group role plays that involve all participants.

The workshop presents a forum where participants are encouraged to examine suicide intervention from a number of perspectives involving their attitudes, knowledge, and skills. The workshop presents a specific intervention model with detailed descriptions of key tasks and techniques. The training emphasizes how caregivers are to engage persons at risk while doing accurate assessments for risk. A key feature of the intervention model is the exploration of ambivalence and how this exploration assists in the discussion of resources and the formation of an appropriate action plan to prevent suicide.

An important objective of the workshop is to increase the participants' awareness of community resources and networks, and their value. Participants learn about the range of resources available to at-risk persons in their communities, from the self-help groups to the most intensive levels of hospital care.

---

Center for Indian Youth Program Development

Contact: Sally Davis, Director
Center for Indian Youth Program Development
Division of School Health
University of New Mexico School of Medicine
Albuquerque, NM 87131
(505) 277-4462

Targets: Native American youth.

Years in operation: 8

Description: The University of New Mexico (UNM) and the Indian Health Service formed a partnership to develop a teen health project in response to input from communities. Program staffers include nurse practitioners, health educators, substance abuse educators, psychologists, youth counselors, and other support personnel. In designing the program, they aimed for accessibility, free comprehensive services, teenage participation in planning and carrying out the program, and community support and participation. The program is not medically oriented; instead, it focuses on promoting physical and mental health. Teacher training uses a substance abuse curriculum that includes a section on suicide. Related activities include Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), Teen Health Awareness Days, Adventure Clubs, improvisational Teen Life Theater, intergenerational events, and a visit to a hospital emergency room that is part of an effort to train students as peer leaders in alcohol and substance abuse prevention (ASAP).

Center services are available on-site at four rural New Mexico high schools. In addition, the program provides technical assistance to other schools and community groups. Services provided by the Center include: Mental health counseling; Alcohol abuse evaluation, counseling, and education; Suicide prevention; Health education and promotion; Physical examinations; Pregnancy testing; Family planning; Programs to reduce school absenteeism and truancy.
Jail Suicide Prevention Program
Contact: Lindsay M. Hayes, M.S., Assistant Director
Jail Suicide Prevention Program
National Center on Institutions and Alternatives
40 Lantern Lane
Mansfield, MA 02048
(508) 337-8806

Targets: Staff in jails, detention centers, and police lockups.

Years in operation: 14

Description: The National Center on Institutions and Alternatives determined that, by conducting an intake screening, properly trained correctional personnel can effectively assess inmates' suicidal potential, both at the booking stage and during subsequent phases of the inmates' incarceration. In addition to assessing inmates' suicidal potential, staff members using intake screening can detect any medical or mental health problem, determine alcohol or drug intoxication, and address classification needs. This is a high-risk population. On the basis of the results of the national study of jail suicides, researchers estimated that the suicide rate of inmates in detention facilities is about nine times greater than that of the general population (Hayes and Rowan, 1988). Suicide is the leading cause of death in jails.

Training consists of an 8-hour suicide prevention program for jail and lockup officers that will enable them to identify, manage, and serve high-risk mentally ill and suicidal inmates. Advanced training is provided to jail administrators in the division and to corrections staff. Technical assistance is offered on a national basis.

Bongar, B., and Harmatz, M. Clinical psychology graduate education in the study of suicide: availability, resources, and importance. Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior 1991;21:231-244.


Suggested Additional Reading

Ramsay, R.F., Cooke, M.A., Lange, W.A. Alberta suicide prevention training programs: a retrospective comparison with Rothman's developmental resource model. Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior 1990;24:335-351.

Training programs for teachers and school staff/students


BRIDGES (Building Skills to Reach Suicidal Youth)
Contact: Building Skills to Reach Suicidal Youth
Charsetta Sutton, ACSW, BCD
Karen Dunne-Maxim, R.N., M.S.
UMDNJ--CMHC
671 Hoes Lane
Piscataway, NJ 08855-1392
(908) 463-4109
Targets: School personnel (guidance staff, teachers), Agency staff who work with youth
Years in operation: 7
Description: School personnel training lasts 16 hours (2 days). BRIDGES trains school personnel to accurately distinguish students at risk for suicidal behavior from those who are depressed. Personnel learn to assess students' risks, to intervene when appropriate, to work with families and peers, to follow referral procedures, and to develop school policy and procedures with regard to suicide prevention and postvention. No formal evaluations have yet been made of this program.

Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS)
Contact: Roberta Chuzie
Student Assistance Services Station Square
200 Commerce Court Building, 2nd Floor Pittsburgh, PA 15219
(412) 394-5837
Targets: All buildings at the secondary level in all school districts.
Years in operation: 6
Description: The Student Assistance Program (SAP) focuses on early identification, intervention, and referral of at-risk students to community resources for assessment and treatment. A SAP core team within a school building consists of six school personnel trained to identify and refer at-risk students to community resources. Two service-provider representatives (one mental health and one drug and alcohol expert) train with the core team and serve as ad hoc members on the team. SAP team members do not diagnose or offer treatment to students; instead, they refer them to appropriate community assessment and treatment resources. There is a direct link between schools and local mental health and drug and alcohol service providers.

SAP team members attend an initial 5-day residential training course: 2 days of lectures; 2 days of exercises, role-playing, and practicing intervention models to establish team roles and responsibilities; and 1 day of questions, reinforcement, and planning for the creation and implementation of individual SAPs.

STAR -- Services for Teens At Risk
Contact: Dr. David Brent, Director
Services for Teens At Risk (STAR)
WPIC (Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic)
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 624-5211
Targets: School personnel, at-risk youth.
Years in operation: 4 (for both the Outreach and Outpatient Clinic programs).
Description: STAR Center offers three programs designed specifically to help school personnel identify and refer at-risk youths.

Level 1: Administrators, teachers, counselors, and others who are in daily contact with students learn
to identify potential risk factors, recognize behavior patterns of adolescents who may possibly become suicidal, and follow referral procedures.

*Level 2*: During a 2-day workshop, school personnel learn to evaluate a youth's level of risk and to work effectively with families, students, and mental health agencies.

*Level 3*: Trains in-house personnel to continue Level 1 training in their school.

STAR Center also works to implement programs in communities and schools immediately following a suicide. Teams from STAR Center conduct postvention sessions that are designed to prevent further suicides through individual student screening, small group discussions, and education. In addition, STAR Center offers outpatient clinical treatment for adolescents at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic (WPIC).

**Suicide Prevention Center Programs**

Contact: Linda Mates, LPCC  
Executive Director  
Suicide prevention Center, Inc.  
PO Box 1393  
Dayton, OH 45401  
(513) 297-9096

Targets: Students (junior high and high school), teachers & staff.  
Years in operation: 10

Description: The Suicide Prevention Center (SPC) provides training as part of a broad range of crisis support Services, including a 24-hour crisis hotline, training of professionals (teachers, service providers, clergy, physicians, police), and a crisis response team for postvention work for individuals or groups. The program provides in-service training on recognition of depression and suicidal behavior; short-term crisis intervention; school and community resources; and factual information about suicide. Specific programs operating as part of Project Lifesaver are:

*Staying Alive*: A program that targets minorities and uses other community members, such as barbers and hairstylists.

*Finding Hope*: Training program for parents.

*Life Saver III*: A 3-year pilot program training undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students (teachers, administrators, school counselors, and nurses).

**Crisis Intervention**

Contact: Dr. J.L. DeChurch  
Executive Director  
Division of Student Services  
Dade County Public Schools  
1444 Biscayne Boulevard, Suite 202  
Miami, FL 33132  
(305) 995-7315

Targets: All students.  
Years in operation: 5

Description: Dade County established a Department of Teenage Pregnancy and Suicide Prevention in 1987, which in turn became the Department of Crisis Intervention, whose purpose is to prepare staff at the district, region, and school levels to identify, assist, and refer students at risk. The department trains "crisis care core teams" in every school to counsel staff and the community in times of crisis. A hotline is available to assist administrators, counselors, and other support staff. Training of crisis core teams in the schools is done by the District Crisis Team, which consists of one counselor and one psychologist. Training consists of a 3-hour program. Crisis teams are present in all schools; this is a county-mandated requirement. School staff includes counselors, teachers, social workers, occupational specialists, college advisors, psychologists, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, students, peer counselors, and parents.
**Project SOAR (Suicide: Options, Awareness, Relief)**

Contact: Project SOAR  
Judie Smith, MA  
Specialist in psychological Social Services  
Dallas Independent School District  
1401 South Akard  
Dallas, TX 75215  
(214) 565-6700

Target: Teachers, staff, and counselors.  
Years in operation: 3

Description: Project SOAR is a comprehensive program that covers prevention, intervention, and postvention. Prevention consists of suicide awareness lessons for teachers and staff. Intervention consists of training school counselors in all secondary and elementary schools in risk assessment of potential suicides through personal verbal interviews. A crisis team does postvention for students and teachers. There is also a peer support system and a section called Quest on esteem building. A committee of community mental health professionals advises the suicide and crisis management program.

An 18-hour course was designed to train one school counselor from each high school and middle school to become a primary caregiver. Caregivers coordinate suicide prevention efforts in their local building and conduct the initial intervention when a student threatens or attempts suicide. To minimize the disruption of their ongoing job responsibilities, the 180 primary caregivers were selected to receive training over 4 months.

All other elementary and secondary school counselors who are not designated as the primary caregiver receive 6 hours of instruction. All counselors, including the primary caregivers, receive 3 hours of follow-up training each year. The trainers, members of the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) Psychological/Social Services Crisis Team, are always available for consultation. A school psychologist or home school coordinator will assist with high-risk cases. The course was adapted for use by other student services personnel: school psychologists, home school coordinators, parent ombudsmen, special education crisis staff, nurses, and drug counselors.

The professional staff of the DISD includes 9,600 employees made up of teachers (83%), professional support personnel (8%), campus administrators (5%), and central office administrators. An additional 5,400 employees provide support services, such as maintenance, cafeteria help, and transportation.

The objectives of the course are to examine attitudes toward suicide, gain knowledge about crisis theory and the dynamics of suicide, sharpen skills of empathy and active listening, and learn a counseling model for crisis intervention. The goal for the training is to help the school counselor develop the skills of a crisis counselor. The training program will provide instruction on how to identify students who may be at risk for suicide, assess the level of that risk, provide crisis intervention counseling, complete and file a report with the DISD Psychological/Social Services Department, and refer the at-risk student to a mental health agency or private therapist as needed.

**Adolescent Suicide Prevention Program**

Contact: Adolescent Suicide Prevention Program  
Myra Herbert, LCSW, Coordinator  
Social Work Services  
Special Education Department  
Fairfax Public Schools  
10310 Layton Hall Drive  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
(703) 246-7745

Targets: School personnel  
Years in operation: 8

Description: The aim of this program is to help teachers and school staff become aware of and able to identify suicide-prone youths. The program includes a crisis management plan for schools to use in handling the aftermath of suicides and other crises that affect both the staff and student populations. The plan involves community agencies as well as school personnel.

Related components include sections in the health and family life education curricula that begin in the fourth grade. These sections cover a variety of affective and mental health issues in the early grades and extend to suicide discussion.
in the higher grades. Students can take an elective course for credit in the Peer Helper Program in which the same issues are discussed in greater detail. Workshops that involve both school and community resources are also offered for the parents.

Suicide awareness and prevention training is given over a 2-day period to faculty in high schools and secondary schools, and in-service sessions are held periodically.

**Weld County Suicide Prevention Program**  
Contact: Weld County Suicide Prevention Program  
Susy Ruof, M.A.  
5290 Mesquite Court  
Johnstown, CO 80534  
(303) 587-2336

Targets: Students, school staff, parents, community members.  
Years in operation: 6

Description: This program develops crisis teams for schools (from in-place staff) and a student curriculum for grades 3-12. The training acquaints the crisis team with the signs of suicidal behavior in students and teaches interviewing skills and counseling techniques for dealing with suicidal students and their parents. The training also addresses legal issues changes in confidentiality, documentation, public relations, team structure to reduce individual stress, procedures and policies, interagency agreements, suicide contagion and postvention, working with the media, and safety factors in working with students. The student curriculum varies, depending on the grade, but mainly consists of information about depression and its role in suicidal thoughts, how and where to get help for one's self or a friend, and how to develop coping or problem-solving skills.

The crisis team members undergo extensive training (30 hour) in suicide awareness, counseling techniques, and methods and resources for help and referral. A 1-hour training session is provided each year to all school staff to give them a basic understanding and an awareness of the issue and of what they can do. An additional 4-hour training session is given to all administrators on legal issues, policies, and procedures.

References: