

Suicide Response Resources

Section B: the first 24 hours

Action Checklist

The list below outlines the key actions that schools can undertake to respond to and recover from a death by suicide. Further detail about these actions is provided throughout the toolkit.

Section B: The first 24 hours

- ☐ Convene the ERT. Refer to your postvention plan or department guidelines, and modify the plan as required for the circumstances.
- ☐ Identify any ERT staff who are impacted and need to change responsibilities or opt out of managing the response.
- ☐ Contact relevant mental health services for support.
- ☐ Inform staff — in person if possible. Contact staff who aren't on site. Don't talk about or describe the method of suicide.
- ☐ Identify and plan support for young people at increased risk of suicide.
- ☐ Identify and support high-risk young people.
- ☐ Set up a support room for young people.
- ☐ Inform students in small groups via a script. Don't describe the method of suicide. Note any absent students or any students who are very distressed.
- ☐ Inform families. Include information relating to help services. Don't describe the method of suicide.
- ☐ Inform the wider community as appropriate — for example, other schools or sporting clubs.
- ☐ Nominate a media liaison ERT member. Contact the media liaison adviser in the central office of your relevant education authority. Plan a response to any media enquiries.
- ☐ Plan a response for social media.
- ☐ Ensure staff have support within the school, and access to external professional advice where required.

Convene the Emergency Response Team (ERT)

The ERT is typically led by the principal and consists of six to eight people. It should include:

- the assistant principal/s
- at least one member of the school wellbeing team
- any relevant health or education sector critical incident professionals.

Collectively, the team ideally has:

- experience with critical incident management.
- authority within the school community
- good interpersonal skills under stressful conditions
- a strong understanding of and experience in student wellbeing.

If your school has developed a postvention plan, you will already have identified the members of the ERT. It's important to consider whether nominated staff are appropriate in each circumstance. Staff should have the option to opt out if they're impacted by the death or feel unable to undertake the responsibilities assigned to them.

If you don't have this team in place already, identify the most suitable members as soon as possible. The ERT should meet within 24 hours of the suicide to implement the postvention plan (or establish the plan, if there's not an existing one).

Planning tip: resource kit

The postvention plan should include a resource kit. Ideally, this should be updated every year and include:

- ✓ an up-to-date schedule of classes
- ✓ an up-to-date list of students enrolled
- ✓ emergency telephone numbers of all ERT members
- ✓ emergency telephone numbers of all staff
- ✓ contact details of external mental health professionals or services
- ✓ contact details of key people in the local community such as family groups and religious leaders.

The ERT should also ensure that:

- no single member of staff assumes the full burden of responsibility
- the wellbeing of the ERT members is considered
- all members are made aware they can opt out of the ERT at any time.

Communicate with relevant mental health professionals

Your response will be greatly assisted by the immediate support of mental health professionals. This will also aid the referral process for any young people who are identified as high-risk and in need of additional assessment and mental health support.

Planning tip: develop relationships

Postvention collaboration between schools and mental health professionals is greatly enhanced by existing relationships. Consider contacting local services when you develop your postvention plan. This may include mental health professionals from the relevant education body, Be You team members, your local headspace centre and the local child and adolescent mental health service.

Mental health professionals may be able to work alongside the school to:

- attend to the immediate counselling needs of affected young people
- attend to the immediate counselling needs of affected staff
- assist in the identification of other vulnerable young people
- assess young people at risk
- manage referrals from families and staff
- provide information sessions to students
- liaise with hospital staff and the media
- communicate and coordinate support with other relevant services.

Inform staff

Ideally, an initial staff briefing should be held before school commences in the morning. However, there may not be enough time to hold the meeting before students have begun to hear the news through word-of-mouth, text messaging or social media. If this happens, the ERT leader should first verify the accuracy of the reports and then notify staff of the death through the school's predetermined crisis alert system (such as email or calls to classroom phones). Remember that information about the cause of death should be withheld until the family has been consulted.

Note: In some cases, only the ERT will know that the death was by suicide, and it should not be communicated to all staff. However, if the student body is speculating about suicide, it is appropriate to acknowledge this and talk about suicide as a general topic. If you are unsure how to do this, talk to the ERT leader or your Be You team.

Arrange the first staff briefing

The briefing should occur before students are formally informed but after the ERT have met to implement the postvention plan. The purpose of this briefing is to inform staff of relevant information regarding the suicide and those affected; giving enough detail to enable staff to contain rumours and support young people but avoid details of the method of suicide.

The first staff briefing should:

- Introduce the ERT.
- Identify an ERT contact person who staff should go to with any information or questions.
- Develop a script to inform staff of the suicide and ensure communication is consistent (you can find a sample script in the Complete Toolkit). Ensure the wording is adjusted to reflect how the family have requested the death be referred to.
- Share accurate information about the suicide as per the script, including the bereaved family's wishes about how it's communicated.
- Discuss the principals of postvention, including the school's role, the impact of suicide contagion and the importance of ensuring that suicide is neither glamourised nor a topic that can't be discussed.
- Advise staff to share any information they become aware of with the ERT and not ask young people for information about the suicide.
- Advise staff to forward items of the young person's work to a nominated member of the ERT.

- Identify an ERT contact person for media enquiries.
- Explain plans for the coming days at school, including: the location and purpose of a support room; external supports available on site; changes in routine or responsibilities; changes to monitoring and supporting young people, including attendance — all unexplained absences should be followed up immediately, including staff absences; identifying, supporting and referring young people who are vulnerable or at risk; informing students of the death; informing families and the school community of the death; managing internal and external communication to the school community, and how phone enquiries will be managed.

Be sure to notify any staff who are on leave or not present at the staff briefing.

This includes regular casual staff, support staff, canteen staff, tutors, volunteers, sports coaches, out-of-school-hours-care staff, bus drivers and boarding house staff.

Regular staff briefings

Ideally, staff should meet at the beginning and end of the working day following the suicide.

This allows for:

- communication about relevant information and decisions made by the ERT
- time for staff to provide feedback and ask questions
- time for staff to express their own grief and reactions
- time for the ERT to identify any staff who may need additional support.

This structure also contributes to a sense of collegiality and shared responsibility, which helps protect the wellbeing of staff.

Staff should be provided with:

- Information on grief, how to offer support, how to manage a safe discussion about suicide and signs to watch out for.
- Sources of support they can access for themselves at school and outside of school.
- An option to leave for the day rather than return to work. Ensure staff have appropriate supports if they choose to go home.
- A script if asked to inform students about the death (see a sample script in the Complete Toolkit).
- Guidance for front office staff, as families may contact the school about the death before receiving official communication from the school. Front office staff should be guided on how to respond to key questions and distress.
- An option to opt out of tasks if they're feeling distressed and overwhelmed. Don't require staff to inform students of the death if they don't feel able to do this. Staff who had relationship with the young person may not feel able to support other young people at this time, and alternative staff may need to undertake these responsibilities.

The end-of-day staff briefing should:

- offer verbal appreciation of staff
- review the day's challenges and successes
- offer opportunities debrief, share experiences, express concerns and ask questions
- facilitate checking in with staff to assess whether anyone needs additional support
- disseminate any further information regarding the suicide and funeral arrangements
- discuss plans for the next day
- remind staff of the importance of self-care.

Consider the impact of this news on staff

Where possible, the most-affected staff, or staff with vulnerability, should be informed individually or in small groups. This is particularly important if the young person had been engaged in school counselling. Consider extra supports for these staff members.




Compile a list of all staff members who had close contact with the young person or who may be at high-risk of distress for other reasons.

A nominated ERT member should:

- check in with them to see if they need additional support
- organise onsite counselling in an appropriate location
- encourage them to seek appropriate support
 - this may be internal or external to the school and formal or informal
- arrange for several substitute teachers to be on hand to provide rotating support in case teachers need to take time out of their classrooms or wish to attend the funeral.

Assign a member of the ERT as responsible for monitoring all staff wellbeing, absences and support needs.

Be You Fact Sheets

-  Staff grief after suicide
-  Family liaison, funerals and memorials after a suicide
-  Staff wellbeing

Identify young people at risk

After a suicide, one of your main responsibilities is to ensure the process of identifying, supporting, referring and monitoring at-risk young people is well understood and effective.

In the first 24 hours:

- develop a list of the most impacted young people, young people who may be at risk of suicide and young people who are vulnerable
- ensure that all those identified are monitored, supported and their risk considered
- refer anyone considered at high risk of suicide for a risk assessment
- ensure staff are aware of the school's referral processes.

Request a mental health professional, school wellbeing staff member or staff member trained in school-based risk assessments to meet with you to help with this work from the outset.

Which young people may be most impacted and at increased risk?

This information will help you identify and develop a list of young people who may be most impacted or at increased risk.

Who's at risk of suicide?

Research shows that a wide range of biological, psychological and social factors are associated with an increased risk of suicide. Risk factors can be things that can change (for example, substance abuse) or things that can't change (for example, a family history of suicide).

Of the many complex factors that influence a young person's reaction to life events, the following may contribute to suicidal behaviour and are therefore considered suicide risk factors (at any time, not only following a suicide):

- mental health conditions
- being male (although females are more likely to think about, plan and attempt suicide)
- identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex
- identifying as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young person
- family discord, violence or abuse
- family history of suicide or death by suicide of a close friend
- alcohol or other substance abuse
- social or geographic location
- financial stress
- bereavement or loss
- prior suicide attempt
- self-harm.

Suicide contagion

Suicide contagion is when one suicidal act within a school, community or geographic area increases the likelihood that others will attempt or die by suicide.

While it's a rare phenomenon, young people seem to be more vulnerable to suicide contagion than older people. This may be because young people identify more strongly with their peers and adolescence is a period of increased vulnerability to mental health conditions, which is one of the strongest risk factors for suicide.

One of the factors thought to contribute to suicide contagion is the glamourising or romanticising of suicide that can occur in the process of communicating about a suicide death. This refers to actions or messages that may inadvertently make suicide seem desirable to other vulnerable young people.

It's common for people to remember the positive things about someone who has died recently and to focus less on the difficulties they may have been having prior to their death. While this may be well meaning, it has the potential to encourage suicidal thoughts and behaviour in vulnerable young people. Care needs to be taken not to give the impression that suicide was a positive outcome for the young person.

To reduce the risk of suicide contagion, schools have the important task of ensuring suicide isn't glamourised. However, not speaking about suicide is equally problematic. It can mean that young people miss the opportunity to receive important education about mental health and suicide, and inadvertently discourage people from seeking help.

What's more, suicide contagion is also more likely to occur when observers identify with the deceased, so oversimplified messages about why someone suicided should be avoided. Such messages may contribute to other vulnerable young people's increased identification with the deceased person.

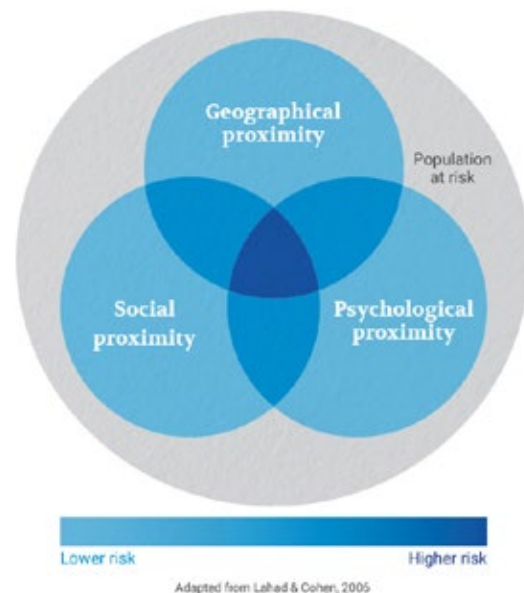
The way the school communicates about suicide is therefore of critical importance.

Be You Fact Sheets

- Supporting young people after suicide
- Grief: how young people respond to suicide

Who's at risk of suicide contagion?

The Circles of Vulnerability Model can help you to determine the impact of the death on members of your school community.



A population at risk refers to those already at risk of suicide (discussed above).

Geographical proximity refers to those who have witnessed the death, were exposed to it or had contact with the person shortly before they died. Suicide contagion can also occur via the internet, mobile phones and the mass media. Social media can substantially broaden the exposure and impact of the suicide.

Psychological proximity refers to those who relate to the deceased through cultural connections, shared experiences or perceive themselves to be similar to the deceased in some way.

Social proximity refers to the relationship someone had with the deceased, including family, friends, social circles and romantic partners. It's about how close someone feels to the deceased. Even if they don't appear to have had a relationship with the person who died, a young person's perception of closeness (for example, feeling close to the person because they travelled on the same bus together for years, even if they never spoke) has been found to significantly influence their level of risk.

List young people who are impacted or already considered at risk

This may include:

- siblings of the deceased
- young people who witnessed the death
- young people with a history of a suicide attempt/s
- young people who are (or have been) accessing mental health services
- young people known to be struggling with grief or trauma related to other events (such as deaths, accidents, catastrophes, family breakdown or emotional, physical or sexual abuse)
- young people in a severe state of distress.

List other young people who may be vulnerable or significantly impacted

This can be done with the help of staff, students and families, and may include:

- close friends of the deceased
- the romantic partner of the deceased or persons with a romantic interest in the deceased
- friends or a romantic partner who attend other schools (this may be best followed up by counsellor-to-counsellor communication if the young person is likely to need specialised support)
- friends or acquaintances who communicated with the deceased in any fashion in the hours before their death
- young people expressing guilt about 'messages' they were given by the deceased but didn't act on or share with an adult
- young people who may have had negative interactions with the deceased
- young people who may have been involved in activities with the deceased (such as peer groups, chess club or SRC)
- young people with a perceived closeness to the deceased, even if they don't appear to have had a relationship with them.

List young people who belong to higher risk groups

Suicide is a difficult topic for many people; however, for young people who belong to an identified high-risk group, additional considerations are required.

It's important that schools:

- create a supportive environment for any young person identified as at higher risk
- encourage and facilitate help-seeking
- when developing your list of young people at risk, consider that those identifying within the groups discussed below may or may not be at higher risk
- don't highlight publicly that those who identify within these groups are at increased risk of suicide; rather, discussions should highlight that minority groups are likely to experience additional stressors.

Culturally diverse attitudes and beliefs

It's important to consider culturally diverse attitudes and beliefs about suicide — both in the deceased young person's family and among those impacted by the death — and the implications of these, especially in relation to risk. You can seek consultation and advice from the bereaved family, appropriate service providers or community elders about cultural, religious and family practices relevant to the death and grieving process.

It's also helpful to consider and try to mitigate any cultural barriers to help-seeking.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities hold well-established cultural beliefs, protocols, customs and practices in relation to death, the deceased and the grieving period after someone passes away. Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 'Sorry Business' is the term used to refer to the period of mourning, activities and cultural practices that occur after the loss of a loved one.

Adhering to cultural practices and traditions is an important part of grieving and can reduce distress for family, friends and communities affected by grief.

Cultural practices and beliefs in relation to Sorry Business can vary between groups, and may vary depending on the location of the community and where families traditionally come from.

Australia is a large nation represented by hundreds of diverse traditional groups, and each group has its own practices, ceremonies and customs. It's important to consider these culturally diverse beliefs when responding to suicide — both in the deceased young person's family and among those impacted by the death — and any implications of these, especially in relation to risk.

It may be helpful to:

- seek consultation from the bereaved family about their cultural, religious and family practices relevant to the death and their grieving processes
- consider consulting with a cultural elder from the local community for further guidance and understanding
- consider consulting with an external local service provider who can provide some advice and support regarding the cultural practices relevant to the local community
- specifically consider the importance of cultural funeral rituals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and prepare the school community if relevant.

It's also helpful to consider and try to mitigate any cultural barriers to help-seeking.

Support high-risk young people

The responsibility for supporting and responding to high-risk young people depends on staff members' relationships with young people and their role at the school. However, during this time, all staff members who are approached by or come across a distressed young person should:

- listen in a non-judgmental and empathic way
- remain with them if they're highly distressed
- encourage them to talk to a trusted adult
- refer them to the school wellbeing team or the nominated ERT member.

All young people identified as potentially high-risk following the suicide should:

- receive initial support from a member of the school wellbeing team
- undergo an individual risk assessment.
- If they're assessed as at-risk, they should:
- receive follow-up support from the wellbeing team, who can refer them to an external mental health service if appropriate
- be monitored to ensure they are receiving appropriate support.

Asking about risk

If you're worried that a young person might be at risk of suicide, it's important to create an opportunity to talk to them directly about your concerns in a calm and non-judgmental manner. It can feel uncomfortable asking someone directly about suicidal thoughts or plans, but it's necessary to check whether a person is at risk and how imminent that risk is. Asking directly is often a relief for young people as it allows them to communicate openly and seek assistance.

Anyone can ask about suicidal thoughts

However, only those trained in suicide risk assessments should conduct them. If a young person indicates they're thinking about suicide, empathise, acknowledge their distress and refer them to appropriate help. For example, you could say, "I'm so sorry to hear that you are feeling so bad. Things must be really hard for you now. But I believe that you can feel better with the right help. I'd like to take you to [\[the school counsellor\]](#) to have a chat. Is that OK with you?"

Immediate risk

If you believe a young person is at immediate or high risk of attempting suicide, you or an appropriate staff member should:

- stay with them (or arrange for supervision) until they can be seen and assessed
- contact their family as soon as possible
- remove access to methods of suicide or harm (such as sharp objects, medications, alcohol or drugs)
- contact an appropriate local mental health service, call 000 or take them to the emergency department.

Be You Fact Sheets



Supporting young people after suicide



Responding after a suicide attempt

Set up a support room for young people

A support and reflection room is a quiet space set up by the ERT following a suicide.

It is:

- on site at the school
- open during school hours only
- set up on the first day after the death, if possible
- a place for young people to go to receive support and have some quiet time to reflect
- a safe, supervised location where young people's grief and needs can be expressed, responded to and monitored.

Room resources

Where possible, a support room should:

- be set up in a small to medium-sized room
- be private and easy to access
- provide protection from noise, bright light and high student traffic
- contain items such as water, tissues, cushions, bean bags, pens, paper, drawing materials, games and playing cards
- contain a sign-in sheet for students accessing the room, enabling the school to check against the attendance role and identify young people who may require additional support
- contain information about appropriate support services.

You could also include a memorial book.

Room supervision

- At all times, the room should be supervised by staff members (preferably with a wellbeing background).
- Discuss and define the roles of each staff member when setting up the room. For example, one staff member allocated to the sign-in sheet, one 'floating' in the room to offer support as required, and one acting as a 'bridge' between the room and the rest of the school.
- Supervising staff members should be confident in managing a large group of distressed students, have an engaging style and have student wellbeing skills.
- The room's coordinator should be familiar with school processes related to student wellbeing.
- Ensure staff have a way to communicate with the ERT (for example, a mobile phone).
- Have wellbeing staff (such as counsellors, the wellbeing coordinator or student support service officers) available to see individual young people in a separate and private space. These staff members shouldn't be responsible for the coordination of the room, so they can freely provide individual support if needed.

Room processes

Before opening the room, develop clear and consistent processes.

Consider:

- the maximum number of young people the room can accommodate and options for managing a larger number
- how to prioritise access if demand is higher than anticipated
- how young people will access the room (for example, using your ordinary leave class process).




Once the room is open:

- Welcome each young person into the room and provide information. Let them know their family will be made aware of their use of the room.
- Provide support as needed.
- Identify which young people need additional individual support and link them with available wellbeing staff or external supports.
- Talk to distressed young people before they leave the room. Discuss an appropriate place for them to go — for example, returning to class (if their distress has subsided), being collected by a family member or returning to the company of supporting friends during recess or lunch.
- Be mindful that some young people may be impacted for reasons that are not obvious. All distress should be taken seriously.
- Notify families of their young person's use of the room.
- Continue to review the list of attendees and any follow-up actions that school staff need to complete.

This room can be maintained for several days.

Ensure that the school community is prepared for the room's closure and that additional supports are put in place as required.

Be You Fact Sheets

-  Grief: how young people respond to a suicide
-  Supporting young people after a suicide
-  Family liaison, funerals and memorials after a suicide

Inform young people

In some cases, young people may already know about the suicide, but staff should still inform students formally.

When informing young people, staff should:

- note students who are absent, so they can be informed separately
- note young people who appear to be very distressed
- follow the script prepared by the ERT that's tailored to the age of the students, their emotional development and the types of relationships they shared with the deceased. You may need to have different scripts for different cohorts of students – see a sample script in the Complete Toolkit.

Scripts are an important way to support staff with this difficult task. They also ensure that accurate and consistent information is provided, which helps to counter any rumours and misinformation that inevitably spread in a crisis.

If the bereaved family don't want the death referred to as a suicide, ensure the phrase 'died by suicide' is exchanged for 'died' or another term the school and the bereaved family agree to, and that any other appropriate modifications are made.

The script should contain:

- clear and accurate information
- acknowledgement that the situation will be distressing to family, friends and the school community
- a statement that there's professional help available for mental health conditions and suicidal thoughts
- information about supports available within the school (for example, school wellbeing staff and the support room) and in the community (for example, mental health services)

- a statement that young people should always tell a member of staff or another responsible adult if they have concerns about a peer
- information about normal grief reactions
- a reminder about the importance of self-care, stress management strategies and supporting each other
- a statement that rumours can be hurtful and unfair to the deceased, their family and their friends
- information about responsible use of social media
- instructions not to talk to the media and to refer any media enquiries to a nominated staff member
- a reminder about the process for leaving school grounds.

Once you've informed students about the death, give them time to process the information. Answer only basic questions and redirect more-complex questions to other staff members such as the wellbeing team.

You may also like to:

- assess whether all students should be informed, or whether it's more appropriate to limit the announcement to particular groups who've been exposed to the suicide or who are likely to be exposed to the suicide (for example, young people in the deceased's year level)
- inform groups you've decided to inform as soon as possible
- refrain from sharing the method of suicide – this can be traumatising for others and can also provide suggestion to those at risk of suicide
- prevent young people affected by the news from leaving the school unaccompanied. Families should be called to collect any young person who's too distressed to stay at school, even if the young person has a driver's licence.

How to inform different groups of young people

Inform young people in small groups such as home, pastoral or class groups.

Whole-school assemblies aren't recommended. Reactions are more difficult to manage in this environment and it's harder to observe and support individuals in larger groups.

Inform close friends and vulnerable young people:

- individually or in small, appropriate friendship groups
- before other students
- with support from a counsellor or staff member who has a relationship with the young people and feels able to do this.

You may also like to:

- ensure young people are provided with immediate support and given information about where they can receive more assistance at school
- inform families so they can provide support to their young person
- arrange for young people to be collected from school by their families if necessary
- ask young people about any other young people who weren't obvious friends of the deceased who may benefit from being informed separately.

Young people in the same year level as the deceased

Wherever possible, the homeroom or year level teachers (or equivalent) should inform young people in logical groups, such as homeroom or first period classes, using a script with the appropriate level of detail. This is done in recognition of their close association with the deceased and their different needs for support.

Young people in the same class as a sibling of the deceased

Provide additional assistance on how to support the classmate once they return to school. It may be appropriate to have wellbeing staff or a mental health professional speak to this group and the class teacher.

Inform young people in other year levels in class groups.

This should be done by their usual teachers, with a script.

Supporting young people in class upon hearing the news

The news of a suicide can elicit a range of emotional and behavioural responses.

These will be unique for each individual and will depend on factors such as past experiences, level of support, personality type and how close the young person was to the deceased person.

Talking to young people about suicide can feel daunting.

Many people fear it will cause increased distress or even lead to the development of suicidal thoughts or suicide contagion. However, talking about suicide in a calm and straightforward way, as well as providing information and support, is actually very important in helping young people to manage their feelings and make sense of what happened.

To limit the harmful impact of the death and to promote positive coping strategies and good mental health, it's helpful to:

- acknowledge a wide range of emotions and thoughts
- acknowledge that the death may be confusing
- acknowledge that it's common to want more information to help understand what happened
- provide accurate information about the death (only include information you have permission to share and do not mention the method of suicide)
- avoid blame
- avoid sharing your personal opinion about suicide
- encourage help-seeking
- provide information about support plans at school.

Sometimes young people will seek more information or ask you to confirm information that isn't appropriate to share. You may not be able to do this, or it may be considered harmful to provide some information (such as the method of suicide). Focus on acknowledging the complexity of the situation, the young person's emotions and providing support.

You could say:

"It seems this information has really upset you. Unfortunately, it's sometimes difficult to understand why someone has died and suicide is very complex. It's not usually one reason. What can I do to support you right now?"

or

"I can see that this news has really upset you and you have some questions. Unfortunately, I am unable to share any more information with you as we are respecting the family's wishes for privacy. What can I do to support you?"

If a young person wants to continue the conversation or is experiencing increased distress, redirect them to individual support such as wellbeing coordinator.

Be You Fact Sheets



Supporting young people after
a suicide

Inform families

Inform families about the suicide and the school's response.

Giving families immediate and accurate information helps to support the school community, limits misinformation and gives families confidence in the school's response.

- If the bereaved family don't want the death referred to as a suicide, ensure that the phrase 'died by suicide' is exchanged for 'died' or another term that the school and the bereaved family agree to.
- Information should be conveyed via usual communication processes (excluding social media, which should not be used).
- Be sensitive to the response of families upon receiving this information.
- Make phone calls to the families of the most-impacted or at-risk young people to inform them of the death and the possible impact on their young person. Provide support options for the young person and families.

When you talk with families, include:

- the same clear and accurate information about the suicide that was shared with young people
- the name and contact details of the ERT member to whom they should direct any questions or concerns
- details of supports available for young people at school and in the community
- a list of resources available to families
- a statement that the school's routine will remain as normal as possible, including information about any upcoming events that have been altered or cancelled
- what to do if they're worried about someone else
- advice on how to talk to their young person about attendance at the funeral or memorial service
- the date and time of a family meeting, if one is to be held
- information about common reactions to suicide and grief reactions in young people
- how to answer difficult questions about suicide and how to talk to young people about suicide
- resources and information on youth suicide prevention.

Communication with families should encourage them to:

- monitor the reactions of their young person
- take supportive and protective action with their young person
- focus on the needs of their young person and not on specific information about the deceased
- talk with their young person openly about suicide or encourage them to talk to another trusted adult
- adopt actions and attitudes that complement the school's postvention plan
- communicate with the school about wellbeing concerns and support.

See a sample script in the Complete Toolkit.

Be You Fact Sheets



Suicide in schools: information for families



Suicide in schools: information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

Inform the wider community

You need to seek consent from the bereaved family in order to share information about the nature of the death outside of the school community. However, information of this nature spreads quickly via social media and word of mouth, and can have a profound effect on young people not connected to the school.

In some circumstances, it will be important to liaise with some or all the following:

- Local community and sports groups that the deceased young person was involved with or who will be servicing impacted young people.
- Other agencies that involve young people.
- Principals of local schools, schools the deceased previously attended, or schools attended by the deceased's siblings or known close friends, so they too can activate their postvention plan.
- The police.
- Relevant external mental health services available to young people or staff, especially those who could expect additional demand.
- Any service responsible for providing suicide postvention support (such as Be You or Standby).
- Any community response team that has been established in response to previous suicides.

Help the media report on the incident in an appropriate manner

The media is sometimes interested in reporting about youth suicide.

However, the reporting of suicide needs to be done with care as media coverage can increase the risk of suicide contagion.

Nominate one ERT member as the media liaison person who will:

- Liaise with the relevant spokesperson at the education department or equivalent body before speaking to the media.
- Prepare a statement that contains accurate information and is agreed to by the ERT and the bereaved family.
- Refer to (and refer reporters to) [Mindframe](#), which provides guidance and recommendations about safe reporting on suicide for the media. The website includes an overview of reporting about suicide with the least risk of suicide contagion as well as tips and tools for how to work with the media.

The media should be encouraged to reinforce some principles about the reporting of suicide, such as:

- Don't glamourise the victim or the suicide.
- Don't oversimplify the cause of suicide.
- Highlight the relationship between suicide and mental health conditions.
- Don't give details about the method of suicide.
- Don't include pictures of the death scene or distressed mourners.
- Always include information and phone numbers for crisis support services and local mental health services.

Internet and social media

Messages posted on social media platforms can have a large impact because they can quickly reach a significant number of people.

Managing social media is therefore an important part of your postvention plan.

While it can feel overwhelming, you can collaborate with local support services to use social media to promote suicide prevention, mental health and wellbeing and distribute other important information to young people and the broader school community.

Some suggestions for managing social media.

- Involve and collaborate with students — don't ask them to monitor social media, but ask them to inform a nominated ERT member or their family if they see anything concerning.
- Monitor any concerns raised about the deceased's social media posts.
- Follow up any concerning social media use directly with young people and their families. This may include sharing unhelpful rumours, inaccurate information, derogatory messages, glamourising suicide or comments indicating young people who may be at risk. In some circumstances, notifying the police may be warranted.
- Provide information on appropriate and safe social media use to young people, families and school staff. This includes information about how to report any inappropriate use and websites to access further information and resources.
- Promote activities and programs the school is undertaking to strengthen the mental health and wellbeing of young people.
- Raise awareness about mental health.
- Provide information about help-seeking options available and credible websites to support young people and their families.

Information about the death is often posted on social media before the school informs students about the death.

This can complicate your response and the messages you are trying to convey. If this has occurred:

- Continue with your plan to inform students and staff, regardless of how much information is on social media. This will help to dispel rumours and ensure that everyone has consistent information.
- Don't confirm or deny the information on social media. Continue to convey the information that you've agreed on with the family or your governing body.
- If you're unsure how to proceed, seek advice from your Be You Consultant.

Be You Fact Sheets



Suicide, media and social media