

Suicide Response Resources

*Section D:
the first month*



With delivery partners



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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 D: The first month

- Continue to monitor staff and young people's wellbeing, and review your list of at-risk students.
- Consider the impact of the suicide on the planning for school events like yearbook photographs, award nights, graduation and reports.
- Conduct a critical incident review.
- Consider facilitating an information session for families.
- Continue to document all the school's postvention activities and actions.

Continue to monitor staff and young people's wellbeing

By this time, people at increased risk will have been identified and should be receiving ongoing support and monitoring at the school in partnership with mental health professionals and families.

Continue to monitor staff and young people and review your most impacted or at-risk student list. Maintain contact with your local mental health services.

Be aware of the impact of other critical incidents.

If other crises in the school community occur after a suicide, this may further impact young people affected by the suicide. If further deaths, attempts or critical incidents occur, many staff and young people will return to their earlier levels of grief and therefore require additional support and monitoring.

Consider the interim appointment of an additional experienced school leader

This can provide invaluable support, relieving school leaders from day-to-day administrative responsibilities and allowing them to focus their attention on specific postvention tasks.

Consider the impact of the suicide on the planning of school events

You may be faced with questions about how to manage events or documents that would have usually included the deceased young person, such as yearbooks, graduation nights, reports and award ceremonies.

Each school community will approach these decisions differently but be guided by cultural and family sensitivity and postvention principles.

Treat the death as you would any other, ensuring the death is neither glamourised nor stigmatised.

If a school yearbook or graduation features any students who've died, then young people who have died by suicide should be included. Statements relating to these students should be overseen by the ERT. Liaise with the family regarding their wishes, which should be respected.

Conduct a critical incident review

This should occur when the ERT believes the school has started to move into the recovery phase.

Indicators for this include:

- regular school routines and activities have resumed
- absenteeism has reduced
- visible distress has decreased in students, staff and families
- requests for future planned activities is occurring.

This may be around four to six weeks after the school's initial response.

All members of the ERT should participate, unless they choose to opt out for personal reasons. It may also be beneficial to invite those who have supported the ERT (for example, your Be You Consultant or governing body staff).

The purpose of the critical incident review is to reflect on the processes and procedures undertaken by the school in response to a death by suicide, which is an event outside the normal range of experience of the people involved. It's important to perform a critical incident review so that ideas on how to improve the school's emergency response or practices can be shared, considered and incorporated into school policy and planning. It's also important to acknowledge the efforts of the school community and highlight what worked well.

Some education departments have their own process and documentation standards for the critical incident review.

However, you could also use the following key areas to guide reflection and the structure of this review meeting:

- Communication with the bereaved family (including seeking permission from the family about referring to the death as a suicide).
- Informing staff and communication with staff.
- Informing students and communication with students.
- Informing families and communication with families.
- Communication with the broader community.
- Identification of most impacted staff and support for staff.
- Identification of young people most impacted or at-risk, including staff and student understanding about what to do when they have concerns about young people's safety.
- Support for students.
- Collaboration with external mental health providers.
- Any additional comments about the response that have not been covered.



In order for the critical incident review to be most effective, prior to its occurrence:

- give members of the ERT a copy of these key areas so they can begin to reflect
- ask that all participants come prepared and have thought through their ideas and opinions
- provide all school staff with an opportunity, via an anonymous survey, to contribute their views on how the school community managed its postvention responsibilities. A member of the ERT should collate the responses and bring them to the critical incident review.

Outcomes of the critical incident review may include:

- a commitment to review and revise the school's postvention plan (or to develop one)
- identifying needs such as building staff capacity in specific areas (for example, recognising and responding to risk factors for suicide, grief and loss, mental health in young people or staff self-care). Staff professional learning sessions can be facilitated with the support of local services and the Be You team.

Consider facilitating an information session for families

If families express the need for additional information, consider facilitating a family information session.

Use your mental health partners or Be You Consultant to help deliver these sessions.

However, if there is major unrest within the community, a family session isn't recommended as it may lead to further distress for some family members.

The wishes of the bereaved family and the needs of the families in your learning community will inform the focus of the session. It may vary greatly, depending on the capacity to refer to the death as a suicide, the circumstances of the suicide, the location, capacity and size of the school, cultural considerations and the needs of the school community.

Ideally, attendance should include school leadership staff, wellbeing staff, representatives from external mental health services and mental health professionals from the relevant education body. Some of these representatives may present information or form a panel to answer questions from families.

Ensure that:

- an experienced facilitator who has the skills to contain the group runs the session in order to preserve the safety of the space
- all presenters are clear about their role and the session format
- sessions are set up as information sessions rather than as group therapy or debriefing sessions
- families register to attend, where possible
 - this means you can inform presenters if any families who may need extra support are attending
- families understand the session is for adults and that it's not appropriate for children or young people to attend
- details are shared about help services that can be accessed at different times and in different modes (for example, in person, phone or online).

Often, it's helpful for families to be able to send questions ahead of the session so that presenters can make sure their questions are answered. This also helps you to understand the needs of the community.

Be aware of any media representation at the session and decide whether the school is comfortable with their presence.

Continue documenting all decisions and actions

The amount of documentation will decrease over time, but good practice is to ensure that documentation occurs for any postvention response activity.