

Suicide Prevention Resources

Suicide: how prepared is your school?

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When a suicide occurs in a school community it's important to have a coordinated and planned response.

This approach can help minimise the effects of the difficult and traumatic event, and will help students, staff and the school community return to a normal routine as soon as possible.

Your school can use this document to complement existing school emergency management response policies or plans.

Emergency Response Team

The first step is assigning an Emergency Response Team (ERT) of five or six staff members.

This team shares the responsibility of preparing for, and responding to, an emergency incident such as a suicide.

Your school may have already established a team to manage emergency situations, but it may be worth assessing whether the most appropriate staff members to manage a suicide are part of this team. Depending on the resources of the school, some ERTs may also include employees from external agencies, such as a local mental health service.

Select ERT members thoughtfully, based on their experience, suitability and skill level.

You might like to include the principal and other senior staff, school wellbeing staff, year level coordinators or pastoral care staff. Consider selecting back-up ERT members in case core members are unavailable.

What does the ERT do?

Here are some suggestions for roles you might like to assign in the ERT.

ERT leader

This role is typically suited to the school principal or a senior staff member. The Emergency Response Team leader coordinates the school response and is charged with informing staff of the suicide, chairing staff meetings and supervising the critical incident review. The team leader should be made aware of all activities occurring in relation to the response to ensure co-ordination and efficiency.

Family, police and social media liaison

The person assigned to this role should ideally have an existing relationship with the family and be confident helping them with social media. It may not be possible to assign this role prior to the event.

Mental health services liaison

This role also helps to identify vulnerable staff and students and may be best suited to a wellbeing staff member.

School authority liaison and mainstream media contact

This role may be suited to a senior staff member who has an existing relationship with the local education authority and should be limited to one person.

Communications manager

This role prepares written information for students, staff, parents and the local community and is the main contact for parents and community members.

What else can schools do?

There's more that your school can do to ensure a coordinated and planned response to suicide. Here are some ideas:

- Have a clear process for informing school staff about the suicide.
- Use a telephone tree to inform staff of the suicide prior to the start of the school day. Ideally, the ERT leader would contact other ERT members before school starts to organise a staff meeting.
- Create a script to inform students about the suicide. Please refer to the Suicide Response Toolkit for a suggested template.
- Identify a student support room: This is a quiet space that provides confidentiality and privacy for students who need extra support.
- Write a letter to families. Please refer to the Suicide Response Toolkit for a suggested template.
- Source the contact details of the media liaison advisor at the local school authority.
- Connect with local mental health agencies to ensure prompt support for students.
- Document all actions and responses carried out by the ERT Team. This documentation will help to review your school's response to the suicide.



Further information and resources

Be You has a range of resources to help you manage issues related to suicide. Please see:

-  Suicide Response Toolkit
-  Suicide, media and social media
-  Responding to a death that can't be referred to as suicide
-  Grief: how young people respond to suicide

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