



Transcript - Prevention Strategies

So what do we mean by comprehensive suicide prevention?

Maybe you've done a walk, provided some information about risk factors for suicide, had a motivational speaker come do a talk on your campus, or passed on information about the suicide prevention lifeline. Maybe you've even offered a training for faculty or staff on suicide prevention. What more is there to do?

While each of these approaches has a role, research has shown us that it takes a combination of many different strategies to effectively prevent suicides. In fact, leading experts in suicide prevention have identified nine different areas that should be addressed in a comprehensive suicide prevention plan.

As we go through these key areas of a comprehensive plan, think about what your campus is already doing. Use the worksheet provided to jot down the strategies your campus already has in place. These can be programs, trainings, activities, events, services, or policies that already exist on your campus and which address one or more of the nine areas. And if you have ideas for additional strategies that are feasible for your campus, but that you're not yet doing, please note those on your worksheet as well.

So, what are the nine areas?

First, a campus must be ready to **Respond to Crisis**. This means you have training as well as policies and protocols in place to identify and effectively respond to heightened risk for suicide. So, for example you would want a range of natural helpers who have been trained in how to talk with someone who is distressed and who know how and when to get that person to the next level of care on your campus. For more serious situations, you need guidelines for when to notify parents or send a student to the hospital, as well as a supportive medical leave policy. Additionally, the ability to **Respond to Crisis** means you have services available, both on and off campus, to support students and the campus during and after a crisis situation.

Second, a campus must **Increase Help-Seeking**. On a typical campus, less than 40% of students struggling with anxiety and depression that is significant enough to interfere with their ability to function actually seek counseling services. Nationally, only about a third of those who die by suicide were actually receiving any sort of treatment. Appropriate treatment greatly reduces risk for suicide. Therefore, students experiencing emotional distress should be encouraged to seek support in whatever form would be most beneficial to them, so that they can return their focus to their studies and success in school.



This means we must help students recognize when they might need support through screening and education, as well as promote services and provide a variety of avenues for students to seek support. For example, some students might pursue mental health counseling, while others might prefer support through academic advising, online treatment options, or peer support services.

The third area a campus must address is its ability to **Identify and Assist** students in distress. Some students don't recognize the extent of their distress and need for support, while others may initially reject the idea of needing assistance to deal with their problems. For those students who don't self-identify their need for support, a campus can train its faculty, staff, and students to recognize when someone might be at risk, and once identified, have procedures in place to give students appropriate referrals for effective care and support services.

If a student seeks formal counseling services, they should be provided with **Effective Care or Treatment** that is shown to reduce suicide risk and/or alleviate other mental health concerns. Counseling staff need to be trained specifically in the assessment and treatment of suicidal thoughts and behaviors. While not all needed services and levels of care can be provided on campus, it is an institution's responsibility to help the student locate where they can receive the necessary services.

When a student has had prior treatment or is seeking services from multiple providers, it is essential that we ensure full communication occurs between providers during these **Care Transitions or Linkages**. Likewise, a student may begin to seek services on campus, but need to be transferred to a different type or level of care outside of the academic institution. Effective care transitions and communication can occur through case managers, standardized consent and follow-up procedures, and established referral agreements with outside providers.

To effectively prevent suicide, it is also important to **Reduce Access to Means** someone might use to end their life. Research shows us that means "safety" has been one of the most impactful ways to reduce suicide rates. Policies that allow students to safely store guns with campus security, securing windows and balconies on tall buildings, and locking up dangerous chemicals in labs and maintenance closets, as well as counseling students on means safety when appropriate are all strategies that help accomplish this goal.

If a suicide does occur, how a campus responds to that death can have a significant impact on other students who may be at risk for suicide as well as on the overall emotional health of the campus. Thus, a campus must have a good **Postvention** plan in place – well before a death occurs. This includes having protocols for how to inform the campus and public, providing appropriate support and resources to friends, family, acquaintances, and others affected who may have not even known the decedent, and facilitating ways for the campus to honor the individual's life without increasing the risk of contagion. It's also crucial that all relevant personnel are aware of these protocols, so they can implement them without delay if ever needed.

Finally, we want to strengthen the emotional well-being of the entire campus by proactively building the **Life Skills and Resilience** of all students, especially those who may face a greater than average number of challenges. Any student could develop mental distress and even suicidal thoughts in the face of overwhelming academic, social, and personal stressors. There are many ways campuses can help students develop needed life skills to cope with challenges they may face.



For example, offering psychoeducational workshops on things like conflict resolution, mindfulness, and financial management, as well as providing supports for failing students.

Additionally, we know that increasing the **Connectedness** of students helps to build a stronger, healthier, and happier campus, as well as reduces risk for suicide among students. We can help students to build a social support system and feel like they belong through housing policies and arrangements, a variety of clubs, organizations, teams, and activities, and encouraging positive relationships with faculty and staff who serve as advisors, club sponsors, and mentors.

I know that was a lot of information, so let's recap those 9 areas one more time:

- First, a campus must be ready to Respond to Crisis.
- Second, a campus must Increase Help-Seeking.
- Third, a campus must be equipped to Identify and Assist students in distress.
- Fourth, students seeking formal services should be provided with Effective Care or Treatment, shown to reduce suicide risk and address other related mental health concerns.
- Fifth, students seeking services from multiple providers should be supported during Care Transitions.
- Sixth, whenever possible, we must Reduce Access to Means someone might use to end their life.
- Seventh, if a suicide does occur, we need a good Postvention plan in place, so that we can reduce the risk of contagion to other members of the campus community.
- Eighth, we also want to strengthen the emotional well-being of the entire campus by proactively building the Life Skills and Resilience of all students.
- And finally, we want to increase the Connectedness of everyone on campus to build a healthier community.