



Behavioral Research and Training Institute
Traumatic Loss Coalitions for Youth

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After a Suicide: Answering Questions And Assisting Students Adapted from guidelines written by Dr. Scott Poland and Richard Lieberman

Overview:

The aftermath of a youth suicide is a sad and challenging time for a school or a community. The major tasks for suicide postvention are to help youth manage the understandable feelings of shock, grief and confusion and to prevent further suicides.

The research literature estimates that once a suicide happens the chances of another death by suicide increases dramatically in the adolescent and young adult population. The following suggestions are intended to guide teachers, parents, and others working with youth during this difficult time.

- * It is important to balance being truthful and honest without violating the privacy of the suicide victim and his/her family and to take care not to glorify their actions.
- * It is important to have the facts of the incident, be alert to speculation and erroneous information that may be circulating and assertively, yet kindly, redirect students toward productive, healthy conversation.
- * Center for Disease Control research has found teenagers and young adults to be the most susceptible to suicide contagion. Those believed to be most at risk include the following: Students who backed out of a suicide pact; students who had a problematic relationship or a recent negative interaction with the decedent; students who now feel they missed warning signs; and students with their own set of childhood adversities or previous suicidal thoughts or behavior who need not have known the decedent.
- * Numerous professional associations caution that memorials not be dramatic and permanent and encourage activities that focus on living memorials such as funding suicide prevention
- * National research has found that talking with youth about suicide does not implant the idea of suicide, and in fact provides the opportunity for youth who are thinking about suicide to unburden themselves and get help.
- * Protective factors identified by the World Health Organization are the following: positive connections at home, school, and with other youth, religious involvement, lack of access to the means for suicide, access to mental health care and awareness of crisis hotline resources.
- * It is important to let parents and youth know that everyone (including youth) can play a key role in suicide prevention.