# POSTVENTION

TEXAS Health and Human Services

## Support Those at Risk

When a suicide occurs, it is important to identify others who may be at risk. Some people who may be at higher risk include those with a history of suicide attempts, who identify with the deceased (no matter how close or distant the actual relationship), and who are experiencing high levels of guilt regarding the death. It is important to keep a list of those people identified as high-risk. Screen all high-risk people using a valid suicide screener. For those who screen negative, provide periodic follow-up to ensure they are continuing to make progress in their grief journey. If they screen positive, provide a referral to the local crisis hotline.

## What is Postvention?

Postvention is a term used to describe how a community responds after a suicide death. The goals of postvention responses are to facilitate healthy grieving and healing from the suicide loss at both an individual and community level, and to prevent the future suicides of other high-risk people exposed to the suicide loss. Having an organizational-level postvention plan in place is essential to respond effectively. This guide can help you get started.

## Who is a Suicide Survivor?

A suicide loss survivor is someone affected by the loss of another to suicide. In 2014, Julie Cerel published an article organizing survivors into four tiers: exposed, affected, suicide bereaved short-term, and suicide bereaved long-term. People can self-select into a survivor category.

## Postvention Guidelines

- Remember, suicide is multifaceted. Do not present suicide as inexplicable but, instead, as due to multiple complicated factors. Point out there is always help.
- Avoid glamorizing the individual who died by suicide. Likewise, avoid implying the individual was selfish.
- Do not focus on the method, focus instead on how help was possible.
- The CDC discourages memorializing an individual who dies by suicide with a permanent memorial. Instead, consider encouraging participation in suicide prevention activities, or a memorial that is temporary in nature.
- Provide education about suicide grief, depression and suicide risk factors. Providing education allows for the opportunity to encourage help-seeking behavior and decrease stigma.



## Tips For Speaking With Children/Youth

1. Use clear, direct language. Use the word suicide.
2. Allow them to say how they feel without judgement.
3. Help them to understand that the death is no one's fault.
4. Explain that there is help for depression.

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## Promote Help Seeking

Communicate clearly within the community that suicide is a preventable event, and there is help available for individuals struggling with depression and suicidal thoughts. Providing the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number (1-800-273-8255) in any available media forums and written platforms (social media pages, informational letters, etc.) will serve to enhance help-seeking behaviors.

## Meeting the needs of suicide survivors

Although suicide deaths are traumatic, and individuals experience a very different type of grief, one can start meeting the needs of suicide survivors by providing them with support as one would during any other death. Often, families, friends and communities shy away from survivors of suicide loss because of the stigma surrounding the death. Simply being present with the survivor and allowing them to tell their story reduces their sense of isolation and stigma. Other common needs for survivors include:

1. **Survivor support groups** – Research has found that the opportunity to be with others who have experienced a similar loss has been helpful for many survivors.
2. **Counseling referrals**
3. **Practical assistance** – Refer for forensic restoration; help with death notifications and insurance claims; encourage rest, food, water, etc.
4. **Linking to resources** – Provide the survivor with resources they may need for counseling or other services.

## Develop a Systemwide Suicide Postvention Plan

Whether the person that dies by suicide is a member of a school, a sports team, a church, a workplace or another organization or community, the organization or community will be greatly affected. It is important for every entity to develop a plan about what it will do in the event someone in their organization dies by suicide. Postvention plans should consider the following tasks:

1. Verification and cause of death - ensure the death was a suicide to dispel rumors.
2. Disseminate information in the organization/community in the most appropriate way.
3. Support those most affected by the death.
4. Identify and support those at risk.
5. Provide education on suicide and depression.
6. Link to resources.

**RESOURCES:**

**Responding to Grief, Trauma and Distress after a Suicide: US National Guidelines:**
https://theactionalliance.org/resource/responding-grief-trauma-and-distress-after-suicide-us-national-guidelines

**After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools:**
https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/after-suicide-toolkit-schools

**Riverside Trauma Center Postvention Guidelines:**
https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/riverside-trauma-center-postvention-guidelines

