

Suicide Postvention Toolkit

Resources to Help Organizations Support their Communities After a Loss

A death by suicide is a tragic event, with profound impacts on the deceased's family, friends, and community. Broader connections due to advances in social media and communications can expand the impacts beyond those local and closest to the deceased. Those grieving the loss might be faced with complicated grief, adjustment issues, increased stress, depression, and even an increase in their own suicidal thoughts and actions. **A death by suicide can increase the risk of suicidal thoughts and actions among those close to, or even aware of, the person who died.** Best practices for how to respond to a suicide – practices that are collectively termed “postvention” – may help to reduce that risk.

If your organization, club, house of worship, workplace, or any other type of community loses a loved one to suicide, this toolkit can help you find the resources and best practices to guide your response.

Postvention Overview

The Riverside Trauma Center identifies goals for postvention on two levels:

- For *organizations*, postvention helps restore a sense of “equilibrium and functioning.”
- For *individuals*, postvention helps “promote healthy grieving and identify those most likely to need support, provide comfort to those distressed, minimize adverse personal outcomes, and reduce the risk of suicide imitation or contagion.”

Effective postvention includes four key components:

1. Communicate the loss with attention to following best practices to promote safety and access to resources and supports.
2. Provide support for those most impacted by the death and help connect them to resources.
3. Commemorate the deceased with attention to following best practices to promote safety and maintain consistent messaging.
4. Maintain a consistent message throughout that mental health issues are treatable and resources and supports are available.

Resources and tips for implementing each component are shared below.

Accessing Help in Fairfax and Falls Church

If you or someone you care about may be at risk of suicide, don't hesitate to reach out for help. These resources are available 24/7:

- Call Community Services Board (CSB) Emergency Services at 703-573-5679.
- Text "CONNECT" to 855-11 to contact PRS CrisisLink.
- Call PRS CrisisLink at 703-527-4077.
- In an immediate, life-threatening situation, call 911.

For help in finding a local mental health service provider, or to inquire about accessing CSB non-emergency services, call CSB Entry and Referral at 703-383-8500, TTY 711, available Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Key Components of Postvention

1. *Communicating the Loss*

The way a suicide death is communicated can influence the way those close to the deceased respond, and can contribute to either increased or reduced risk of additional suicides. The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention developed a [Framework for Successful Messaging](#) that emphasizes messages that are strategic, safe, positive, and make use of relevant guidelines and best practices. The following resources provide tips and guidelines for sharing information about the loss:

- [Guidelines for Suicide Messaging](#), from the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention
- [Talking to Children About Suicide](#), from North Dakota State University
- [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#), by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and others

Many of the resources below also include templates and messaging guidance. Be sure that your communications respect the family's wishes regarding privacy, contacting them, and other concerns.

2. *Obtaining Resources and Support*

Individuals can be impacted by suicide in many ways, and it is important to help connect them to supportive resources to help them cope. Many of the postvention resources below include population-specific resources and examples of ways to connect people. Important resources available in our community include:

- [Help is at Hand](#), from the ConnerStrong Foundation
- [Support Group Directory](#), from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- [Resources for Survivors](#), from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- [Alliance of Hope](#), for suicide loss survivors
- [TAPS: Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors](#), for people grieving the death of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces
- [Grief Therapist Directory](#), from Psychology Today

Knowing and understanding these resources before a suicide loss increases the chance the resource will be shared in a time of crisis.

3. *Events and Activities in Memory of Loved Ones*

After a suicide loss, many communities struggle to know how to best honor the person who died. The ultimate goal of a memorial service is to foster an atmosphere that will help survivors understand, heal, and move forward in as healthy a manner as possible. Following the recommendations in [After a Suicide: Recommendations for Religious Services & Other Public Memorial Observances](#), from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, can facilitate a community's healing in the aftermath of a suicide and, at the same time, reduce the risk of imitative suicides. Many of the postvention resources below include additional information and guidelines.

4. *Consistent Messaging on Suicide*

It is important to include within any communication following a suicide, the strong and clear message that *mental health issues are treatable and suicide is preventable*. Consider adding that exact phrase at the end of every communication and include the national suicide prevention hotline (1-800-273-8255) or local hotline.

General Postvention Resources

- [Responding to Grief, Trauma, and Distress After a Suicide: U.S. National Guidelines](#), by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention
- [Riverside Trauma Center Postvention Guidelines](#), by the Riverside Trauma Center
- [Resources for Suicide Postvention Planning](#), by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center

Postvention Resources for Specific Communities and Organizations

Schools and Youth Organizations:

- [After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools](#), by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center

Colleges and Universities:

- [Postvention: A Guide for Response to Suicide on College Campuses](#), by the Higher Education Mental Health Alliance

Older Adult Communities:

- [Promoting Emotional Health and Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for Senior Living Communities](#), by the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- [Promoting Emotional Health and Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for Senior Centers](#), by the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Workplaces:

- [A Manager's Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace](#), by the American Association of Suicidology and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

Media:

- [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#), by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention et al

Funeral Directors:

- [Supporting Survivors of Suicide Loss: A Guide for Funeral Directors](#), by the Suicide Prevention Action Network

Racial and Ethnic Groups:

- [Suicide Prevention Resources Related to Racial and Ethnic Groups](#), by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center

Local Resources

These organizations offer programs, services, and trainings related to suicide prevention and postvention:

- [Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board](#)
- [Fairfax County Public Schools](#)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - National Capital Area Chapter](#)
- [Our Minds Matter](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) Northern Virginia Chapter](#)
- [PRS CrisisLink](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Alliance of Northern Virginia](#)

