

Policies and Protocols for Suicide Risk and Post-vention: Is Your Agency Ready?

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Suicidal Behavior and Legal Issues

- Youth suicide is the third-leading cause of death among children and adolescents in the U.S.
- Schools have a moral and legal responsibility to keep children safe
- School districts have been found liable for not offering suicide prevention programs, for providing inadequate supervision of at-risk students, and for failing to notify parents when their children were suicidal
- It is important to have agency policies and procedures for dealing with suicidal youth

Suicide Policies

- Have a referral process system to handle suicidal youth
- Inform all gatekeepers of warning signs of youth suicide
- Assign a "designated reporter" who receives and acts upon all reports
- Have the designated reporter assess the severity of the risk

Suicide Policies

- Collaborate with colleagues throughout the assessment, at least one administrator and one other mental health professional (counselor, school psychologist, PPW, social worker, etc.)
- Explain the of the limits of confidentiality during situations involving abuse of a minor, risk of harm to self, and risk of harm to others

Suicide Policies

- Notify parents-Duty to warn of severity of suicidal risk
- Secure needed mental health services
- Seek help of law enforcement or emergency services when appropriate (student becomes combative, flees, etc.)

Suicide Policies

- Supervise the student at all times, never leave student alone, and do not send home unaccompanied by a responsible adult
- Provide follow up at school for the student
- Develop a process/form for documenting interventions and assessment

State Initiatives

- Linkages to Life: Maryland's Plan for Youth Suicide
 - Prevention
 - Intervention
 - Post-Vention
 - Methodology
- Mental Hygiene Administration's Position Paper on Suicide Prevention
 - Adults/Older Adult
- Garrett Lee Smith Prevention Grant

State Initiatives

- Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline-
1-800-422-0009-first in the nation
- Governor's Commission on Suicide
- House Bill 973- required each local board of education to provide each student in grades 6-12 with the telephone number of the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline by:
 - Printing it proximately in the school handbook
 - Printing it on students' school identification cards

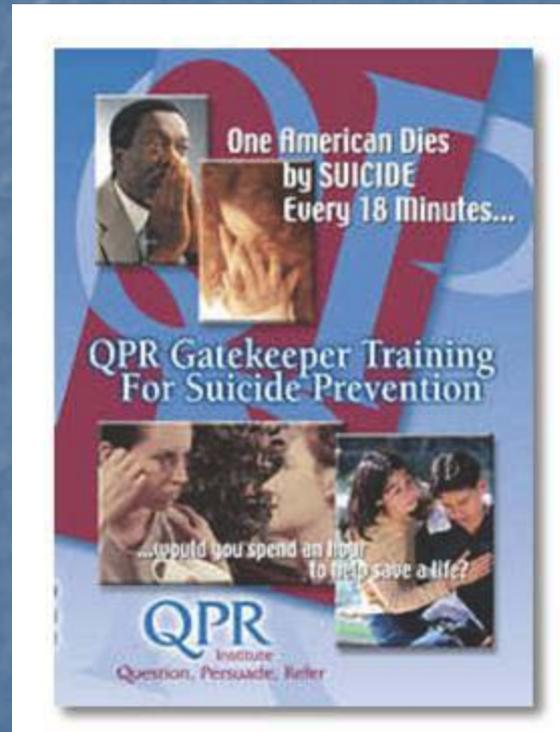
School-Based Suicide Prevention Programs and Initiatives

- In-service training for school personnel
- Gatekeeper training
- Curriculum prevention programs for students
- Individual risk assessment and screening programs

School-Based Suicide Prevention Programs: In-Service Training

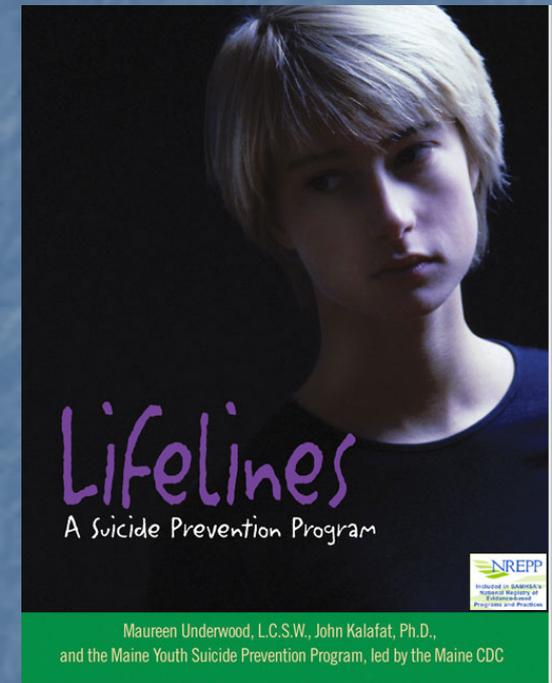
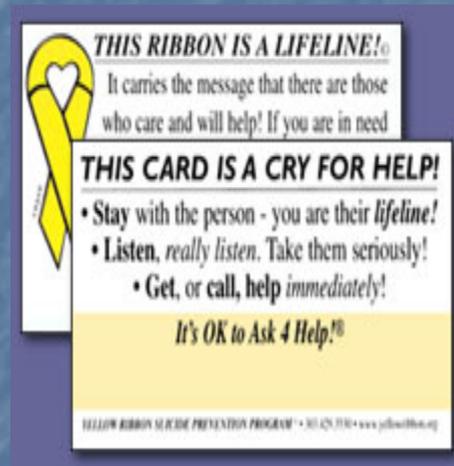
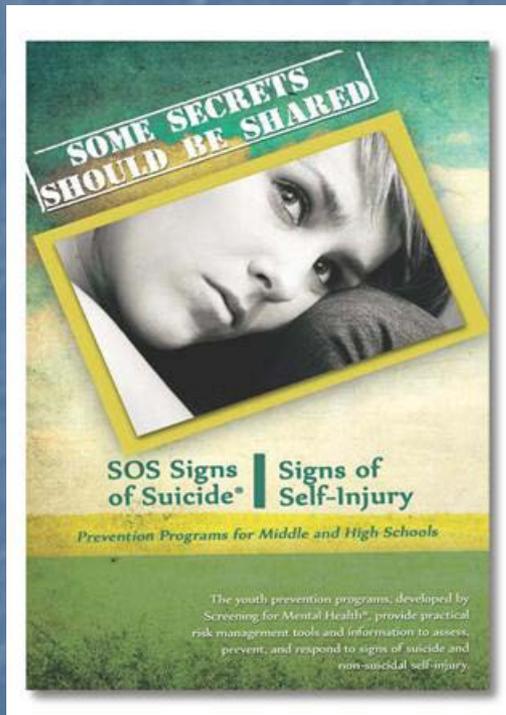
- Widely used in schools
- Typically includes following:
 - Discussion of warning signs
 - Discussion of sample cases
 - Referral procedures

Gatekeeper Programs

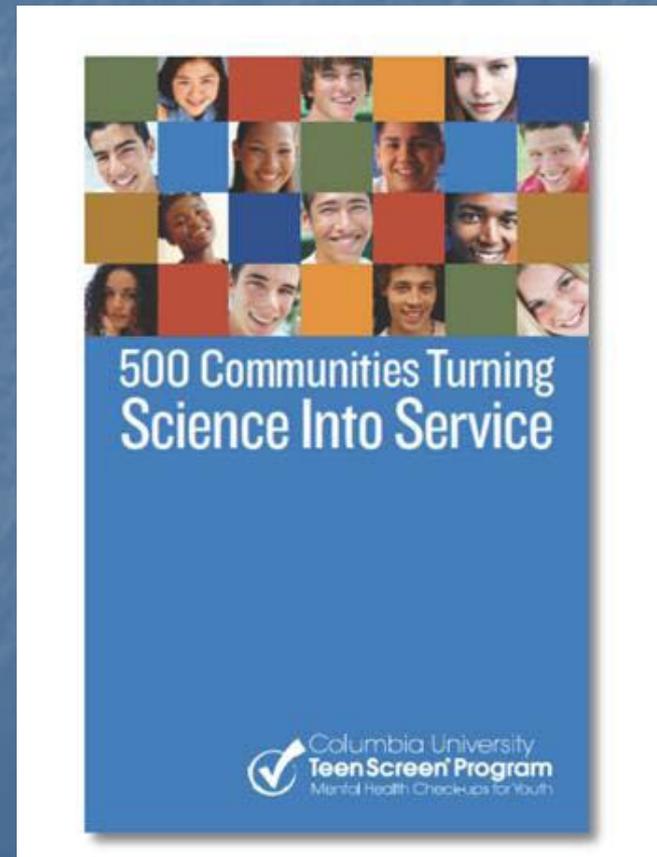
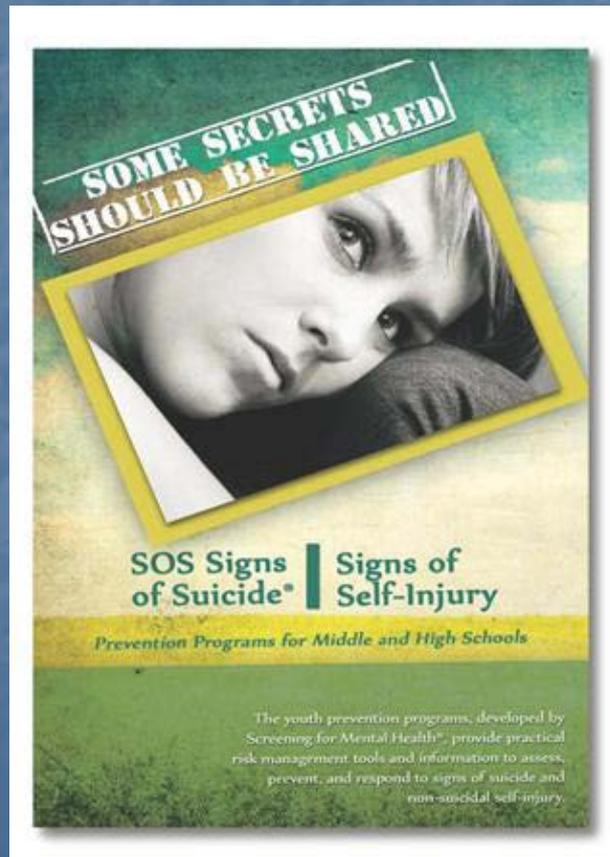


- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)
- Suicide Alertness for Everyone (SafeTalk)

Curriculum



Screening Programs



Warning Signs for Youth Suicide

- Suicide threats
- Suicide plan/method/access
- Making final arrangements
- Sudden changes in behavior, friends, or personality
- Changes in physical habits and appearance
- Preoccupation with death and suicide themes
- Increased inability to concentrate or think clearly
- Loss of interest in previously pleasurable activities
- Symptoms of depression
- Increased use and abuse of alcohol and/or drugs

What Are We Looking For?

- **Social isolation**
- **Failure to complete high school**
- **Involvement in correctional system**
- **Lack of vocational success**
- **Health problems-chronically ill**

Individuals

Dramatic changes in behavior

Giving away personal possessions

Preoccupations with death

Specific suicide plans

Suicide Postvention: Recommended "Dos" and "Don'ts"

- Do plan in advance of any crisis
- Do select and train a crisis team
- Do verify that a suicide occurred
- Do disseminate information to faculty, students, and parents; be truthful but avoid unnecessary detail
- Do report information to students in small groups (classrooms) using fact sheets and uniform statements
- Do not release information about the suicide in a mass assembly or over a loud speaker
- Do have extra counselors available on site for students and staff

Suicide Postvention: Recommended "Dos" and "Don'ts"

- Do not dismiss school or stop classes
- Do not dedicate a memorial, fly flag at half-mast, or have a moment of silence for deceased; develop living memorials instead (e.g., student assistance programs)
- Do allow students, with parental permission, to attend the funeral
- Do not make special arrangements to send all students from a class or school to the funeral
- Do contact the family and offer any assistance
- Do collaborate with media, law enforcement, and community agencies

Postvention Strategies

- Develop trauma response process
- Partner with local crisis agencies-i.e. hospice center
- Initiate counseling response team
- Develop tracking risk assessment system and outcomes, including follow up
- Develop local crisis manual/handbook with guidelines

Suicide Postvention: Media Guidelines

- Do not sensationalize with front page coverage and/or details of suicide method
- Do not print pictures of deceased
- Do not report the suicide as simplistic or romantic
- Do emphasize that no one person or thing is to blame
- Do provide information on suicide prevention
- Do provide information about where students can go for help, including both school and community resources
- Do emphasize that suicide is a preventable problem, and that we all have a role in it

Web-Based Resources

- Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
 - <http://www.dhmh.maryland.gov/suicideprevention/>
- National Association of School Psychologists
 - www.nasponline.org
- American Association of Sociology
 - www.suicidology.org
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
 - www.afsp.org
- Centers for Disease Control
 - www.cdc.gov

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