

Suicide-Affected School Postvention Dos and Don'ts

When a school community experiences a suicide loss, leadership must act quickly to provide stability, support grieving students and staff, and prevent further crisis. Use this guide to help your school community navigate the immediate postvention response:

- 1 Respond with Care: Share brief, factual messaging and support.
- 2 Maintain Safe Routines: Keep schedules while adjusting expectations.
- 3 Connect to Resources: Direct students, staff, and families to support.

DON'T DO THIS 	DO THIS INSTEAD 
Don't speculate publicly about the death or share the cause of death unless approved by the decedent's family. <u>Approved, factual messaging should only be shared by designated school spokespersons.</u> ¹	Contact the family to express condolences, offer support, and determine what information they are comfortable having shared. Have designated members of the crisis response team provide factual updates to <u>staff, students, families, and media.</u> ¹
Don't cancel school or school events solely because of a suicide loss. <u>Not everyone will be impacted</u> ² <u>in the same way</u> , and maintaining normal routines can help, particularly when a death occurs off campus and the school would not typically close for another death. However, consider temporary closure when the circumstances affect school safety or operations.	In the days following a suicide, ¹ be flexible with academic and extracurricular expectations. Allow time for students and staff to access crisis resources and grief support during school hours, <u>identify students and staff who have been particularly impacted</u> , and check in with those who are absent. ²
Don't announce the death through the PA system or in a large assembly. Impersonal outreach can magnify hurt feelings and impact student trust. Instead, share the news with students <u>in small groups</u> where staff can better identify those in need of crisis or grief resources. ¹	Notify staff and students of the death with care. <u>Notify staff in person if possible</u> , especially those who worked closely with the decedent, and host an <u>in-person staff meeting</u> before students are informed. With all parties, <u>keep the message brief and factual</u> , and share information about available crisis and grief resources. ¹

Resources and Additional Support

- [Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation \(OSPF\)](#).
- [OSPF Together Through Grief](#)
- [Nationwide Children's Hospital Center for Suicide Prevention and Research](#)
- [Supporting Children Through Grief: A Guide for Caregivers](#)
- [Memorials After a Suicide Death One Page Resource](#)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention \(AFSP\). After a Suicide: Toolkit for Schools](#)
- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)

References

1. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. *After a Suicide: Toolkit for Schools*. <https://afsp.org/after-a-suicide-a-toolkit-for-schools/>
2. Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation. *Long-Term Postvention in K-12 Schools* webinar. Co-presented by Dr. John Ackerman, Nationwide Children's Hospital. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSG6OixqaPQ>

DON'T DO THIS 	DO THIS INSTEAD 
Don't implement suicide-focused curricula immediately after a suicide. Postpone or modify planned programming for about three months, and adjust lessons that include suicide-related content. Holding these activities too soon may unintentionally increase feelings of guilt or distress.²	Promote suicide prevention and mental health resources. Share information about 988, mental health counselors, crisis and grief supports, and other available resources. Continue prevention programming that builds protective factors, such as healthy coping skills, as long as the curriculum is not centered on suicide or suicide-related content.
Don't discourage conversations about suicide or the person who died, which can create its own kind of harm. Open, supportive conversations can help students and staff process grief and connect those who are struggling with needed support.	Create opportunities for healing.¹ Create opportunities for healing. Provide designated, facilitated space for students and staff to process their feelings, remember the person who died, and access individual or group grief support.² Offer opportunities that promote connection and healing.¹
Don't hold funerals on school grounds or during school hours. Keeping these events off-site allows students and staff to make their own decision about attending and maintains the school as a place for learning and support.¹	Share funeral information with students and staff. If a funeral occurs during school hours, allow students and staff to attend without academic penalty and encourage parents to accompany children who choose to attend.¹
Don't allow unmonitored or permanent memorials. Memorials should honor the person's life,¹ not the manner of death, include suicide prevention resources, and have a clear timeframe for removal (up to five days).²	Focus memorialization activities on connection, healthy coping skills, and access to resources. Invite students and staff to help design and plan these efforts while monitoring for suicide prevention best practices.¹

A suicide does not need to occur on school grounds or involve a current student or staff member to deeply impact a school community. A school-affected suicide refers to any death by suicide that impacts the school community, including current students and staff as well as incidents that may have taken place on school grounds or have been witnessed by students and staff.

Principle of Moderating Exposure

Give students and staff some control over their exposure to reminders of the death. Avoid making the death highly visible or unavoidable through school-based funerals, permanent memorials, or unnecessary cancellations. At the same time, don't prevent people from talking about the death or accessing support.

Together Through Grief

IN THE JOURNEY OF SUICIDE LOSS
NO ONE SHOULD WALK ALONE

ABOUT OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.

OHIO'S VOICE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION



(614) 429-1528 / OhioSPF.org / support@ohiospf.org



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