



Introductions

Subject-Matter Experts

- **Kevin Hodgson**, Manager of Programs, Hockey Education Reaching Out Society (HEROS Hockey). His 15-year career in the Human Services sector has exclusively focused on marginalized children and youth. He is also a Consulting Trainer for the Centre for Suicide Prevention.
- **Linda Scurr, MEd**, counselling program supervisor with Adult Addiction Services Calgary, Addiction and Mental Health (formerly AADAC), Alberta Health Services. As the supervisor of the Calgary AADAC Enhanced Services for Women program Linda was awarded the Premier's Award of Excellence 2005. She is a Consulting Trainer with Centre for Suicide Prevention and has taught suicide intervention training since 1975.
- **Dave MacLeod, MSc RPsych**, founding clinical psychologist with Western Psychology Services in Calgary, now the overseer of the WPS co-operative. Dave began work in suicide prevention in the late 1970s as a volunteer with the Distress Centre/Drug Centre and has, since then, worked in a variety of adolescent treatment centres around the world. Dave is a Consulting Trainer with the Centre for Suicide Prevention.

Secondary Research

- **Robert Olson, BA, MLIS**, Librarian, Centre for Suicide Prevention, provides secondary research and presents this webinar.



Co-sponsoring Organizations

Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research (ACICR)

A provincial organization committed to advancing the impact or prevention, emergency response, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries in Alberta. ACICR is part of the School of Public Health, University of Alberta. For more information, visit us at www.acicr.ca

Centre for Suicide Prevention (CSP)

An education centre committed to reducing suicide through education: information services, workshops, presentations and now webinars. CSP is a branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). For more information, visit us at www.suicideinfo.ca





The 5 Things We Wish ALL Teachers Knew About What to do **After a Suicide**

Principle 1:

The goal is to resume normal life as soon as possible

Principle 2:

We must always be mindful of the family

Principle 3:

We must always be mindful of the staff and students

Principle 4:

It is important to get ahead of the story

Principle 5:

Ghosts and shrines are not helpful

First Things First

Upon hearing news of a student suicide:

- (1)** Inform the School Board administration
- (2)** Contact the deceased's family
- (3)** Confirm the cause of death

First Things First

Upon hearing news of a student suicide:

- (4)** Notify school staff of the death
- (5)** Schedule an all-staff meeting as soon as possible
- (6)** Notify your community crisis response team

A Second Phase

Putting the word out:

- Arrange for students to be notified of the death in small groups
- Draft a scripted statement for teachers
- Draft a letter to be sent home to parents
- Provide materials to your staff with tips for talking about suicide
- Monitor the emotional climate of the school

A Second Phase

Putting the word out:

If the cause of death is unconfirmed:

- Acknowledge that there are rumours
- Remind students that rumours can be very hurtful
- Do not report anything unconfirmed

A Second Phase

Putting the word out:

If the family does not want the cause of death disclosed:

- Let the family know that there is already talk spreading around that the student died by suicide
- Gently try to persuade the family members that they could help students with their grieving, and also help students who are also struggling with suicide if they can be allowed to talk freely about it

A Second Phase

Putting the word out:

- If the family **STILL** does not want the cause of death disclosed, this needs to be respected
- However, use the rumours as an excuse to discuss suicide in general

A 'Settling-In' Phase

Maintain normalcy as much as possible:

- Keep to regular school hours
- Ensure that students follow established dismissal procedures
- Call on school resource officers, caretakers for support
- Pay attention to students who are having particular difficulty

Looking After Others

- Follow the deceased student's schedule to monitor peer reactions and answer questions
- Make support available for teachers
- Arrange for crisis counseling rooms for staff and students
- Try to identify individuals who may be struggling

Memorialization

Key considerations:

- Requests for memorials are VERY common
- Try to treat every death the same, regardless of the cause
- Students are more prone to suicide contagion than adults

Memorialization

Spontaneous memorials:

- It is VERY common for students to leave flowers, cards, stuffed animals, etc.
- To minimize glamorizing, set limits
- Locate spontaneous memorials in a place that can be avoided by those who don't want to participate, such as a multipurpose room
- If they accumulate in prominent places (e.g. front steps, cafeteria, etc.), discreetly remove them each night and move them to the desired place

Memorialization

Permanent memorials:

- It is common that students or families will seek to have a bench, or tree, or plaque installed
- Not clear whether this promotes contagion
- Must be prepared to recognize all deaths in this way
- One memorial has a very different impact than a group of memorials
- Try to have them installed OFF SCHOOL GROUNDS

Memorialization

Temporary/thematic memorials:

- Scholarships
- Dedicated events such as a fund-raising event
- School newspaper, yearbook dedication
- A statement at graduation
- Treat all deaths the same, regardless of cause of death

Memorialization

Ghosts and Shrines:

- The places where the deceased student used to be will be noticed – minimize these
- Spontaneous memorials can be dismantled by giving the materials to the family (or to a charity)
- Use the funeral as a symbolic end-point for the school's accommodations

References

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Suicide Prevention Resource Center. 2011. *After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.

Thanks for tuning in! More questions?

Contact us at: csp@suicideinfo.ca



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