

Jackson County Best Practice Postvention Checklist for Schools

This checklist highlights some of the best practices recommended to schools by the published work SAMHSA: After a Suicide, A Toolkit for Schools. This checklist is intended to encourage Jackson County Schools to be prepared for a suicide and to follow evidence-based best practices in order to contain contagion and return the school back to its regular routine. The priority of affected schools should be focusing on education and crisis prevention rather than the death of a student and the glamorization of suicide.

Before a suicide occurs it is recommended that:

- All Jackson County School's have a Crisis Response Team that meets periodically to discuss the school's response should a student complete a suicide or another crisis occurs at school.
- Students have been given education on depression and suicide. This can be done by teachers, or the Youth Suicide Prevention Coordinator from Jackson County Mental Health.
- Students have been given resources, identified adults that they trust, and have phone numbers for 24/7 crisis lines in the area, should they or a friend become suicidal or need supports.

Immediately following a suicide it is recommended that:




- Crisis Response Team at this school meets to complete assigned tasks and discuss how staff should inform students and parents of the death. (preferably using the sample letters provided in the toolkit on pages 15-19).
- One assigned person on the Crisis Response Team contact the family of the deceased to confirm that the death was a suicide and ask for permission to disclose death and cause of death to students (page 9 of toolkit).
- School respects deceased family's wishes to disclose or not disclose the cause of death.
- All student deaths be treated the same.
- Bring in outside help that is trained in trauma response. JCMH will come on site to deliver support and counseling to students and staff.
- If the school chooses to hold a memorial it should be time limited. A poster board where students can write memories is appropriate and should be left up for 1-3 days in an area that is avoidable by students who do not want to participate.
- A member of the Crisis Response Team should monitor social media pages for inflammatory statements or copy-cat behaviors. Social Media should be used to provide education on suicide and resources for students and staff.

- Staff identify students whom were close with the deceased and alert counselors to check in with these students.
- School allows ongoing grief counseling services at their school following the death of any student. (WinterSpring holds ongoing grief counseling groups).
- Allow for time limited counseling services. Students should have access to counseling services for up to 5 school days following the death. Students who need counseling beyond this window should be referred to ongoing counseling services.

In the weeks and months following a suicide it is recommended that schools:

- Allow counselors or JCMH Youth Suicide Prevention Coordinator to go in to classrooms and give students accurate information about suicide and depression.
- Anticipate the anniversary of the death and ask for additional supports on site for students who need supports on and around the anniversary.
- Join Jackson County's Suicide Prevention Coalition so that when there is a suicide, partnering and finding resources and supports for your school is not difficult.
- Rearrange classrooms where the deceased student use to sit. The deceased's empty chair can be triggering for some students.
- Hold prevention and best practice trainings for students, staff, parents, or anyone interested.
- Hold a debriefing with concerned parents if needed. Invite local MH agency that assisted with postvention to be present to answer parent questions.
- Hold awareness and educational sessions for students around suicide, warning signs, and how to help a struggling friend. This can be done before or after a suicide.

NOT RECOMMENDED:

-  It is not recommended that anyone speak with the media about the details of a student's death. Use the media as an opportunity to educate the public on signs of suicide and depression and provide resources.
-  Do not hold memorial services or assemblies on site. There are not enough trained adults to handle large groups of grieving students safely. Doing this puts students at risk for contagion. Holding large gatherings glamorizes completed suicides and pays positive attention to suicide in general. (See pages 35-36)
-  Do not allow students to distribute or create t-shirts, flyers, or buttons memorializing the student. If someone comes to school with any of these, allow them to wear it for the day and then explain why it is not a good idea to have these items.

