

## Community Postvention Tips and Resources

The following are suggested steps for responding after a suicide death. Having a postvention plan for how these steps will be implemented promotes effective and timely response. For more information about building a community postvention plan see “After Rural Suicide: A guide for coordinated postvention response” (<https://www.cibhs.org/pod/after-rural-suicide>).

### Goals of postvention

- Support healing to those affected
- Reduce the likelihood of contagion
- Help organizations/individuals respond promptly and appropriately
- Offer messaging and activities to help educate the community

Postvention Steps:

1. **Verify and document** the accuracy of information received. E.g. County of residence, sex, age, race/ethnicity, circumstances, occupation, family, and any other information useful to plan for support.
  - Accurate information shared in a timely manner enables postvention responders to mobilize support quickly and effectively to those most affected.
2. **Mobilize and offer support** to those immediately affected (survivors of suicide loss), including family and any witnesses.
  - Proactively reach out to loss survivors to offer condolences and support.
  - Offer education about complicated grief after suicide.
  - Share resources that offer specific support survivors of suicide loss (e.g. support groups, experienced counselors).
3. **Communicate carefully** about the death.
  - Acknowledge the death, offer condolences, and share information about services and supports.
  - Do not share details about the death or engage in guesswork about the causes.
  - Always share resources for support.
4. **Monitor impact** on the community over time and continue to mobilize support.
  - Use social media, news media, and other information channels to determine what other actions might be beneficial (see step 4).
  - Continue to promote and share survivor support resources widely. Many survivors may not be in a position accept help for weeks, months, or years after the death.
4. Determine the need for **community-wide response** and/or a **targeted response**.
  - Broader response might be needed if the death was public, the individual was prominent, involved a homicide/suicide, received a lot of media coverage, more

than one suicide occurs in an unusually short time, or the impact on the community is heavy.

- Options for broader response include community meetings, public forums, media (news and social) response, and disseminating educational materials.
  - Targeted response focuses on specific settings most impacted by the death, such as schools, workplaces, senior living facilities, etc.
5. Discuss suicide prevention **training** needs and considerations.
- As a postvention response, any training should be focused on reducing the risk of contagion. Offering broad training too soon after a death does not allow time for healing and processing
  - Training is most effective as part of a strategic suicide prevention planning process.
6. Use and share **templates** for public communications and communications within specific settings such as schools or workplaces.
- Share and utilize the [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide \(http://reportingonsuicide.org\)](http://reportingonsuicide.org) and the Strategic Framework for Successful Messaging (<http://suicidepreventionmessaging.org>).
  - Offer condolences and avoid addressing detailed information about the death.
  - Always include resources for support.
7. Memorialize the deceased in a safe manner.
- Memorials should be the same as for any cause of death.
  - Focus on how the person lived, not how they died.
  - Encourage channeling grief toward support for others that have lost someone to suicide and for suicide prevention activities.
8. When holding a **community suicide prevention event** after a recent suicide loss:
- Be clear about the purpose of the event, e.g. to promote healing, offer education, gather input. Skillful facilitation keeps the purpose intact.
  - Notify immediate loss survivors that the event will occur.
  - Acknowledge recent loss(es) without being too specific. Avoid opening the floor for discussion of any individual suicide death.
  - Be aware of language or content that might imply blame for not recognizing the signs, or for not doing enough to help.
  - Identify a quiet space for retreat and have a counselor available for anyone who needs support.