

Postvention After Suicide

Dr. Laurel Bear

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Who in the group has had an
experience with suicide?

Today's Agenda

- What is postvention?
- Promoting healing and support
- Reducing risk
- Best practices for postvention in communities and in schools
- Resources

Postvention

Response after a suicide to help alleviate the suffering and emotional distress of the survivors, and prevent additional trauma and contagion.



Postvention is Integral to Prevention



Goals of Postvention

Support healing of the individuals affected (loss survivors) and of the community at large;

Offer support to at-risk individuals and reduce the likelihood of additional attempts or deaths (contagion);

Help individuals and organizations **respond promptly and appropriately**; and

Offer messaging and activities to help **educate the community** about suicide prevention

Surviving Suicide Loss



Complicated Grief

- Shame, blame, guilt
- Anger, abandonment
- Shock and disbelief – or relief
- Fear of losing others
- Increased risk themselves



Contagion

- Process by which one suicide death may contribute to another
- Relatively rare
- Adolescents and young adults are especially vulnerable
- How a death is portrayed and talked about can have a significant impact on risk
- Media coverage plays a role

Robin Williams' Legacy, and Its Impact on Suicide Prevention

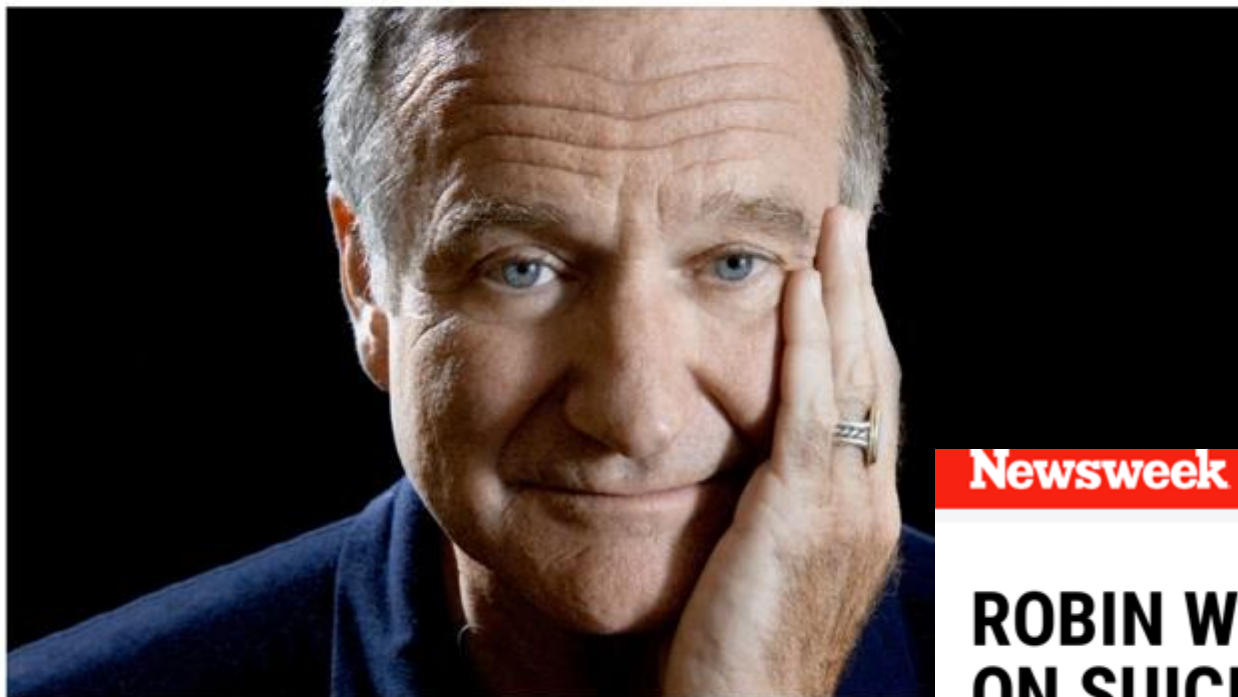
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Increase in suicides the months after the death of Robin Williams in the US

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Abstract

Investigating suicides following the death of Robin Williams, a beloved actor and comedian, on August 11th, 2014, we used time-series analysis to estimate the expected number of suicides during the months following Williams' death. Monthly suicide count data in the US (1999–2015) were from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Wide-ranging ONline Data for Epidemiologic Research (CDC WONDER). Expected suicides were calculated using a seasonal autoregressive integrated moving averages model to account for both the seasonal patterns and autoregression. Time-series models indicated that we would expect 16,849 suicides from August to December 2014; however, we observed 18,690 suicides in that period, suggesting an excess of 1,841 cases (9.85% increase). Although excess suicides were observed across gender and age groups, males and persons aged 30–44 had the greatest increase in excess suicide events. This study documents associations between Robin Williams' death and suicide deaths in the population thereafter.

Newsweek

ROBIN WILLIAMS LEFT 'UNPRECEDENTED' MARK ON SUICIDE HOTLINES

BY ZACH SCHONFELD ON 8/11/15 AT 4:00 PM

What helps after a suicide?

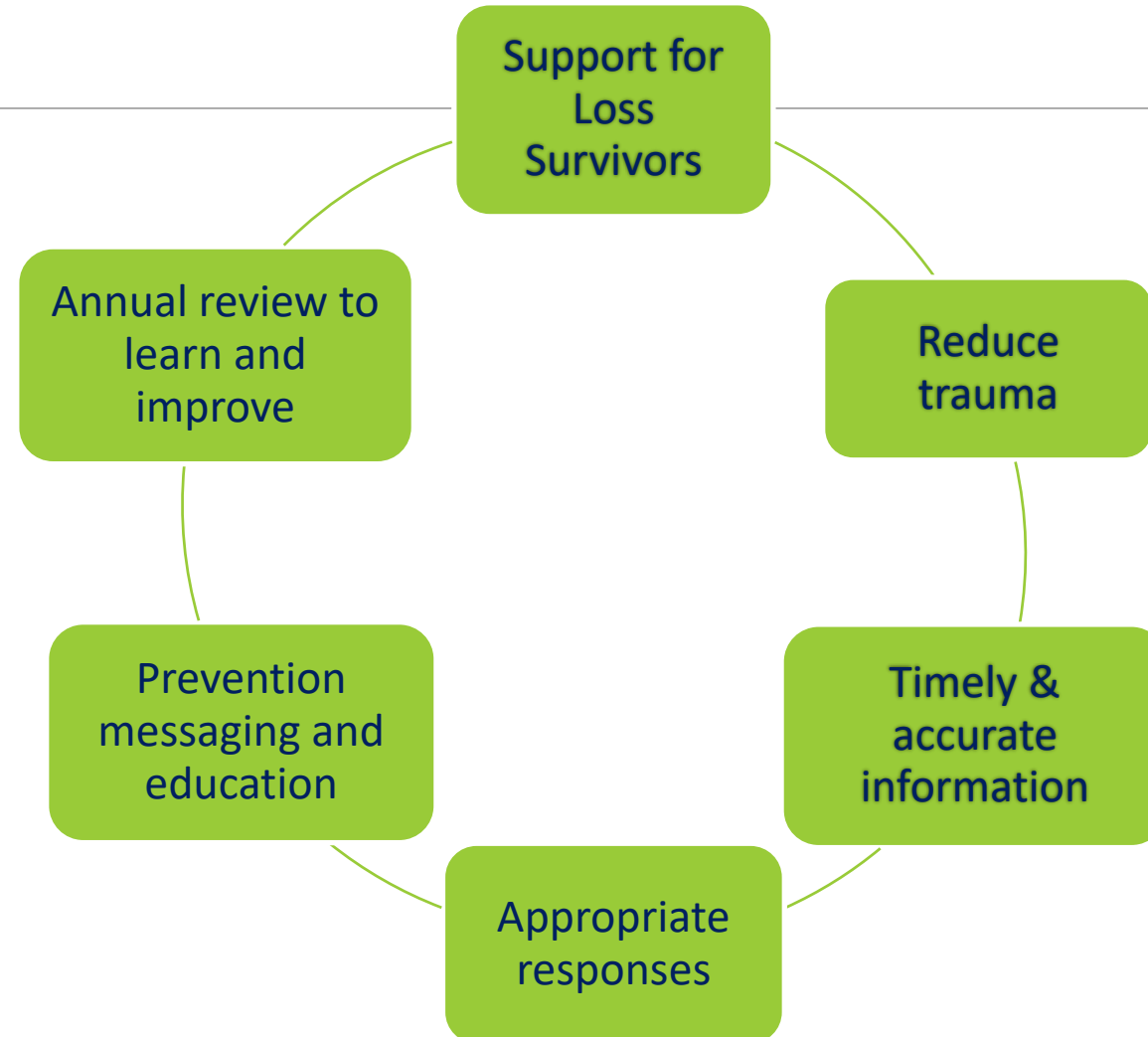


- Organized, quick and empathic response
- Support is available to those affected
- How a suicide is handled by the school, community, workplace
- How a suicide is portrayed publicly and in the media

Postvention Plan?



Elements of a Postvention Plan



Developing a postvention plan

- Engage key stakeholders
- Gather information
- Establish a Core Team to oversee response
- Inventory services and supports
- Plan for public communication

Engage Key Stakeholders

Coroner

Law enforcement (including Chaplains)

Behavioral health providers (public and private)

Crisis centers

Loss survivors

Schools

Chaplains and clergy

Funeral directors and/or chapels

Primary care providers

Hospital and emergency room staff

Leaders and/or healers from culturally diverse communities

First Responders

- Law enforcement and the Coroner need to be engaged and fully participating
- Primary source of timely information about a death
- Explore how a postvention plan will augment, rather than interfere with, their work
- Determine if formal agreements are needed

Gather Information

- What does suicide look like in your community?
- What currently happens after a suicide death?
(What does NOT happen?)
- What formal procedures are already in place?
- What do survivors typically experience?

Establish the Core Team

- Primary contact with first responders, the public, and others impacted by the death
- Coordinate response steps
- Connect loss survivors with services and supports
- Monitor contagion risk and response level
- Coordinate with suicide prevention coalition and key partners
- Develop a process for debriefing among team members

Timely Notification?

- A postvention plan can still be effective even if early notification from first responders is not feasible
- Postvention Steps may be implemented from whatever point the Core Team learns of a death
- Start where you are; over time, earlier notification may become more possible

Survivor Services & Supports

- Inventory services and supports
- Create a card and/or brochure
- Provide a supply to first responders and others who interface with survivors
- Add information to web sites

The screenshot shows a website page with the title "Hope and Help After a Suicide" in a large, blue, cursive font on the right side. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Local Resources:** A section with a placeholder "[add local resources here]".
- What Helps:** A section with several bullet points: "People who have experienced a suicide loss have shared what has helped them.", "* Work at understanding that you have experienced a traumatic loss.", "* Be patient in allowing yourself your reactions and feelings of grief.", "* Seek out those persons who give you comfort.", "* Avoid or limit contact with people who complicate your grief or tell you how to feel.", "* It's okay to let people know what you do and do not want to talk about; they may have questions but you do not have to satisfy their curiosity.", "* Practice self-care along with caring for others.", "* Gain information and skills through reading and using available resources.", "* Discuss your feelings and responses with other loss survivors, such as in a support group."
- Crisis Resources:** A section with "Emergency Response: 9 1 1" and "Local Crisis Line: [add URL here]".
- Regional Resources:** A section with "Compassionate Friends: (877) 969-0010" and "www.compassionatefriends.org", and "Friends for Survival: (916) 392-0664".

On the right side, there are two more placeholders: "[add URL here]" and "[add logo]".

The brochure features a background image of a sunflower. The title "Survivors of Suicide Loss Peer Support Group" is prominently displayed. Below the title, there is a short paragraph: "Have you lost a friend, family member, loved one, or someone close to suicide? Join our peer support group to help cope with the ever-changing mix of emotions as most grapple with what often happens to suicide." The brochure lists two locations and their meeting times:

- POWERSVILLE:** 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm, 1st Tuesday of each month, Powersville Wellness Center, 333 W. Henderson Ave., Powersville, CA 93257.
- VISALIA:** 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm, 1st Thursday of each month, Woodland Drive Baptist Church, 1436 S Woodland St., Visalia, CA 93277.

At the bottom right, there are logos for "LOSS TEAM" and "SUICIDE PREVENTION".

The screenshot shows a website header with a navigation menu: "Mental Health", "Services", "Clinic", "MHSA/Prop 63", and "Advisory Board". Below the header is a red banner with the text "Suicide Prevention Information and Resources". The main content area features the text "You are not alone!" and "If you or someone you love is in crisis, please reach out for help."

Safe Messaging After Suicide

~ Safety concerns don't mean we should avoid messaging. Communicating to the public about suicide is critical; what's important is how we message about it. ~

Plan for Public Communication

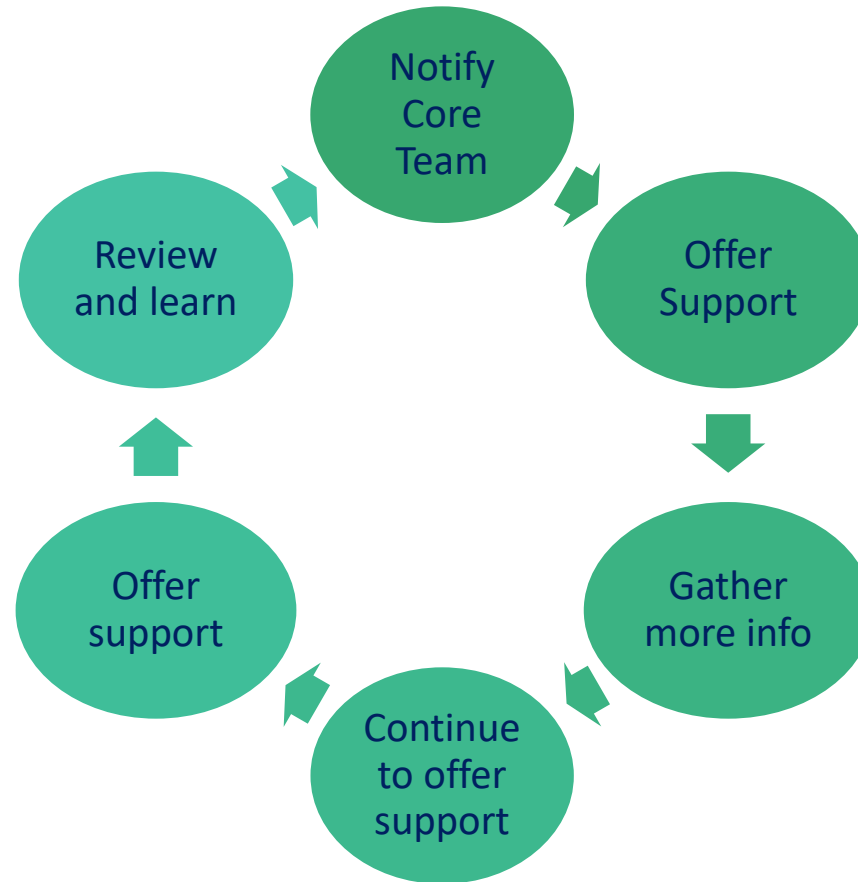
- Acknowledge the death, share information about resources
- Avoid sharing details about the death
- Develop templates to promote timely response
- Work with the media to promote safe reporting
- Balance family wishes or uncertainty with reducing risk of contagion



Key Principles of Safe Messaging After Suicide

- Always provide resources
- Educate about complicated grief
- Avoid details about suicide method or location
- Avoid oversimplifying the causes of suicide
- Acknowledge that suicide CAN be prevented without suggesting it is 100% preventable

Community Postvention Response



Steps in ALL Deaths

- Establish, confirm, and document facts and circumstances
- Mobilize and offer support
- Communicate carefully
- Monitor community impact
- Determine if a broader community response is needed

Mobilize Support to Survivors

- Coordinate with first responders to identify immediate survivors, witnesses
- Proactively reach out to offer support
- Ensure card/brochure was received
- Continue outreach over multiple points of time
- Share communication templates

Reduce Risk of Contagion

- Monitor response, including memorial and social media
- Disseminate messages of help and hope
 - Share communication templates
- Work with partners to identify and support vulnerable individuals

Community-wide Response

- A public event
- Suicide of a well-known figure
- Subject of extensive media or social media coverage
- Homicide/suicide
- When more than one suicide occurs in an unusually short time frame

Options for Broader Response

- Public meeting or forum
- Public statement or public health alert
- Monitoring and responding to media
- Disseminating materials
- Targeted responses may be helpful when a death disproportionately impacts a sector of the community

Holding Community Events After Suicide

- Be clear on the purpose
- Reach out to survivors to let them know about event
- Acknowledge loss without being too specific
- Avoid inadvertent messaging of blame
- Make sure there is a quiet space and/or counselor
- Use suicide prevention training carefully and strategically

Linking Postvention to Prevention

- Engage a suicide prevention coalition
- Review implementation of the postvention plan; ask survivors what was –and wasn't - helpful
- Examine data
- Modify postvention plan with lessons learned
- Feed postvention learnings into prevention strategies

Postvention in School Settings

How do we work with school staff to support students?

Am I to blame if there are more suicides?

- We do not have the power to completely prevent suicide from occurring
- Currently, there is no way to accurately predict who will attempt or die by suicide
- There are ways to lower the risk and it is important to learn about them



Do's of Postvention

- ✓ Quiet the environment
- ✓ Pay attention (nonverbal cues)
- ✓ Avoid interrupting
- ✓ Focus on the main issue
- ✓ Wait → Think → Respond
- ✓ Ask clarifying questions
- ✓ Help problem solve vs. giving advice
- ✓ Be patient

A tilted rectangular box with a black border containing the handwritten text "hi, I care." in a cursive, handwritten style.

Don'ts of Postvention

- ✓ Do not sound shocked
- ✓ Do not promise anything
- ✓ Do not overlook the risk factor signs
- ✓ Do not minimize the problem
- ✓ Do not argue
- ✓ Do not encourage guilt



Multidisciplinary Teams

- Another tool to support students
- What multidisciplinary teams meet on your campus?
- What role do you –or can you- play on your school’s multidisciplinary teams?



Strategies for School Staff

- Ask questions directly
- Be persistent
- Be prepared to act and intervene
- Get help when necessary

Reaching out to students who may be at risk

REACH OUT to the student and ask how he/she is doing

MENTION changes you have noticed in his/her behavior and that you are concerned for them

LISTEN. It can be more powerful than talking

AVOID downplaying their situation with statements such as “you have a lot to live for”

TALK to a counselor or administrator about your concerns for further evaluation and assessment

Considerations for Memorials



Questions?

Thank you!



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