

The District shall follow this procedure when a death by suicide occurs in the District.

Development and Implementation of an Action Plan

The District Crisis Team will develop an action plan to guide school response following a death by suicide that has a significant impact on the school community. Ideally, this plan should be developed long before it is needed. A meeting of the crisis team to implement the action plan will take place immediately following news of the suicide death. If the death has not yet been confirmed to be a suicide, the team should still meet while this is being confirmed. (See *After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools*).

Postvention Action Plan

The following steps will be taken following a death by suicide in the District:

1. *Verify the death.* Staff will confirm the death and determine the cause of death through communication with a coroner's office, local hospital, the student's parent or guardian, or police department. Even when a case is perceived as being an obvious instance of suicide, it shall not be labeled as such until after a cause of death ruling has been made. If the cause of death has been confirmed as suicide but the parent or guardian will not permit the cause of death to be disclosed, the school will not share the cause of death but may, at an appropriate time, discuss suicide prevention with students.
2. *Alert the State Department of Education (SDE).* Alert the Director of Student Engagement, Career & Technical Readiness about the death (208-332-6961). The SDE tracks student suicides throughout the state and can leverage resources (counselors, guidance, scripts) as well as asserting flexibility around SDE program monitoring activity, SDE trainings and other SDE reporting requirements so school staff can focus on student/staff grieving.
3. *Assess the situation.* The crisis team will meet to prepare the postvention response, to consider how severely the death is likely to affect other students, and to determine which students are most likely to be affected. The crisis team will also consider how recently other traumatic events have occurred within the school community and the time of year of the suicide. If the death occurred during a school vacation, the need for, or scale, of postvention activities may be reduced.
4. *Share information.* Before the death is officially classified as a suicide by the coroner's office, the death can and should be reported to staff, students, and parents/guardians with an acknowledgement that its cause is unknown. Inform the faculty that a sudden death has occurred, preferably in a staff meeting. Write a statement for staff members to share with students. The statement should include the basic facts of the death and known funeral arrangements (**without providing details of the suicide method**), recognition of the sorrow the news will cause, and information about the resources available to help students cope with their grief. The use of public address system announcements and school-

wide assemblies should be avoided. The crisis team may prepare a letter (with the input and permission from the student's parent or guardian) to send home with students that includes facts about the death, information about what the school is doing to support students, the warning signs of suicidal behavior, and a list of resources available.

5. *Avoid suicide contagion.* It shall be explained in the staff meeting described above that one purpose of trying to identify and give services to other high risk students is to prevent another death. The crisis team will work with teachers to identify students who are most likely to be significantly affected by the death. In the staff meeting, the crisis team will review suicide warning signs and procedures for reporting students who generate concern.
6. *Initiate support services.* Students identified as being more likely to be affected by the death will be assessed by a mental health professional to determine the level of support needed. The crisis team will coordinate support services for students and staff in need of individual and small group counseling as needed. In concert with parents or guardians, crisis team members will refer to community mental healthcare providers to ensure a smooth transition from the crisis intervention phase to meeting underlying or ongoing mental health needs. School administration will monitor crisis team members for signs of 'compassion fatigue' and provide additional supports for staff as needed.
7. *Develop memorial plans.* The school will avoid creating on-campus physical memorials (e.g. photos, flowers), funeral services, or fly the flag at half-mast because it may sensationalize the death and encourage suicide contagion. Avoid canceling school for the funeral. Any school based gatherings should not memorialize the student but rather focus on how to prevent future suicides, prevention resources available and healthy coping mechanisms.

External Communication

The Superintendent will be the sole media spokesperson, unless the school principal is designated by the Superintendent. Staff will refer all inquiries from the media directly to the spokesperson. The spokesperson will:

1. Keep the district suicide prevention coordinator and superintendent informed of school actions relating to the death.
2. Prepare a statement for the media including the facts of the death, postvention plans, and available resources. The statement will not include confidential information, speculation about victim motivation, means of suicide, or personal family information.
3. Answer all media inquiries. If a suicide is to be reported by news media, the spokesperson can encourage reporters to follow safe messaging guidelines (e.g. not to make it a front-page story, not to use pictures of the suicide victim, not to use the word suicide in the caption of the story, not to describe the method of

suicide, and not to use the phrase "suicide epidemic") - as this may elevate the risk of suicide contagion. They should also be encouraged not to link bullying to suicide and not to speculate about the reason for suicide. Media should be asked to offer the community information on suicide risk factors, warning signs, and resources available including the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline number.

District personnel shall at all times attend to the rights of the student and his or her family



LEGAL REFERENCE: Idaho Code 33-512; IDAPA 08.02.03.160

ADOPTED: October 21, 2019

AMENDED/REVISED: