



Suicide and Schools

UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital

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DISCLAIMERS

- We recognize that every setting is unique with its own policies and procedures, as well as team roles and resources
- This presentation is intended to share resources and best practices; all recommendations should be considered with supervisors, administrators, and relevant stakeholders in each setting before changes to policies and procedures are made

Learning Objectives

01

Describe value of procedures in suicide intervention and post intervention protocol

02

List 6 steps for assessing managing suicide risk

03

Describe 2 guidelines for school/student death posts intervention support

SAMHSA Suicide Prevention

A Toolkit for High Schools

*California Law,
Assembly Bill
2246 in 2017-18
must have
procedures for
suicide for 7-12th
graders*

1. Engagement

2. Procedures

1. Prevention

2. Intervention

3. Postvention

3. Training

Creating the Suicide Protocols

1. Identify members to help create protocol
2. Identify suicide risk response coordinator(s)/crisis response team
3. Identify and involve mental health providers for referrals
4. Determine suicide screening plan
5. Develop protocol for suicide risk assessment
 - Suicide risk assessment, caregiver notification, referrals, documentation process, maintaining confidentiality
6. Develop protocol for responding to a suicide attempt on school campus
 - Never leave the student alone, caregiver notification, law enforcement involvement, ambulance, school counselor or nurse or other school staff
7. Develop a protocol for a students return to school
8. Develop a communication and training plan to keep teachers and staff up to date on the protocols
9. Revisit protocols every year (or even after any use of the protocols).

Continuum of Strategies to Promote School Mental Health

Prevention

- Systems for promoting and preventing mental health problems

Intervention

- Systems for early intervention
- Systems for active evaluation and return to school

Postvention

- Systems for organized response following extremely adverse event (e.g. suicide, homicide, death)
- Facilitate healing & reduce negative impact of exposure

Prevention



Suicide Screening in School Setting

- Someone can feel suicidal even if they are not depressed
- Typically screening begins with general mental health screening risks
 - Schools usually have a COST team to identify and work with students who are having academic, emotional and behavioral concerns
 - Create a formalized procedure on screening for suicide if someone is identified
- Find ways for teachers, staff, students, parents to identify/communicate if there is someone at risk for suicide
- Find ways to communicate how any one can reach out for support

Teen Suicide Warning Signs

KNOW THE SIGNS

Pain isn't always obvious, but most suicidal people show some signs that they are thinking about suicide. The signs may appear in conversations, through their actions, or in social media posts. **If you observe one or more of these warning signs**, especially if the behavior is new, has increased, or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change, **step in or speak up**.

Select a
category



CRITICAL
TEENS
THE SIGNS

Personality
change

Withdrawal

Loss of
interest

Neglect of
personal
appearance

Changes
in sleep

Sudden mood
changes

Reckless
behavior

Physical
pain


Substance
abuse

Giving away
belongings

If any of these signs are present, call or text [988](tel:988) or chat 988lifeline.org to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

- Talking about death or suicide
- Seeking methods for self harm, such as searching online or obtaining a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

<https://www.suicideispreventable.org/>



Are you
thinking
about
suicide?

It's *OK* to be Direct

Talking about suicide does not
increase suicidal behavior.

By talking openly and directly,
you are sending the message
that you care and want to help.

Key talking points about suicide education

- Education about suicide
- Address blaming and scapegoating
- Do not talk about the method
- Address feelings of anger & responsibility
- Encourage help seeking
- Include resources
 - 9-8-8
 - Local mental health resources
- **Suicide education can be included in general education when talking about mental health**



Interventions



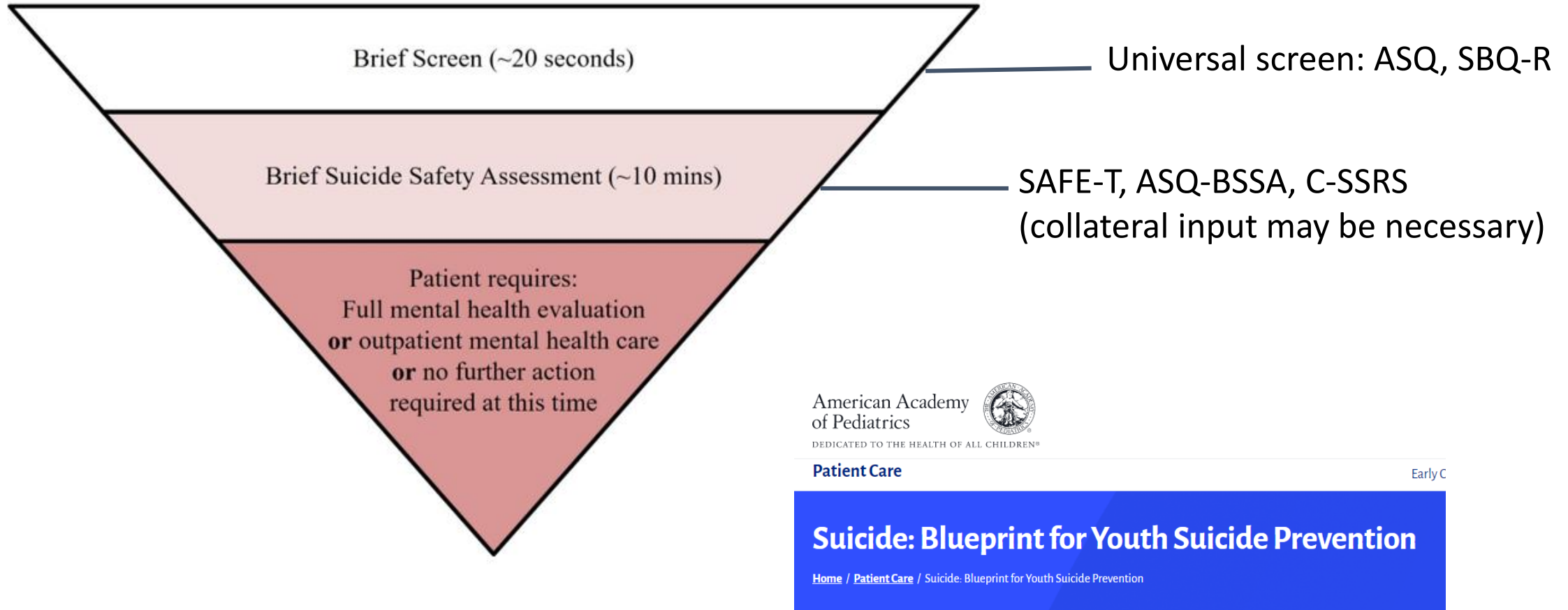
Suicide assessment

Training should include all STAFF to recognize warning signs for students at risk (*aka “gatekeeper” training programs*)

ONLY a professionals with some background in mental health assessments should be trained to assess suicide risk.

- School psychologist, social worker, nurse, counselor
- If none, check with school district or community mental health partners
- Note: not all mental health professionals have been trained to assess suicide risk

Suicide Screening and Suicide Assessment



ASQ Suicide Screen Questionnaire

Ask the patient:

1. In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. In the past few weeks, have you felt that you or your family would be better off if you were dead? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. In the past week, have you been having thoughts about killing yourself? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Have you ever tried to kill yourself? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how? _____

When? _____

If the patient answers **Yes** to any of the above, ask the following acuity question:

5. Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please describe: _____

If "NO" to 1-4, done

If "YES" to 1-4 or no answer, =
Positive Screen

If "YES" to 5 = acute positive
screen (imminent risk, full
safety evaluation & maintain
safety

If "NO" to 5 = non-acute
positive screen. Complete
brief suicide safety
assessment. Patient cannot
leave until evaluated for
safety.

Safety Plan Development: 6 Steps



Assess Suicide Risk (Beginning & End of Session)



Assess the Problem



Don't do it.
I have hope.

Why don't you...

Problem



Reduce Environmental Risk
(e.g. Means, Social Isolation, Stressors)



Get & Troubleshoot Commitment



Schedule Follow-Up Contact

Safety Plan Development: 6 Steps



Assess Suicide Risk (Beginning & End of Session)



Assess the Present-Moment Problem



Address the Present-Moment Problem



Reduce Environmental Risk
(e.g. Means, Social Isolation, Stressors)



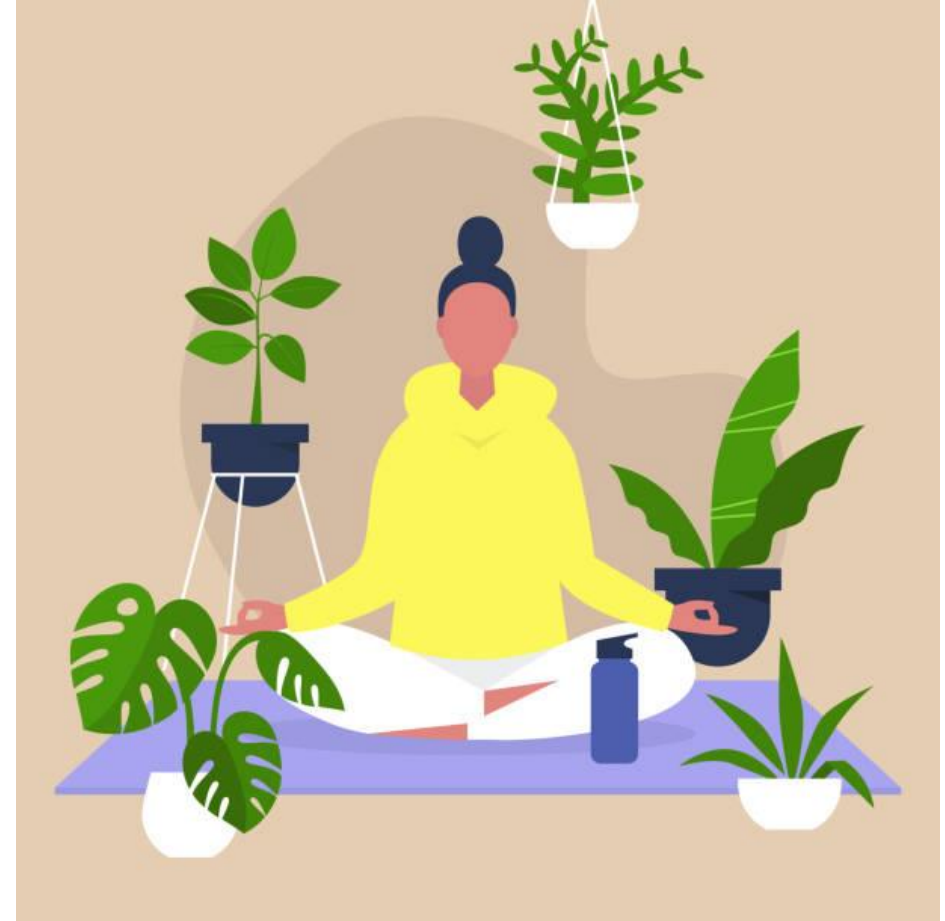
Get & Troubleshoot Commitment

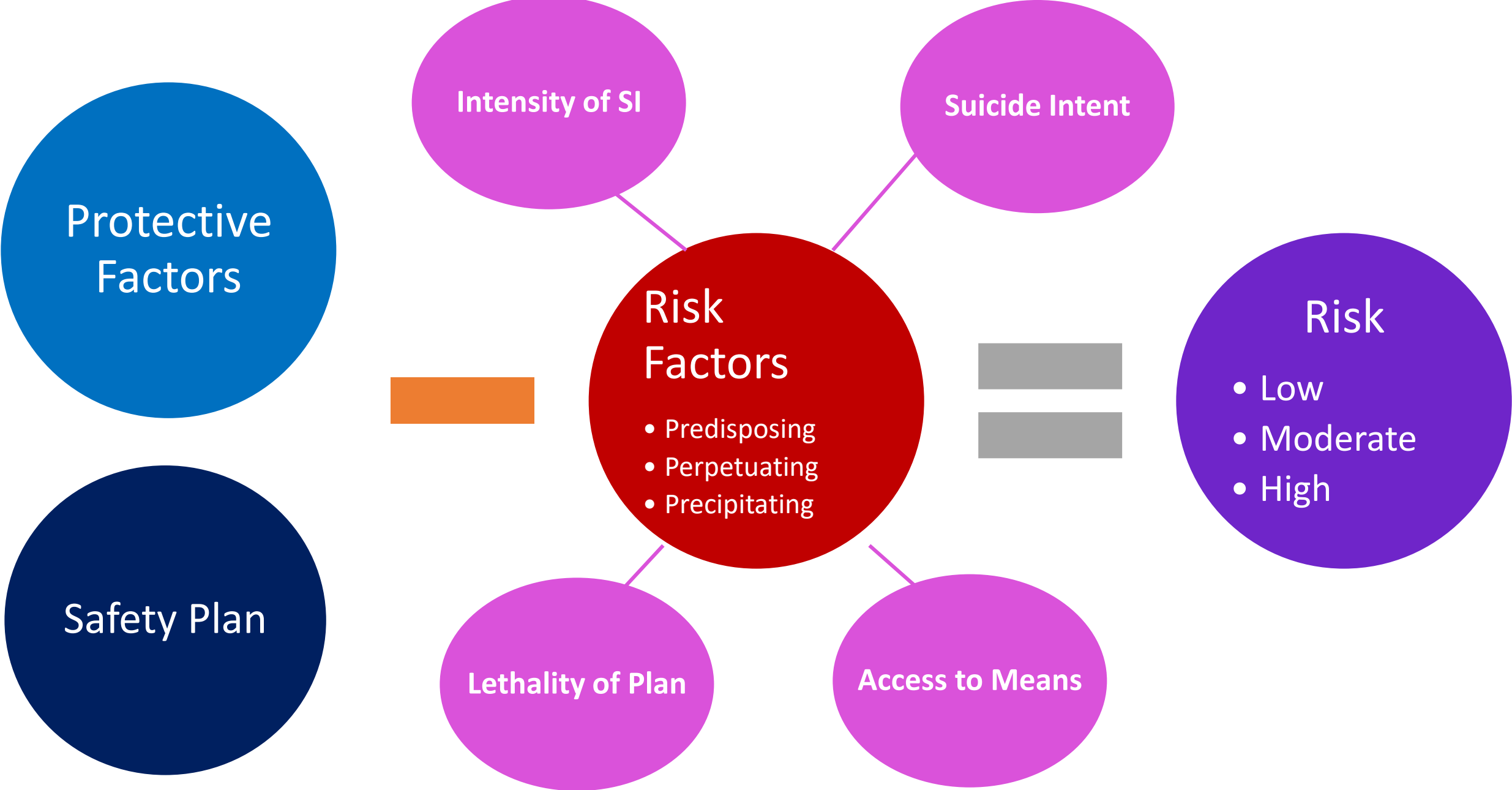


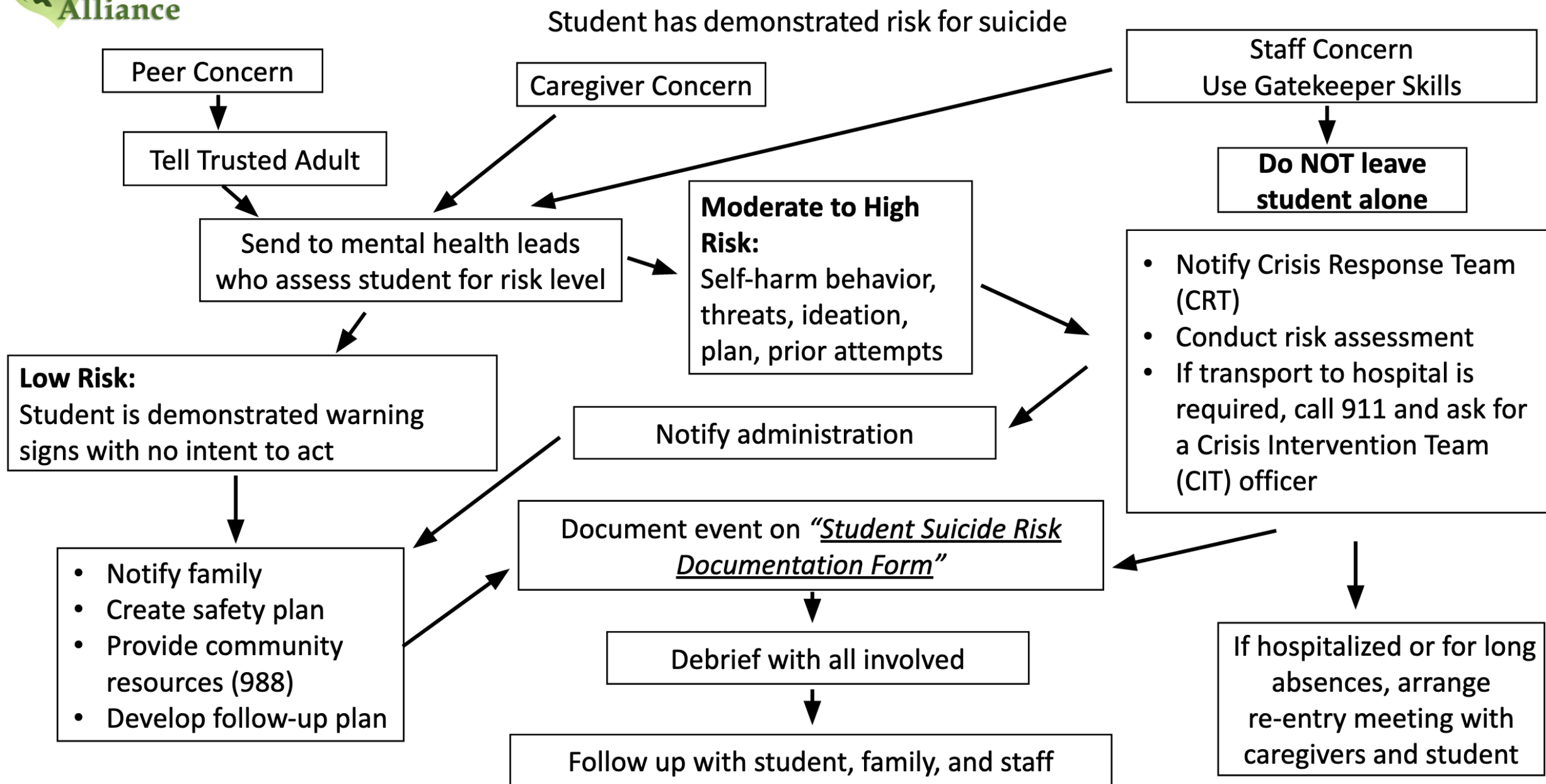
Schedule Follow-Up Contact

Safety Plan Considerations

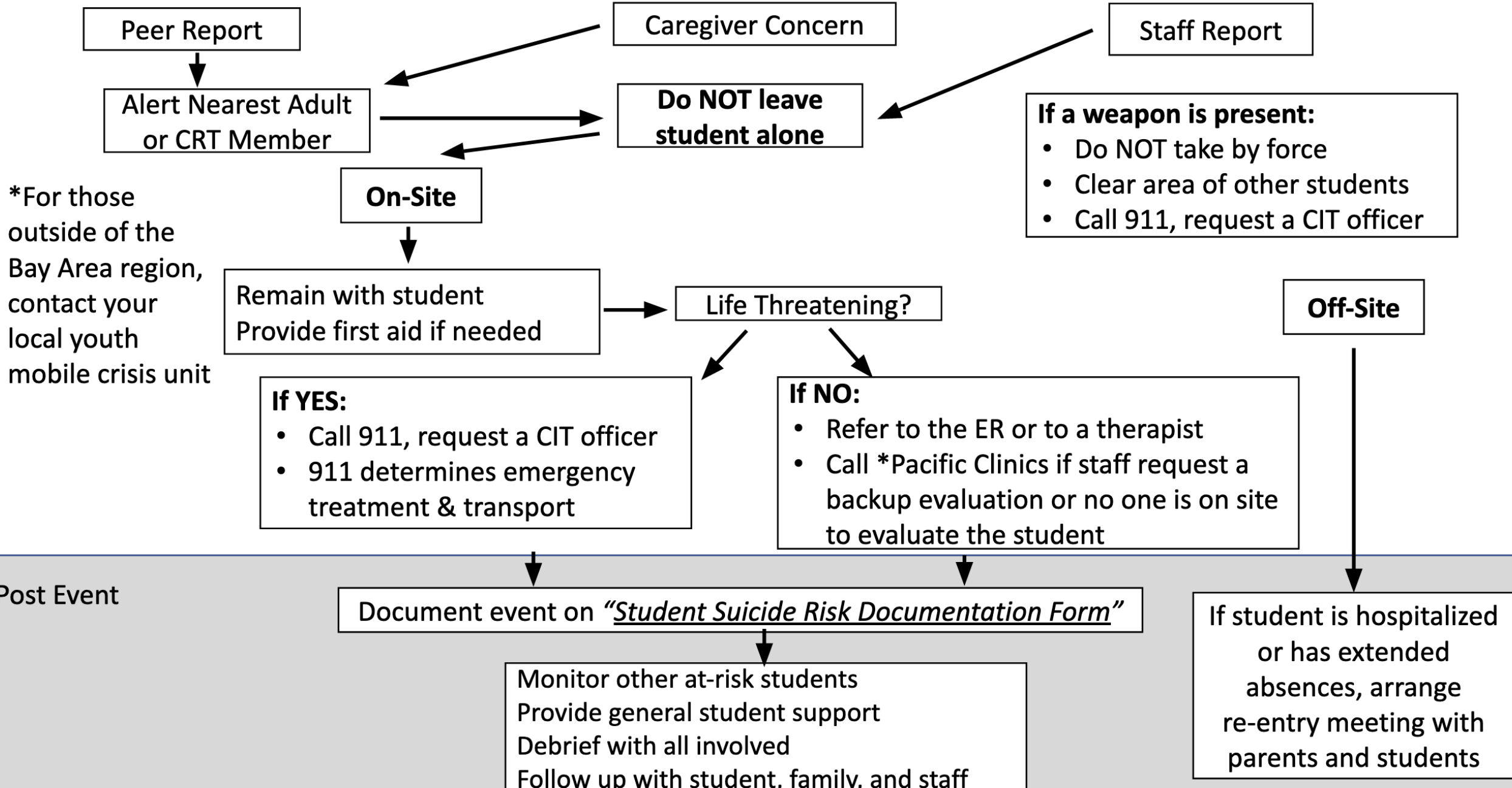
- Calm, active, and direct when asking about suicide
- Validate the emotion and suffering, not the behavior
- Be firm that suicide is a maladaptive solution
- Use your clinical intuition (assessment is a science and art)



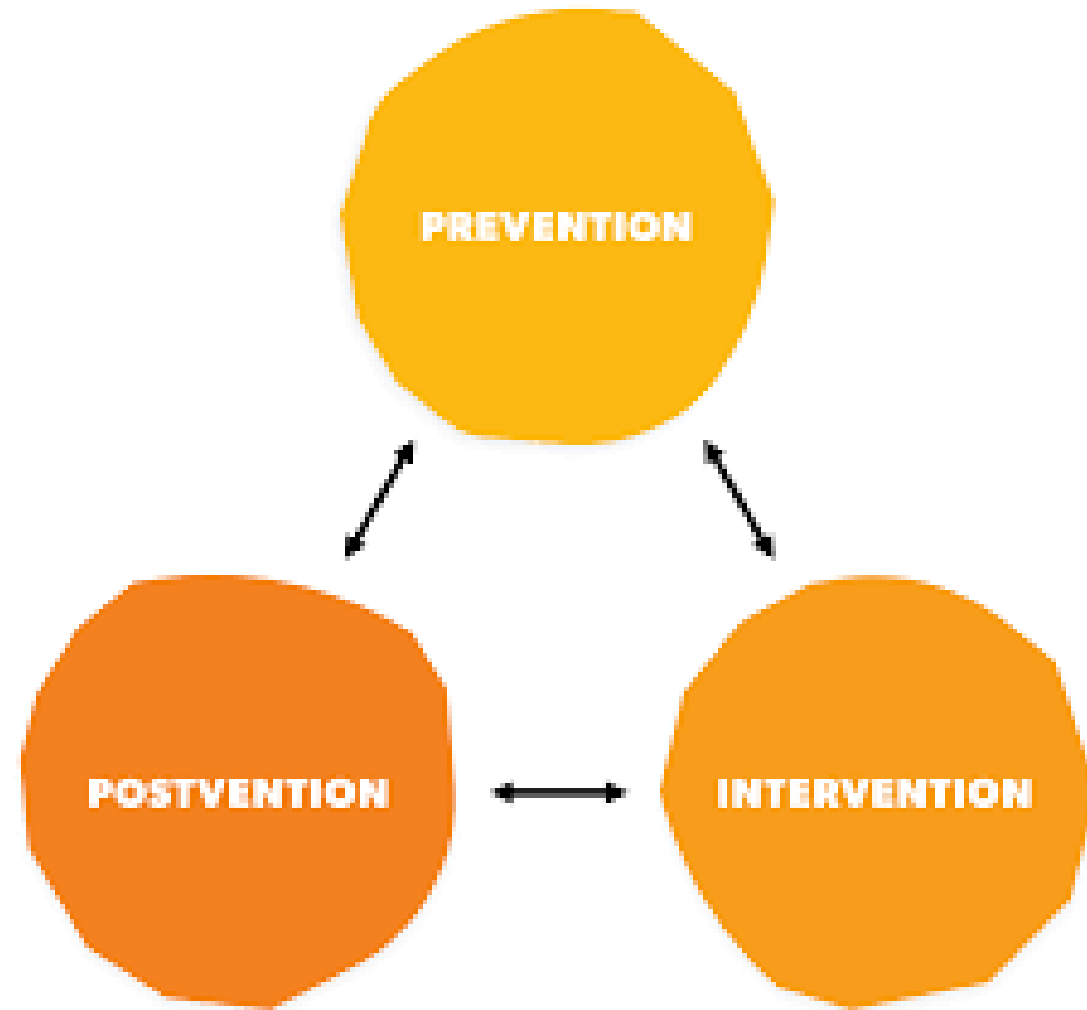




Student attempts suicide or has means on person



Postvention



After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools

Second Edition

Postvention

1. Identify group to create protocols
2. Identify community partners
3. Immediate response protocol
4. Long term response to suicide protocol (include memorialization guidelines)
5. Communication (include media) & training of protocols
6. Updating the protocols

<https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/after-suicide-toolkit-schools>

On Site

- (1) Call 911 & Contact Principal & Superintendent
- (2) Secure Area:
 - Do not move body or disturb evidence
 - Clear area of students and staff
 - Document names of witnesses
- (3) Administrator notifies staff

Notify & Support Staff

- Staff meeting before school to review postvention protocol
- Send follow-up emails with info
- Offer after-school meeting
- Give resources, emphasize self care

Notify & Support Students

- Inform during first period
- Identify vulnerable students
- Review self-care, help-seeking
- Advise regarding memorials
- Provide support stations

CRT Leader Activates Crisis Response Team

Communicate with All Parents

- Provide area for parents to get information
- Provide warning signs, risk factors, protective factors
- Provide funeral arrangements as available per family wishes

Media

- Do not allow on campus
- Direct request to media spokesperson

Off Site

Principal: Verifies death & Contacts family
Notifies superintendent & other key school personnel

Protect confidentiality and family wishes

Principal notifies broader school community, including:

- Current and former schools attended by siblings
- All parents/guardians
- Community supports and resources

Document all actions taken

- Create & maintain a database of at-risk students
- Review what worked & what could be improved

Long Term Aftermath

- Review long-term response protocol
- Enhance identification & support of vulnerable students
- Prepare for anniversaries, special events, incorporating family wishes as possible
- Provide educational resources for staff and families to enhance their understanding of adolescent suicide and its prevention

K-12

Toolkit for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention

[illegible]

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1. Mental health and wellness promotion
2. Intervention in suicidal crisis
3. Postvention
4. School suicide prevention policy, law and education standards
5. Staff, Parent & Student resources
6. Kara Grief Support resources

<https://www.heardalliance.org/help-toolkit/>

GUIDELINES FOR NOTIFYING PARENTS

1. Suicide risk- contact as soon as possible, ask parents to come to school as soon as possible
2. Sensitive to family's culture
3. Encourage using the school staff who knows the student to help notify parents
4. Explain why you feel there is a suicide risk
5. Lethal means counseling: the importance of removing from the home (or locking up) firearms and other dangerous items, including over-the-counter and prescription medications and alcohol.
6. If low to moderate risk, provide safety plan and referral information
7. Ask the parents to sign the Parent Contact Acknowledgement
8. Follow up w/in a week with parents
9. If the parents refuse to seek services for a child under the age of 18 who you believe is in danger of self-harm, you may need to notify child protective services that the child is being neglected.
10. Document ***all*** contacts with the parents.

"I have some very sad news to share. Jason died due to complications from cancer. I am feeling pretty sad and would like to take some time to talk about how you are feeling"

Supporting Grieving Students

A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS
AND ADMINISTRATORS

- State facts and how you are feeling
- Flexibility – teacher or counselor
- Reach out & collaborate with student/family
- Ask how to communicate to others
- Funeral arrangements communication
- Grief discussion/outlets
- Have the class help decided what to do with empty seat
- Maintain class routine and rules

Some Grief Resources

1. The Grieving Student: A teacher's Guide, by David J. Schonfeld and Marcia Quackenbush. This book was written by a physician and a marriage and family therapist. It is a beautifully written, in-depth guide for teachers about how to be an emotional support to grieving students.
2. Children, teens and Suicide Loss, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the Dougy Center, <https://aws-fetch.s3.amazonaws.com/flipbooks/childrenteenssuicideloss/index.html?page=1>
3. Coalition to support Grieving students, <https://grievingstudents.org/>
4. K-12 toolkit for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention, Heard Alliance, <https://www.heardalliance.org/help-toolkit/#web>
5. Addressing Grief: tips for teachers and Administrators, national Association of School Psychologists, <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/addressing-grief/addressing-grief-tips-for-teachers-and-administrators>

6. "supporting the Grieving student," American Federation of Teachers, <https://www.aft.org/childrens-health/mental-health/supporting-grieving-student>

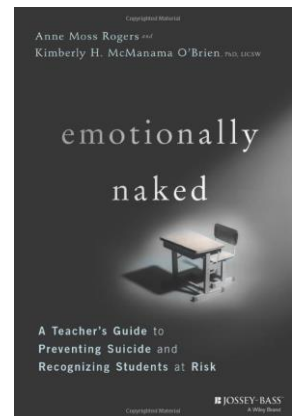
7. "Talking With Teens and kids About dying and death," KidsGrief.ca, <https://kidsgrief.ca/>

8. The dougy center, national Center for Grieving Children & Families, <https://www.dougy.org/>

9. The national Alliance for Grieving children, <https://nacg.org/>

10. child bereavement Uk, <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

*From KARA: Moving through Grief Toward Hope and Meaning. www.karfa---grief.org
<https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/content-public/pdf/a-handbook-for-teachers-and-administrators.pdf>*



Some Resources

- <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Preventing-Suicide-A-Toolkit-for-High-Schools/SMA12-4669>
- <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/preventing-youth-suicide/model-school-district-suicide-prevention-policy>
- <https://www.heardalliance.org/>
 - <https://www.heardalliance.org/help-toolkit/>
- <https://afsp.org/after-a-suicide-a-toolkit-for-schools>
- <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/mh/suicideprevres.asp>
- <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/content-public/pdf/a-handbook-for-teachers-and-administrators.pdf>
- <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/blueprint-for-youth-suicide-prevention/>