



suicide postvention

GUIDELINES

A framework to assist staff in supporting their school communities in responding to suspected, attempted or suicide death



Government of South Australia
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Child Development



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Other Authors/Contributors: South Australia. Dept. for Education and Children's Services.
Catholic Education Office (Adelaide, S. Aust.)
Association of Independent Schools of South Australia.
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Adelaide, S. Aust)

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This document is designed to assist schools in responding to a traumatic incident, such as a suicide death or attempted or suspected suicide within their student community, a process known as postvention. It aims to support communities in grief and to guide schools in recognising and responding to the risk of suicide contagion. Important to achieving both these purposes is the requirement for sensitive information sharing between government and non government schools, Department for Child Protection, mental health agencies and families.

These guidelines form part of a set of child protection related policies that have been developed collaboratively by the Department for Education and Child Development, Catholic Education South Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia. The government and non government school sectors are committed to promoting consistent child protection standards across all South Australian schools.

This document should be seen as a resource which complements schools' efforts to promote mental health and supports their critical incident management processes.



Rick Persse

Chief Executive

Department for Education and Child Development



Helen O'Brien

Director

Catholic Education SA



Carolyn Grantskahn

Chief Executive

Association of Independent Schools of SA

In the past, suicide was sometimes treated as a taboo subject. Today, we have a much better understanding of the connections between mental health and suicide and we appreciate that some level of openness about suicide is necessary for the protection and promotion of wellbeing in young people.

A student's attempted, suspected or suicide death is, in itself, a traumatic event for a school community. However, it can also contribute to an increased risk of suicide in other vulnerable students and members of the student's family. International research has identified the phenomenon of suicide "contagion" where a vulnerable person's knowledge of, or exposure to, a suicide increases the likelihood of them viewing suicide as an option. For this reason, suicide postvention represents a rare but essential component of a school's contribution to suicide prevention. Identifying, referring and supporting vulnerable students are tasks that all schools undertake as part of their normal health promoting practice. After a student suicide or attempted suicide, this work is intensified and becomes a significant focus of a school's long term postvention work.

Containing the spread of information about a student's suicide or attempted suicide is almost impossible given that young people can communicate with each other instantly and globally at any hour via a range of electronic devices and social media platforms. It is also counterproductive to stop young people from sharing their feelings about such a profound event. Therefore, the best way for schools to manage the impact of suicide on young people is to take as much control as possible over what and how information is shared between students, parents and staff. This process partly relies on a degree of understanding and cooperation from the bereaved or affected family which, in rare cases, may not exist either initially or later. These guidelines outline the tension schools may need to manage in respecting the wishes of family and at the same time meeting their duty of care to others. Staying connected with the bereaved/affected family will help the school be aware of the family's wishes and, over time, will provide an opportunity to share the school's aims in supporting other students.

While schools should respect a family's wishes in the way they refer to a young person's death or attempted suicide, they must also take action in communicating with, supporting and monitoring the rest of the school community. Inaction is not an option.

"Schools need to have emergency plans on how to inform school staff, especially teachers, and also fellow pupils and parents, when suicide has been attempted or committed ... The aim being to prevent a cluster of suicides ... A suicide cluster ... may involve not just children or adolescents who know one another: even young people who are far removed from or entirely unknown to suicide victims may identify with their behaviour ... Schoolmates, school staff and parents should be properly informed about a student's suicide or attempted suicide and the distress caused by such an act should be worked through."¹

1 *Preventing suicide. A resource for teachers and other school staff*
World Health Organization
Geneva 2000
(WHO/MNH/MBD/00.3, pp 15, 16)

How to use these guidelines

These guidelines provide a checklist of the immediate and longer term steps that should be taken in responding to suicide death, attempted and suspected suicide (see following page). Some of the information is clearly relevant to suicide deaths only.

The checklist is followed by five sections (A-E) containing detailed advice on why and how these steps should be taken within the particular time frames. Sample letters and handouts for use with parents, staff and students are provided in Sections F & G.

The guidelines must be read in sequence and in their entirety. This is not a document that can be used partially. It is essential that leaders and their emergency response teams re-familiarise themselves with all the information in the guidelines as soon as they are aware of a traumatic event, suicide death or attempt.

In communications between schools and their communities the term 'suicide' should not be used. Although the cause of death may seem apparent this can only be determined by the Coroner at a later date after formal investigation of the full circumstances. Similarly, we should avoid using language that refers to a suspected or attempted suicide. (However, for internal use only, the guideline reference is suspected, attempted and suicide death.)

Underpinnings for these guidelines

School structures

- The school's support policies, practices and structures for vulnerable students and its health promoting programs and practices.
- An identified emergency response team (ERT) and emergency response plan.
- Emergency school contact details made available to parents (for example on the school's recorded phone message and website).
- A process for the reporting of suicide related information to the relevant sector office within 24 hours.

Sector structures

- Systems that provide immediate advice and ongoing assistance for school communities in their management of critical incidents.
- Processes by which other relevant suicide related information, such as concerning social media posting can be shared with other school sectors.

Agreement between the education sectors

- To collaborate on child protection related policies and practices and to share information about risks to students' safety.

Understanding between mental health providers and schools

- To share information that will assist the school, family and mental health worker to provide the best possible coordinated support to identified young people, as well as contributing to the protection of other students.

A IMMEDIATE RESPONSE (see Section A)

- Ensure the immediate safety of community members if an on-site event, e.g. providing first aid, lock down procedures, ambulance, police, quarantining areas or substances.
- If not a site based event, find out the facts/circumstances as far as possible. Do not ignore rumours—investigate immediately. Confirm facts with your sector incident unit. If this cannot be ascertained seek confirmation from the family and/or police.
- Ensure that affected students/parents/staff are not left alone.

B FIRST 24 HOURS (see Section B)

- Inform relevant sector office
- Convene emergency response team and plan the following steps:
 - Make contact with relevant CAMHS or mental health agency
 - Consider factors specific to attempted suicide
 - Identify and plan support for students who are at risk
 - Set up a support room in the school
 - Inform staff and provide script and advice documents which **do not describe method of suicide**
 - Inform students via a prepared script, in small groups, **not a whole school assembly**
 - Inform school/s of siblings if known
 - Inform the wider school community via prepared letter
 - Contact the media liaison advisor in your sector's central office. **Refer all media enquiries to that office**
 - Monitor/manage social media.

C 48–72 HOURS AFTER THE INCIDENT (see Section C)

- Restore school to regular routine
- Liaise with bereaved/affected family
- Plan school involvement with funeral
- Advise staff of all relevant actions and seek their feedback/observations during debriefs which should occur regularly over the first few days
- Monitor students and refer for assessment with mental health agency
- Monitor staff wellbeing
- Keep parents informed via notices
- Protecting a deceased student belongings for the police and family
- Continue monitoring of social media
- Continue documentation of all actions.

D DURING THE FIRST MONTH (see Section D)

- Monitor staff and student wellbeing
- Plan for school events of relevance (year book photographs, award nights)
- Gather relevant information from staff for a critical incident review
- Conduct a critical incident review
- Consider offering information sessions for parent community with mental health agency
- Continue documentation and checklist of all actions

E IN THE LONGER TERM (see Section E)

- Continue support and monitoring of students and staff
- Keep parents, staff and students informed
- Plan for anniversaries, birthdays and significant events
- Implement recommendations from the critical incident review
- Include the postvention plan when inducting new staff

F SAMPLE LETTERS AND SCRIPTS

- Department for Education and Child Development memo/email from Education Directors to inform site leaders of a traumatic death of a student
- Memo/email from sector offices to site leaders
- Memo/email to advise site leaders of high risk behaviour/attempt to suicide
- Script for student community
- Script for students in the same year level (for an attempted suicide)
- Information to assist staff in talking with students following an attempted suicide or suicide death
- Catholic Education SA parent letter
- Department for Education and Child Development parent letter
- Parent letter insert: Information for parents following a traumatic event

G RESOURCES

- Postvention checklist record
- Information to help staff identify students for referral
- Resources and other information
- Emergency contacts
- Sample documentation outline
- Critical incident review reflection guide

If the attempted suicide, or suicide death, takes place at school, ensure the immediate safety of community members

- Ensure no other students or staff are in immediate danger.
- Administer First Aid as necessary following basic casualty care practices (avoid contact with blood or other body fluids by using protective gloves).
- Call Emergency Services 000, or 112 if using a mobile, for medical advice, ambulance/police support.
- Alert emergency response team for assistance.
- Report incident to sector office
- If the student is physically unharmed, contact your regional CAMHS team, Youth Mental Health Service (if over 16) or GP for advice. Responsibility to inform the Emergency Mental Health Nurse at the Women's and Children's Hospital sits with the regional CAMHS team.
- Contact the student's parents/carers and support the student until family members can take over that care. Do not leave the student alone.
- Move witnesses to pre-established safe locations where they must be supported and supervised by staff/counsellors until police have taken statements or advised other actions.
- Isolate the location from student or unauthorised staff access by using screens, blocking corridors, using invacuation procedures etc. Do everything possible to protect others from viewing the site without disturbing the area that the police will need to inspect. Do not remove or disturb items from the location until police have concluded their work and advised that the area is no longer a secured area.
- Depending on the means of the attempted suicide or suicide death, begin consideration of whether changes to the environment or access to materials is necessary.

If not a school based event, find out the facts

- Do not ignore student, parent or staff "rumours" about suicide. Do not ignore suicide notes/emails/messages sent to staff by students. Immediate follow up should occur in both these situations.
- Contact your sector office to verify the "rumours".
- If, after following up on notes or rumours, a student is found safe in the school, organise a counsellor to meet with them straight away to assess their wellbeing and the background to the suicide concern. In most cases it will be essential to share this information with the student's parents and refer the young person to a mental health provider if one is not already involved.
- If the student cannot be located at school, make contact with the family immediately. If parents are unaware of the student's whereabouts and safety, contact police.
- Suicide reports made by people other than direct family members should be verified. If the reports are not confirmed by the sector office verification should be sought through the local police, hospital staff or, with extreme sensitivity, the family.
- If it is out of hours and you are seriously concerned about the young person's wellbeing call the GP or Emergency Mental Health Nurse at the Women's and Children's Hospital (08) 8161 700 for advice.

If a suicide report is made or confirmed by the family

It is appropriate to seek the family's feelings straight away about informing the school community of the attempted suicide or suicide death. If the family asks for advice it is appropriate to talk about:

- these guidelines for government and non government schools
- the damaging impact of misinformation
- the importance of notifying school/s attended by any known siblings
- the importance of parents being made aware of how best to support their own children's grief
- the option of only naming their son/daughter to their peer group and referring anonymously to the suicide death or attempt with the rest of the school population.
- advising that the suicide will be referred to as a traumatic death and an attempt will be referred to as serious risk behaviour
- providing support to monitor social media.

Ensure that affected students, parents and staff are not left alone

Exposure to suicide death or attempted suicide is a traumatic experience. Staff, students and parents immediately affected by a suicide death or attempted suicide should not be left alone but should be comforted and supported by others until family members can take over that care. Safe and secure environments where this kind of crisis support can be provided to staff and students should be identified in the school's emergency response plan.

Sector Central Office

When a suicide death or suspected suicide of a young person up to the age of 19 years occurs, the Coroner's Office will notify nominated director positions within the government and non-government education sectors, Department for Child Protection, CAMHS and YMHS. The information provided will include the young person's name, age, school enrolment, if known, and the 24 hour period in which the death is believed to have occurred.

The nominated delegates may use the same protocol to verify a death when information has come via other sources and has not been verified by the Coroner's Office.

The relevant sector authorities will inform schools. (see sample email in Section F)

It is the responsibility of the school sectors and agencies to follow their procedures for informing relevant stakeholders in a timely manner and immediately implement the postvention procedures.

Inform relevant sector office

Youth suicides or attempted suicides can increase the risk of harm to family members as well as other vulnerable young people. International research confirms the risk of suicide "contagion", where a vulnerable person's knowledge of, or exposure to, a suicide increases the likelihood of them viewing suicide as an option. Based on this phenomenon it is important that schools are alerted firstly to any immediate connections between a deceased student and members of their own school community and secondly to the possible influence of suicide information being exchanged across their student population. Given the instant and global communication networks that young people utilise, schools need as much advance warning as possible so that sensitive enquiries can be made between schools and extra monitoring can be put in place for identified vulnerable students.

If the school receives information about a suicide from another source (as outlined previously) they should seek verification and then follow the procedure below.

1. School informs their sector office, SAPol/Coroner's Office informs:

Catholic Education Office:

Director or Assistant Directors: (08) 8301 6600
CEO Principal Consultants Direct: (08) 8301 6885

Department for Education and Child Development:

Site leader notifies: SWISS (08) 8314 4100
and Education Director
Education Director contacts
[Incident Management Directorate](#)

Association of Independent Schools SA:

Deputy Chief Executive or Chief Executive
has responsibility for informing principals (08) 8179 1400

2. Sector offices inform each other

CAMHS
Department for Child Protection

The sector in which the incident occurs takes responsibility to inform the other two sectors via the contacts above

3. Sector offices inform their school leaders

Catholic Education Office:

Director, Assistant Director or Principal Consultant will advise schools

Department for Education and Child Development :

Education Director will advise schools

Association of Independent Schools SA:

Deputy Chief Executive or Human Resources Consultant will advise School Principals

Convene emergency response team (ERT)

The emergency response team is an identified group of staff who will lead the school's response to emergencies. New members can be added as necessary from within and outside the school and, in the case of suicides or attempted suicides, a mental health professional is an obvious example. Include an identified staff member who can manage social media internally and externally. All staff should be aware of the role of the ERT.

The ERT should have a nominated leader and be updated annually. After a suicide or attempted suicide many actions need to be coordinated in a very short space of time. However, unlike other kinds of emergencies, suicide postvention also needs to be sustained for a period of many months. A team is essential to ensure that:

- the wellbeing of all members of the school community is monitored and protected
- all responsibilities are undertaken efficiently and sensitively
- accurate and consistent advice is provided to students, staff and parents
- no single member of staff assumes the full burden of responsibility.

Once the immediate safety needs of staff and students have been met, the ERT must meet to establish the school's postvention plan by delegating the following responsibilities.

Responsibilities list

- Liaising with family (see Introduction and advice in all sections A to G)
- Contacting school/s attended by siblings and known close friends
- Identifying vulnerable students, staff and close friends for personal contact and follow up
- Preparing written information for distribution to students, staff and parents in consultation with sector office
- Liaising with mental health professionals
- Liaising with police and protecting student belongings (secure student's locker)
- Liaising with sector support staff
- Managing all incoming and outgoing information (including sympathy cards, newspaper notices, etc)
- Monitor social media
- Managing media contact through sector office
- Documenting all actions (see sample in Section G)
- Making appropriate environmental changes if the suicide or attempt occurred at school, e.g. barring access to a roof top, locking away certain materials such as ropes or poisons

All members of the ERT should have their own copy of the guidelines. Generally, it will be necessary for the ERT to meet daily for the first week following the event, and consistency in adhering to delegated roles is critical.

The school's postvention work will be helped if the following processes are followed:

- ERT members do not act alone, but channel all information through the leader
- everyone is kept informed of the ERT's work, knowing who they need to speak to and about what.

Make contact with relevant mental health agency

Having the immediate support of CAMHS or relevant mental health professionals is invaluable in assisting a school to manage its postvention responsibilities. For this reason it is sensible to invite a CAMHS representative or a relevant mental health representative to be a part of the ERT for a period of time appropriate to the circumstances. This will assist the longer term negotiation between the school and the mental health agency about the level of support requested.

The involvement of mental health professionals means the school can share some of the work of meeting its community's needs and ensures expert advice is available to guide its actions. This is both a physical and psychological support for the whole school community.

Mental health professionals will be able to work alongside the school in the following key areas:

- planning support for a student who has/had suicidal ideation or has attempted suicide
- helping meet the immediate counselling needs of affected students
- identifying other vulnerable young people
- screening young people at risk, e.g. undertaking Risk Assessment
- taking referrals from families and staff
- providing information sessions as required for parents, staff and students
- planning the management of significant occasions such as funerals or anniversaries
- liaising with police, hospital personnel and the media where relevant.

Postvention collaboration between schools and mental health professionals is greatly enhanced when there is a relationship or partnership already established.

Features of a partnership

Schools ensure mental health professionals are:

- included in regional counsellor network meetings
- consulted/involved in mental health related professional development in the school/region
- consulted on the management of individual students identified as being at risk
- kept informed of any significant changes in students who are clients of the mental health service.

Mental health professionals ensure key school staff are:

- included in discussions about protective management of high risk clients
- notified when high risk clients discontinue with the service.

Mental health professionals encourage parents and clients to:

- consent to information sharing with key school staff as a routine component of support planning
- understand that their wishes may be overridden if the client is seen to be in immediate critical danger.

Mental health professionals ensure:

- liaison with the Women's & Children's Hospital /local hospital emergency mental health service to provide support outside of normal business hours.

Considerations specific to attempted suicide

This page is not a summary of what a school needs to do in the event of an attempted suicide. The advice provided here is to alert schools to some immediate considerations that are specific to an attempted suicide. The rest of these guidelines must be followed. It is assumed that by now the sector office has been contacted, the ERT has been convened and the mental health agency has been contacted.

Communication with staff, students and the community

If the school is informed of an attempted suicide that took place away from the school or the attempt occurred without other students being aware, there is a small possibility that the spread of information may be contained. If complete containment of information is a real possibility it should be discussed with the family as soon as possible. In such circumstances any communication with staff, students and parents will be on a “need to know” basis only. The student, the mental health professional, the family and the school representative must determine who will be included in a “need to know” group. The major consideration in this exercise is how many individuals need to be informed in order to keep the student safe and supported in the school environment. The school should monitor social media to identify potential concerns and risks including inappropriate comment, inaccuracies and rumours.

Complete containment is likely to be a very rare situation and the ERT will need to have a secondary plan to follow if information about the suicide attempt begins to circulate across the school community.

If details of the attempted suicide are already known in the school population then all the advice that follows regarding communication within the school community should be carefully considered. Schools should seek advice from their sector office if they are unsure about their communication responsibilities.

Liaison with the family

Critical areas for sensitive discussion with the family are:

- what information is provided to which sections of the school community
- the support plan for their son/daughter’s return to school
- the support for any siblings in the school
- the support for siblings at another school
- liaison with the mental health professional
- potential impact of social media.

Liaison with the mental health professional

An ERT member must take responsibility for liaising with CAMHS or other mental health professionals who were, are or will be supporting the student who has attempted suicide. The mental health professional on the ERT can greatly assist in this process of liaison.

It is essential that a support plan is developed and agreed to by an identified staff member (usually the counsellor), the student, the family and the mental health professionals before the student returns to school.

Identification of and support for other vulnerable students

Schools must not underestimate the impact of an attempted suicide on other students. All of the advice that follows in these guidelines regarding support for and monitoring of identified and vulnerable students is just as important in the case of attempted suicide as it is with a suicide death.

Identify and plan support for students at risk

The most important aim of postvention is to help limit and prevent harm to others. A crucial responsibility for schools is to ensure their processes of identifying, supporting, referring and monitoring vulnerable students are well understood and effective. More advice is provided on this in Sections C and F.

In the first 24 hours it is important that:

- the closest friends of the student who has attempted suicide or died by suicide (and any other identified vulnerable students) are informed personally by appropriate staff and provided with immediate support and information about where they can receive continuing assistance at school
- the school's ERT monitors social networking sites and other social media (see Social Media for more information)
- the affected students' cooperation is sought in not spreading sensitive information about the student and in following the protocols for leaving the school grounds
- direct contact is made with the parents of these students and any others about whom staff have serious concerns so that support at home can be planned
- direct contact is made with the principals of schools attended by siblings or known close friends to ensure awareness.

Set up a support room for students

The value of a support room is that it provides a safe, supervised location where students' grief and needs can be expressed, responded to and monitored. While a support room would normally be established following a student death, it may be the case that a very public suicide attempt also warrants the provision of a support room. An appropriate staff member such as a counsellor or a mental health provider must supervise the room at all times and, following normal protective practices, the room's door should be left ajar rather than shut. The support room should provide where possible, protection from noise, bright light or high student traffic and an ongoing record (sign in sheet) of the students who have accessed the room.

Allow distressed students access to this room for several days after the incident. Monitor student movement to and from the support room to ensure they return to class, are collected by parents or return to the company of supportive friends if during recess or lunch.

Inform staff (as soon as possible after the ERT has met)

Brief staff about:

- the facts of the situation including any parent wishes about what information they want to be shared/withheld. The death should be referred to as a traumatic event when conveying information to students and the broader school community.
- **following up immediately all unauthorised/unexplained student absences**
- the members of the ERT and their roles, particularly identifying the staff member to whom people should convey any new or relevant information they receive
- the response plan for the day, in particular changes to responsibilities or routines such as more staff on yard duty and interim measures to track movement
- how phone enquiries are to be managed
- the importance of **not asking students for information relating to the attempted suicide or suicide death** but passing on to the ERT what they are told or observe
- forwarding items of student work to a nominated ERT member, e.g. art work, assignments or journals — these will be held for police and family
- the principles of postvention—to prevent further harm to others by identifying people at risk and by managing the school's responses so that attempted suicide or suicide death is neither glamorised nor made secret (refer to section *Considerations specific to attempted suicide* for a rare exception to this)
- contact to be made with staff who were absent at that time or who are on leave.

Display relevant information about roles and special procedures in the staff room and ensure all adults who will have contact with students in the following 24 hours are briefed, e.g. regular bus drivers, sports coaches, canteen staff, school support staff, Out of School Hours Care staff, tutors or relevant volunteers.

Provide staff with:

- a script to follow in informing students (sample provided in Section F)
- information on how to offer support, how to manage discussion about suicide, signs to watch out for and information on grief (samples and links provided in Section G)
- sources of support they can access for themselves (see below) and the option of not being involved in supporting students or reading the statement if they feel this will risk their own wellbeing.

Ideally, individual staff members will have been spoken to ahead of the meeting if they are considered to be particularly vulnerable for any reason. However, it is important to encourage **all** staff to access support or respite whenever they need it.

Ask staff about:

- any students they consider will need particular support and which students are of concern
- what they know that may be relevant, e.g. connections with other students, particular events that need to be monitored/changed or possessions of the deceased student that need to be collected for the family.

All staff briefings in the postvention period should be used to both convey and seek information. This contributes to a sense of collegiality and shared responsibility which helps protect the wellbeing of staff.

Counselling services for staff

CESA/AISSA: [ACCESS](#)—Confidential counselling 1300 667 700

DECD: [Employee Assistance Program](#)—Confidential counselling 1300 360 364

Inform students

(do not provide details of the method of suicide death or attempted suicide)

If a suicide death

Friends closest to the student

Ideally, these students will have been spoken to individually, or in small groups, by a counsellor or a staff member. Depending on their responses they should be offered the opportunity to use the support room or arrangements should be made for them to be collected by their parents. No students affected by the news should be allowed to leave the school unaccompanied, unless by direct arrangement with parents.

Students in the same year level

A modified statement (see sample in Section F) should be provided to students in the same year level in recognition of their closer association with the student, their anticipated desire for more information and a different need for support.

Students in the same class as a sibling at the school

This group will need to be given additional assistance in understanding how to support their classmate once they return to school. It may be appropriate to have the counsellor or mental health professional speak to this group as well as the class teacher.

General population

The general student population should be informed as soon as possible via a statement prepared by the ERT (see samples in Section F). This is an important way to support those staff for whom the task of informing students is stressful. It also ensures that accurate and consistent information is provided to students as a way of countering the rumours and misinformation that inevitably arise in any crisis. This first statement should also promote the important notion of students looking out for each other.

The issue of naming the student will vary and schools should be sensitive to any parental requests regarding this. Student grapevines will eventually name a student, but in recognition of family feelings it may be more appropriate initially to name the student only to the students in the year level concerned or the class of a sibling.

Home/pastoral care groups, class groups or year level groups are the preferred environments in which to inform students, assuming staff are comfortable to do so.

Whole school assemblies are not recommended because student reactions are more difficult to manage and it is harder to support individuals.

Information about professional support for students is provided on in Section G.

If an attempted suicide

An ERT member must liaise with the family to ascertain their feelings about communication with the school community. Depending on the level of student awareness and where the attempt took place, the ERT will need to consider each of the student groups mentioned above. A sample script for students covering the situation of a very public suicide attempt at a school is provided in Section F (p.26). However, there are many possible scenarios in this situation and schools will need to consider carefully their responsibilities to protect the wellbeing of students as well as to respect the express wishes of the family.

Schools should utilise the support and advice within their sector in managing these situations as all options should be considered. For example, if there are conflicting needs between the broader student population and the family, it may be possible to provide appropriate, honest counselling and support for students without issuing any public written statements.

Be mindful however that the person may already have been identified via social media. Monitor and where possible, ensure that any information obtained this way is verified through the school sector processes and that any insensitive or inaccurate information is managed appropriately e.g; asking for comments to be removed from the site or providing accurate information to the school community via prepared scripts.

Refer to the attempted suicide as high risk behaviour.

Inform the wider community (see sample letters in Section F)

Statements should not provide details of the method of the suicide death or attempted suicide.

Giving parents immediate and accurate information about the school's response to a suicide or attempted suicide protects the school in a number of ways. It:

- limits misinformation and distress to the parent population
- reduces the number of enquiries to be managed
- encourages actions and attitudes that complement the school's postvention plan
- helps parents to take supportive and protective action with their own children
- promotes communication with the school about wellbeing concerns
- engenders confidence in the school's capacity to return to a normal routine.

How widely the school community should be informed may differ depending on circumstances. However, because young people can be profoundly influenced and affected by suicide, schools have a very strong duty of care to inform parents so they can take supportive and protective actions with their own children.

A method of checking that parents have received notices should be considered.

Plan media liaison

The first action for the nominated ERT member is to contact the media liaison officer within their own sector.

No comments have to be made, or should be made, to the media until advice is received. See contacts below.

- **Catholic Education SA: (08) 8210 8147 (Media Liaison Catholic Communications)**
- **Department for Education and Child Development: (08) 8226 7990 (Media Liaison Officer)**
- **Association of Independent Schools SA: (08) 8179 1400 (Deputy Chief Executive)**

Research indicates a potential link between inappropriate reporting of suicides and a subsequent increase in "imitative" suicides. Any media interest in a suicide has the potential to hinder a school's postvention work so careful planning to protect against this is essential. Media involvement in reporting suicide should be discouraged as it can contribute to 'contagion'. One member of the ERT should act as the liaison with the sector's media advisor as this will help accuracy and consistency of actions.

Appropriate media reporting	Inappropriate media reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Works closely with CAMHS or other mental health authorities in presenting facts• Highlights alternatives to suicide• Includes discussion of depression and mental illness• Provides information about help lines and community resources• Publicises risk factors and warning signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives details of the method of suicide• Uses photographs or suicide notes• Suggests simplistic explanations for the suicide• Glorifies or sensationalises the person and their suicide

Social Media

The use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr and Snapchat plays a vital role in young people's lives. Young people can access and distribute information with each other instantly and globally at any hour of the day via a range of electronic devices. Information about traumatic events is often disseminated out-of-school hours and prior to the school receiving confirmation of the event.

While it is impossible to contain the spread of information about a traumatic event, schools can when they have confirmation, use social media and the school's network to disseminate information about:

- onsite support available for students, e.g. school based counsellor
- local mental health support services and contacts, e.g. CAMHS, GP, headspace
- helpline numbers, e.g. Kids Helpline
- online support and mental health resources, e.g. reachout.com, youth beyondblue, headspace

The school's Emergency Response Team (ERT) will oversee the use and management of social media. This could involve:

- convening a small group of the student's friends and peers to work with ERT to monitor social networking sites and other social media
- identifying and responding to concerns and/or risks on social media which may include:
 - rumours and inaccuracies about the event
 - information about upcoming or impromptu gatherings in relation to the event
 - memorial pages
 - derogatory messages about the person or other persons
 - comments on the deceased person's personal page
 - messages victimising or bullying current students in relation to the event
 - comments indicating other students may be at risk or vulnerable.

Most social media networking sites have a process for reporting inappropriate content. If you have concerns about material that has been posted following a suicide or attempted suicide you should contact the social media network or community in question, e.g. Facebook or check their 'Help' section for the process for reporting content of this nature and request the content be removed.

Refer to your sector's social media policy in managing inappropriate comments on social media sites.

[DECD](#)

[CESA](#)

[AISSA](#)

Restore school to regular routine

The use of the support room should reduce as time passes and schools will need to use their discretion as to when this is “closed” and normal counselling processes resume. As far as possible (and appropriate) school routines should return to normal after three days. The return to regular daily routines and activities is an important contribution to the recovery of all affected members in the school community.

Returning to normal routines does not mean that vigilance and awareness of student and staff wellbeing are lessened. This must continue for a number of months and longer for particular individuals.

Liaise with bereaved/affected family

The member of the ERT with this responsibility will have to use considerable discretion and sensitivity in managing this role. There will be great variation in the accessibility of the family during this time and their capacity or willingness to communicate. This will be influenced by many factors including:

- the relationship already established between the family and staff at the school
- the family’s cultural or religious practices in dealing with death or suicide
- the level of extended family or community support the family can draw on
- whether there are siblings attending the school.

Wherever possible, identify an extended family member or close family friend to act as a go-between if it is not possible to speak directly with the family. The main aims of this early liaison are to:

- offer the condolences of the whole school community, where appropriate
- extend the offer of all forms of support and liaison available in the school
- alert the family to anticipated or advised media contact
- determine the family’s wishes regarding school representation at a funeral/service
- meet the family’s wishes regarding support arrangements for any siblings attending the school or another location
- plan support for siblings returning to school after the death of their sister/brother
- plan support for a student’s return to school following a suicide attempt
- offer to keep them informed of relevant aspects of the school’s postvention plan and, if appropriate, issues that arise for students
- limit the number of times the family have to relay information about a traumatic event.

Keep the family or their liaison person informed of the information being exchanged between students. Suicide death or attempted suicide may be discussed by many students. Inform the family that communications between the school community will refer to the event as a traumatic death or high risk behaviour.

Continue to use opportunities to talk about:

- the advice in these guidelines (for government and non government schools)
- the damaging impact of misinformation
- the importance of parents being made aware of how best to support their own children, particularly if attempted suicide or suicide death is being discussed within the peer group.

Coroner's Court Counselling Services

A counselling, information, and support service is provided by experienced social workers via the Coroner's Court Counselling Services. Family and friends are invited to use this service, either by telephone or by appointment in person. This service includes:

- initial grief and crisis counselling during the time immediately following the death
- counselling at key points following the death, for example when a finding is made
- in appropriate circumstances, assistance to view the body of the deceased
- provision of specific information about the coronial process
- help in preparing for inquests
- information about bereavement support groups
- information on helping children to understand death
- referral to longer term counselling and other resources
- community education about the State Coroner's Office and related matters.

These services are free of charge and any family member or friend may use them by phoning (08) 8204 0600 during office hours.

The Coroner's Court website **www.courts.sa.gov.au**

An *Information & Support pack for those bereaved by suicide or sudden death* is available from the Coroner's Office.

http://livingisforeveryone.com.au/uploads/docs/6280_Bereavement%20Support_SA_WEB%5B1%5D.pdf

Plan school involvement with the funeral

In order to monitor and support students and staff, the school should know who attends the funeral and, if it occurs on a school day, students must have parental consent to attend.

Ideally, attendance at a funeral should be limited to only close friends and staff and only after the wishes of the family have been sought. Appropriate arrangements should be made to support and supervise students before and after the funeral, especially if they have played a role in the proceedings, for example as a pall bearer or speaker.

Students and/or family members may wish to hold a memorial in the school. Monitor impromptu gatherings organised via social media networks. Generally, memorials involving large numbers of students are not recommended. Schools are encouraged instead to use the support room (in the first few days) as a place where reflective activities can occur with small groups of students. Later, staff may use routine prayer or assembly opportunities to acknowledge the grief felt by family and friends, particularly at the time of the funeral or an anniversary. It is critical that these acknowledgements are delivered and managed in such a way as to ensure that suicide death is not glamorising for the student population.

Advise staff of relevant actions

Regular debriefs are designed to help create calm and restore order. Keeping each other informed and sharing the postvention responsibilities is a way of protecting staff and student wellbeing and demonstrating that a situation is being managed.

Staff should be debriefed regularly over the first week. The ERT's relevant actions should be outlined and, at each meeting, staff should be invited to share any information, concerns or observations which they consider to be of importance. Debriefs should be held before, after or instead of normal staff meeting business. They should not become an agenda item of normal staff business.

The mental health representative on the ERT should attend some or all staff debriefs in the first week.

Regular topics for all staff debriefs

Students of concern

- Staff should be provided with a copy of *Information to help staff identify students for referral* (see sample in section G)
- Staff should discuss this information and ask questions particularly of the mental health professional about interpretation
- Staff should be directed to immediately pass on names of students about whom they are concerned to the ERT member delegated with this coordination.

Activities of concern

- Use staff to brainstorm all upcoming events or activities which might need to be altered or cancelled in view of the attempted or suicide death. Staff should think about:
 - curriculum, e.g. projects, plays, research, novels that invite a focus on suicide may now be seen as inappropriate
 - excursions or camps which may now be seen as inappropriate or too difficult to manage safely
 - all the roles that a deceased student would have been playing in the near future, e.g. sporting, academic, community
 - events where a deceased student would be expected to be honoured (this is not to decide how to manage the situation immediately, just to know what has to be planned).

Emergency Response Team actions

- What has been planned for funeral attendance, parent consent requirements
- The presence of additional personnel such as social workers from sector offices or mental health agency staff and their roles
- When staff can expect that a deceased student's name will be removed from the roll—this is easier for staff to cope with if it is anticipated rather than a surprise
- Media involvement
- Ongoing monitoring of social media
- Any new requirements or procedures, e.g. reporting unexplained absenteeism
- Collecting information for the documentation process.

Monitor students and refer for assessments with mental health agency

This work must occur in collaboration with a mental health agency, e.g. CAMHS. Ideally, a mental health professional will be on the ERT and will be helping with this work from the outset. School counsellors should be part of the team who undertake this area of responsibility.

In the first 24 hours, the closest friends and associates of the student and any students who witnessed the suicide death or attempt will have been contacted and provided with immediate support.

The next steps are to identify other students of concern and to develop response and support plans.

Although it is not possible to prevent every suicide death, it is possible to recognize changes in behaviour and the existence of common crises that may precipitate suicidal behaviour. Knowledge of the warning signs and risk factors can assist school staff to intervene in the potentially destructive process in which a young person is enveloped and take action to alleviate it.

The law does not require you to predict and prevent every situation. Your duty is to take whatever reasonable steps you can to minimise how frequently this behaviour occurs and the risk of injury as a result.

1. Identify students who are immediately or already considered at risk

- Siblings of the student who has attempted suicide or died by suicide
- Students who have a history of suicide attempt(s)
- Any student experiencing depression/suicide ideation/self-harm, whether or not they have accessed mental health services for treatment
- Students who are or have been accessing mental health services for depression/suicide ideation/self harm
- Students known to be struggling with grief or trauma related to other deaths, accidents, catastrophes, family breakdown or emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

2. Identify other young people who may be profoundly affected by the death or suicide attempt, using staff, student, parent and family networks

- Friends or partners who attend other schools are best followed up by counsellor-to-counsellor communication
- Friends/acquaintances who communicated with the student in some fashion in the last hours before the suicide or attempt took place
- Students who may have had negative communication with the deceased
- Students who are expressing guilt about “messages” that they were given by the student but did not act on or share with an adult.

3. Identify other students of concern via referrals from staff, students or parents

- Students and parents are encouraged to contact the school if they are worried about young people through the statements and notices provided by the school
- Staff will refer students based on the guidance provided at debrief meetings (see sample handout in Section G).

4. Develop response and support plans for all identified students, in collaboration with mental health professionals

- Contact with parents (unless it is believed that such contact will place the student at further risk)
- Contact with the young person
- Referral to sector education services for support
- Referral to a mental health professional for suicide risk screening, if appropriate
- A documented plan of the support to be provided to the student by the school, family and mental health agency.

Only mental health professionals should assess students for suicide risk.

School staff need to be caring listeners and observers. Their role is to refer rather than treat.

Monitor staff wellbeing

Staff wellbeing must be monitored and responded to at regular intervals. Teachers need to be encouraged to put their own wellbeing first and to ask for respite or a change of responsibilities if necessary. The school's return to a normal routine relies on a level of positive mental health in staff and this must be promoted and protected in transparent ways. Refer to p9 for staff counselling services.

It is not uncommon for staff to experience levels of guilt about a student's suicide death or attempted suicide. In hindsight, it is possible to read signs in a student's behaviours that were not seen at the time to be significant. Debriefs are an opportunity to acknowledge this and to encourage staff to talk with appropriate professionals about their feelings. Refer to staff counselling services in section B.

The ERT should be considering all avenues of sector and interagency support to assist the school in maintaining its normal routines. Additional social workers in the school can help manage the load placed on counsellors and ERT members in responding to parent, staff and student needs. All outside support personnel must be briefed on the school's emergency response plan and must follow it.

Keep parents/guardians informed via notices

Ensure that parents are advised of any significant events or changes to the school's routine relating to the attempted suicide or suicide death. In this early stage notices may address:

- funeral arrangements and consent requirements
- advice about the wellbeing of a student who attempted suicide
- changes to previously planned activities or excursions
- availability of additional counselling services in the school
- changes to attendance/sign in/sign out procedures, and planned building changes.

Protecting a deceased student's belongings for the police and family

The collection and protection of a student's belongings is an important act of respect for a grieving family and is critical to the work that police will undertake. It is vital that students don't unwittingly distress parents or compromise police work by taking their friend's belongings or distributing them to other friends. Any items can assume a precious status for family members or be significant to police/coronial work.

In the first instance, a staff member needs to secure, where possible by padlock, the deceased student's locker so that the contents remain intact. That staff member or the principal should advise the attending police that the student's items, including pieces of work forwarded by staff, have been safely secured and where the items can be located for inspection/collection as is required in the circumstances.

Once the items have been cleared for release by police, a staff member should empty the student's locker (when students have been dismissed) and keep its contents together with the student's other belongings. An inventory should be made of these items and they should be stored securely in the school until collected by the family.

Schools need to be prepared for the grief that parents will be experiencing. Collecting a student's belongings protects the family from having to move around the school, perhaps in a distressed state, looking for items or emptying a locker in the presence of other students. An empty locker space is a particularly distressing "symbol" of a student death for close friends so it is appropriate to forewarn them when this is going to happen.

Continue monitoring of social media

A member of the ERT has responsibility for monitoring and responding to concerns and/or risks on social media.

Respond by dispelling rumours and derogatory messages. Use social media platforms to disseminate information about seeking help and support, at school and through local mental health agencies. Provide contact details and phone numbers for agencies and helplines.

Follow up all concerns (refer to section B for examples).

Continue documentation of all actions

A member of the ERT has responsibility to document the school's postvention actions. There are a variety of formats that can be followed for documentation but the main purpose is to assist the school in:

- being able to provide organised details of its postvention actions if an authorised agency seeks it
- having information ready to assist with the critical incident review process.

Having documentation managed by an identified ERT member ensures actions are not "lost" and protects the school from the stress of receiving urgent information requests that can not be answered quickly and comprehensively. A sample documentation outline is provided in Section G.

Monitor staff and student wellbeing

This conscious and deliberate process should continue to be a focus for the ERT. The impact of a student suicide death or attempted suicide will continue for as long as there are students and staff in the school who were present at the time of the incident. In the first month, the ERT should be looking for obvious signs of staff or student distress and responding to them in the ways outlined in sections B and C and in partnership with mental health professionals.

The ERT may consider that the needs of staff and students and the impact on ERT members themselves warrants extra longer term support from their relevant sector office. The interim appointment of an additional, experienced school leader can provide invaluable support to a school managing suicide postvention. It can relieve school leaders from the day-to-day administrative responsibilities and allow them to devote their attention to specific postvention tasks.

The school should be aware that any other crises in the school community are likely to be felt more profoundly by those who have been affected by the attempted suicide or suicide death. If further deaths, attempts or accidents occur it should be anticipated that many staff and students will return to their earlier levels of grief and therefore require their earlier levels of support and monitoring.

Plan for school events of relevance

The ERT may need to make decisions about planned events or documents that would have involved or represented a deceased student. Examples are year books, graduation nights, and awards the student may already have been given. Schools can and should celebrate the young person's achievements in the normal way without fear that they are sensationalising the suicide. However, very careful liaison with the family should occur regarding their wishes and these should be respected.

Each school community will approach these decisions differently but cultural and family sensitivity and awareness must guide their decisions.

Gather relevant information from staff for a critical incident review

Before the ERT conducts a critical incident review it is wise to allow all staff an opportunity to contribute their views on how the school community has managed the postvention responsibilities and their perceptions of the prevailing school culture that preceded the attempted suicide or suicide death. The easiest way to collect candid staff opinion is to provide a written or online survey that can be completed anonymously if desired. The responses should be collated confidentially and provided to all staff as well as those participating in the critical incident review.

Conduct a critical incident review

The purpose of a critical incident review is to ensure that ideas for improved emergency responses or school practices can be shared, considered and incorporated into school policy and planning. It is also an opportunity for the ERT to acknowledge the commitment and efforts of all members of the school community and the effectiveness of its actions. Participants in the review will vary but normally it will involve all members of the ERT and a facilitator from the relevant sector office. Before the review, the ERT must collect and provide to all participants:

- data from the staff survey (see previous paragraph)
- a summary of the documented actions to date
- a reflection guide (example in Section G)
- any other feedback received.

Reviews are most effective when all participants:

- have had time to consider and reflect on the above material
- have organised their thoughts ahead of time
- can share their main ideas in a single uninterrupted response, i.e. one at a time
- know their ideas will not be debated during the review
- believe that the review is an opportunity to refine and improve school processes and to acknowledge the achievements of the school community.

Using a reflection guide ensures all participants have an opportunity to contribute to the same topics at the review meeting. Participants can read pre-prepared notes if they wish. All contributions should be recorded, collated and used by the school leadership to determine agreed actions, persons responsible and processes for communicating the outcomes of the review with all members in the school community, including parents. An ERT may choose to use a facilitator for the review process.

Consider offering information sessions for the parent community

What parents/guardians need or want will vary hugely depending on the circumstances of an attempted suicide or suicide death. What is important is that the ERT continues to consider what parents may need. The following are examples of what schools have offered parents under varying circumstances:

- general parent information sessions on recognising signs of suicide risk, current research on building resilience, understanding grief and loss, supportive parenting
- year level based information sessions to address specific issues that may exist for that cohort of students, e.g. Year 12 students about to leave school or enter stressful exam periods
- year level or general parent sessions to discuss the outcomes of the critical incident review
- information sessions for targeted parents of an identified group of at risk students
- follow up information about support services and resources (examples in Section G).

Schools must use their mental health partners in running these sessions

The media should not be invited nor should they report on these events

Continue documentation of all actions

The amount of documentation will ease over time but schools should expect to record postvention actions for a minimum period of 12 months.

Continue support and monitoring of students and staff

Students

The team of staff with direct responsibility to support students at risk will by now have an identified group of young people who will be receiving ongoing support and monitoring in partnership with mental health professionals and parents. The management of this group of students should be conducted as part of the school's ongoing and multi-layered systems of student support.

Specific attention should be given to identified students whose social support networks may change through:

- a holiday period
- an exam period
- leaving school (transition to work, further learning or a family move).

Similarly, identified students whose family support is likely to change, e.g. through divorce or separation, should also receive increased attention.

Close friends of a deceased student can put pressure on each other by insisting on a particular way of “remembering” their friend and forgetting that people manage grief in very different ways. Staff should not underestimate the damaging impact of these sorts of disagreements between students who are already very vulnerable. Staff can help these students by reinforcing at appropriate times that there is no right way to remember or grieve the loss of a friend and that they must be kind to each other and respect their differences.

Staff

At this stage the school leadership and ERT should consider again the need for additional personnel support in the school. This would apply particularly if the school was managing more than one critical event. It would also be at this stage that school leaders would be taking advice from their ERT about whether compassionate transfers or changed appointments should be offered to identified staff. Continued liaison with the relevant sector office is important in helping to quickly facilitate this kind of support.

Keep parents, staff and students informed

The reasons for regular and relevant communication with parents, staff and students are just as important in the long term as they are in the short term. Advice about anniversaries involving the deceased student, media coverage, or any other forms of potential stress will continue to help protect the wellbeing of the school community and reinforce a consistent and supportive approach from the ERT. Keeping people in the dark about possible stressful events is not protective. It increases people's vulnerability and risk of harm.

People's desire to see something positive emerge from a tragedy like a suicide death or attempted suicide is very strong. The results and recommendations of the critical incident review can help the community achieve some of this sense of moving forward.

Plan for anniversaries and significant events

As with deaths from any cause, the anniversary of a death or the birthday of someone deceased are occasions that can take friends and family members back to their original levels of mourning. Consider other transition points for peers, such as final year formal, or occasions of particular significance for that student, e.g. sport's day if the student is a committed athlete. Being aware of and prepared for this possibility is a significant long term postvention responsibility.

Students may wish to do something to recognise different anniversaries. Staff should try to ascertain if this is the case and assist with the arrangements wherever possible. Monitor social media postings about any planned events. These occasions are best handled in very small groups, with parent knowledge/consent and where an adult can be close by if not actually present. Year level or large group memorials are discouraged.

A limited group of staff, students and parents may also need to be kept informed of police processes, inquests and legal proceedings. These events have the potential to create high levels of stress and again schools need to be alert and responsive to people's needs.

Implement recommendations from the critical incident review

At this stage, schools should begin to plan and implement any recommendations that were agreed to as part of the critical incident review. Seeing the results of the critical incident review being implemented helps people appreciate the positive work that the school community has undertaken.

Include the postvention plan in staff induction

All new staff (teaching and non teaching) and volunteers to the school should be made aware of the school's postvention plan. In particular, teaching staff must be made familiar with relevant aspects of the school's support processes for identified students and be given very clear advice about the expectations of referral pathways. A member of the ERT should act as the nominated staff member to whom new staff can direct queries regarding the school's postvention work.

The postvention plan should include the scheduled ERT meetings to be convened over subsequent years until the population of students complete their schooling.

Section F sample letters and scripts

Department for Education and Child Development memo/email from Education Directors to inform site leaders of a traumatic death of a student

Dear Principal/site leader

*Sadly a **(age)** year old student from one of our schools in the **(Partnership/region/metropolitan/regional area)** died traumatically on **(date)**.*

Information about this unfortunate event may be circulating widely on social media. This has the potential to impact vulnerable students at your site.

Please ensure your leadership team and student welfare personnel are made aware of this through the site's normal communication channels.

You are encouraged to continue your support of all students and to respond to any wellbeing concerns raised by members of your school community.

Supporting school staff is also important at this difficult time. For individual 'Employee Assistance Program' support outside of school hours please contact 1300 687 327.

If you need any further information or support contact the Social Work Incident Support Services on 83144100.

Please adhere to the Suicide Postvention Guidelines in responding to this traumatic event.

Thank you for your attention in this sensitive matter.

Memo/email from sector offices to site leaders

Dear Principal/site leader

*Sadly a **(age)** year old student from a **DECD/Catholic/Independent** school in the **north/south/east/west/metropolitan/regional** area died traumatically on **(date)**.*

Information about this unfortunate event may be circulating widely on social media. This has the potential to impact vulnerable students at your site.

Please ensure your leadership team and student welfare personnel are made aware of this through the site's normal communication channels.

You are encouraged to continue your support of all students and to respond to any wellbeing concerns raised by members of your school community.

If you need any further information or support contact ...

Please adhere to the Suicide Postvention Guidelines in responding to this traumatic event.

Thank you for your attention in this sensitive matter.

Memo/Email from sector office to advise site leaders of high risk behaviour/attempt to suicide

Dear Principal

Please advise your school counsellor and senior leaders there may be some information circulating amongst your students related to the serious risk behaviour of a year student in the (Partnership/region/metropolitan/regional area). This behaviour leads us to suspect attempt to suicide. However, no assumptions should be made that this was the intent of that behaviour.

Please ensure your leadership team and student welfare personnel are made aware of this through the site's normal communication channels. Please follow the process as outlined in the Suicide Postvention Guidelines.

You are encouraged to continue your support of all students and to respond to any wellbeing concerns raised by members of your school community.

If you need any further information or support please contact ...

Thank you for your attention in this sensitive matter.

Section F sample letters and scripts

An ERT member must liaise with the family to ascertain their feelings about the conveyance of this information within the school community. The term 'suicide' will not be used. The incident will be referred to as a traumatic event/death. You may find that students are already aware of this event via their social media networks.

Situations will vary and schools should seek support from their education sector office about this important area of postvention responsibility.

Script for student community (for suicide death)

This may occur in class or small groups and with small groups of close friends. Whole school assemblies are not recommended.

*(Today/yesterday/date) the school was given the very sad news that on (day/date) one of our year **XX** students died traumatically and all of us are thinking of their family and friends. You may already have heard about this via your social media networks. Some of that information may be insensitive, inaccurate or inappropriate. You are encouraged to speak to **Ms/Mr XX** if you find inappropriate information has been posted. It is important when talking to your friends, or posting on social media, to respect the privacy of the family.*

*Some students in our school, particularly family and friends in Year **XX** may find this news challenging to understand and accept. For this reason a support room has been set up in **XX** for any students to go to if they feel they can't be in the classroom over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times. You need to get your teacher to fill out a movement slip if you wish to use the support room.*

The school counsellor/s will be available as usual to see students and we may have some extra counsellors/social workers in the school today if you would like to talk to someone.

*A notice is going home today to inform your family about the death so they will understand if you want to talk with them today or sometime in the future. Remember to use the normal signing out processes and talk to **Ms/Mr XX** if you need to leave the school grounds. If you are approached by anyone asking for information about the student who died please tell them they should speak with **Ms/Mr XX**.*

Be sensitive to people's feelings, be cautious about any comments you post on social media, look out for each other and let a teacher or your parents know if you are worried about anything or anyone.

Section F sample letters and scripts

Please note

The script below has been designed for the local cohort of a student who had engaged in serious high risk behavior/ attempted suicide. A similar notice for the other year levels/students in the school may be considered. An ERT member must liaise with the family to ascertain their feelings about disseminating this information with the school community.

The school may decide that it is more appropriate to not name the young person.

There are many possible scenarios in relation to attempted suicide and the school's ERT should seek support from their sector office about this very important aspect of the postvention responsibilities.

Script for students in the same year level (for an attempted suicide)

Today/yesterday the school was involved in supporting a young person who had been engaging in high risk behaviour. This will be a very difficult time for the family and close friends. This young person is being well cared for at present and if you want information about the young person please do so via **[name of staff member]**, rather than approach any of the family members for information.

This information may also be circulating on social media. Some of the information may be insensitive, inaccurate or inappropriate. You are encouraged to speak to **Ms/Mr XX** if you find inappropriate information has been posted. It is important when talking to your friends, or posting on social media, to respect the privacy of the student, their family and their close friends.

The school counsellors will be available in the normal way to see students and you are encouraged to talk with them if you have any concerns you want to share. You are asked to contribute to the wellbeing of everyone involved by restricting your discussions about the student to your close friends, your parents, staff or counsellors. We all want to make this young person's return to school as supportive as possible and being sensitive about the way you discuss this incident is the best way to support them. A notice is going home today to inform your parents so they will understand if you want to talk with them about this information.

Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds. We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. This is a time to be especially sensitive to others' feelings and to look out for each other. Let a teacher or your parents know if you or your friends are worried about anything or anyone.

Information to assist staff in talking with students following an attempted suicide or suicide death

Student reactions will range from confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt, sadness, curiosity and indifference. Teachers can expect tears or silence from some and excitement from others. Any students who appear to be in real distress should be accompanied to the support room or offered the opportunity to contact their parents to be collected.

Students must be allowed to talk about the incident

The first classes following the news should be conducted flexibly. Wherever possible, be guided by the students' need to talk, particularly if they are in the year level of the student concerned. The best way to do this is to set work for those who wish to resume normal lessons but allow others to speak quietly with each other or write in a journal, or simply sit and think.

Encourage students to tell an adult if they are worried about themselves or a friend.

If a student turns to you for help, it's because they trust you. Show you care and give them time and attention. Bereaved people need compassion, recognition and validation of their experience.

However, don't take on the role of being a counsellor, make assessments or diagnose.

Don't do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable and if you feel out of your depth, don't deal with the situation alone.

Don't guarantee confidentiality to a student if you are concerned about their safety; instead tell them that you are concerned about them and that you will be referring them to wellbeing staff. If a student asks you not to disclose any information relating to their safety or another student's safety, you need to tell them that part of your job is to keep them safe and that you are therefore required to pass on your concerns to the appropriate people.

What if they want to talk about the method of suicide?

It is natural for this area of interest to be in students' minds and it is highly likely the information will eventually get out via young people's networks. However, always gently stop discussion about this when it occurs. If students find this difficult to accept, try to help them understand through the following ideas:

- discussing this very personal and upsetting aspect of a death is disrespectful to the feelings of the family and close friends
- discussion is likely to spread inaccuracies that may be harmful to others
- relatives and friends will want people to remember the good things about a young person's life
- discussing these details can be very distressing and harmful to other young people even if they do not know the student
- posting information/messages on social media platforms can have a significant impact on the family, friends, and the school community

Remind students that school counsellors and social workers are available to talk with them in more detail and that some discussions are better held in a more private environment.

Don't be judgemental, criticise, blame, do most of the talking, make promises or deviate from facts.

Do allow and accept expression of feeling, including your own, and allow discussion on alternative and healthy ways of coping with life challenges and difficult feelings.

Section F sample letters and scripts

Where appropriate, provide students with the following information:

- General Practitioner _____
- Local mental health services, e.g. CAMHS _____
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Lifeline text chat <https://www.lifeline.org.au/Get-Help/Online-Services/crisis-chat>
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 www.kidshelpline.com.au/
- beyondblue 1300 22 4636 www.beyondblue.org.au
- eheadspace 1800 650 890 www.eheadspace.org.au
- reachout.com www.reachout.com
- Local Youth Mental Health Service _____

Catholic Education SA parent letter

Consent must be obtained from the family if a student will be named.

Dear Parent/Caregiver

I am writing to you with some sad news about a member of our school community.

One of our Year ... students, took their own life yesterday/today/Saturday/during the holidays. We remember especially, and pray for, their family and friends.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about your child's reaction, or expressions of feelings about this unexpected loss. These reactions and feelings may be part of the grieving process.

Your child's behaviour may be different from normal. They may find it hard to concentrate and complete their school work. They may be unusually quiet, or show displays of anger, or they may show very few reactions at all, particularly if they did not know the student. Following the suicide of a friend, the normal grief reactions can be very intense, for children/adolescents. Each person experiences and copes with grief and trauma in different ways and with different intensities.

Your child may want to share their feelings with you. If your child shares their emotions and feelings with you, try to listen and to positively support them, even though this may be uncomfortable for you. If your child prefers to talk about this situation with friends, this is normal and is more likely to occur with young people.

Additional professional counselling has been made available at the school, through ACCESS Counselling from the Centacare Office in Adelaide. The school routine will continue as normally as possible. Your child may like to talk with a Counsellor, or class Teacher or Priest.

Such a loss can heighten a young person's emotions. The length of grieving can vary for each person. If you have any concerns, please contact your child's class teacher or myself and we will arrange support.

In dealing with death, we need to remember the value and dignity of life. Please pray for them who is now at peace with God. I also ask you to remember their family will be comforted and strengthened by the love of God and the whole school/parish community.

Please feel free to contact the following staff for information about the school's support plan or if you have any concerns about your child. Contacting the nominated staff is an important way of ensuring you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all parent concerns.

If visiting the school, please remember to follow our signing in process.

Ms on

Mr on

Yours sincerely

Principal

Different wording will need to be considered with multiple deaths or an attempted suicide. Also it is acknowledged, that some of the above resources may not be available in country schools. Sample parent attachments that follow may be considered useful.

Department for Education and Child Development parent letter

Dear Parent/Caregiver

I am writing to you with some sad news about a member of our school community.

*One of our Year **XX** students (**displayed high risk behaviour/died traumatically**) (**yesterday/today/Saturday/during the holidays**).*

Our thoughts are with the student's family and friends.

*Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about your child's reaction or expressions of feeling about this sad news. Reactions and feelings vary and are part of a normal response to such events. Let your child know that you are aware of this incident and that you will listen to their concerns at any time. Staying connected and engaged with your child is one of the best ways to support them. When talking about (**high risk behaviour/traumatic death**) try to include discussion about positive ways of managing problems.*

Two important messages to promote are that all of us should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable and that young people should tell an adult if they are worried about themselves or a friend.

If your child is accessing the services of a mental health professional, you should ensure this information is passed on to the service.

I have attached some general information and a list of helpful websites and services that may support you and your child.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our students and staff over the next months. This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible and recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come.

Please feel free to contact the following staff for information about the school's support plan or if you have any concerns about your child. Contacting the nominated staff is an effective way of ensuring you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all parent concerns.

Ms.....on.....

Mr.....on.....

If visiting the school, please remember to follow our signing in processes.

Please note that information about this incident may already be circulating via social media networks. If you are aware of any insensitive, inappropriate or inaccurate information we would encourage you to contact the school or the network provider to seek to have this content removed.

Yours sincerely

Principal

The sample parent letter insert is provided on the next two pages.

Parent Letter insert: Information for parents following a traumatic event

When talking with children/young people remember ...

Each child's or young person's response will be unique and a wide range of reactions are possible

Their reaction will be influenced by their personality, what is happening in their life now and their ability to adjust to change. Your child, whatever age, needs to find safe ways to express their feelings. They may experience a range of emotions including confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt and sadness. Parental understanding, reassurance and attention are very important at this time. Be guided by your child's need to talk and make it clear to them that you will be available whenever they need you.

Children and young people who have experienced other concerns or losses in their lives may find it harder to cope

Children and young people who have experienced other concerns or losses, e.g. separation/divorce of parents, death of a relative or pet, moving house/school) may find it harder to cope. They may become upset and need to express their feelings about these other concerns, even though they may have appeared to be coping before the event. If your son/daughter is already using the services of a therapist for wellbeing concerns, you should ensure they are made aware of this event.

Children and young people may have many questions. They may want to know exactly what happened

The school will have provided your child/children with consistent information about the incident. Specific details about a traumatic event are not provided to students as this information can be potentially harmful to students' wellbeing. As parents, it is important to steer discussion towards the positive "help seeking" actions young people can take, such as talking to a trusted adult (e.g. parent, counsellor, teacher, relative or friend), or using the agencies or websites listed at the end of this sheet.

"Tell an adult if you are worried about a friend"

This is an important message to share with your child/children in any discussion about the issues. Children and young people sometimes share their feelings with friends, e.g. in conversations, letters, emails, text messages, on the internet. If children and young people are aware of friends who they fear may hurt themselves, they should tell an adult immediately.

Monitor the internet and mobile communication tools/social media platforms

Following a traumatic incident, students will be texting news about the death (both accurate and rumoured), calling for impromptu gatherings (both safe and unsafe), creating online memorials (both moving and risky), and posting messages (both appropriate and hostile) about the deceased. This happens quickly and often to large numbers of people. You can proactively monitor, moderate and influence what and how information is shared between students.

If you are aware of any insensitive, inappropriate or inaccurate information we would encourage you to contact the school or the network provider to seek to have this information removed.

Section F sample letters and scripts

Be aware that you or your child may be affected by possible media responses to the event

You may decide to protect against certain coverage or watch television news coverage together so that you can discuss any reactions or concerns and ensure your son/daughter feels supported. Be aware that certain types of media reporting can add to a young person's vulnerability.

Some children and young people may show reactions weeks/months/a year after an event

If you are concerned about your child's reactions—for example, if there are changes to their behaviour at school or at home—it is important to speak to the principal or student counsellor at the school. This may result in a referral to one of the agencies listed below.

Be aware that school staff will also be affected

Some staff may also be managing difficult emotions. Adult counselling support is provided to all our school staff through a process outside the school.

Respond to community concern with respect

When speaking with other members in the community, respect the affected family and avoid sensationalising the tragedy. Encourage young people to seek help for their own wellbeing and when they have concerns about their friends.

Where can parents and young people get more information and help?

General Practitioner

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) 8161 7198 (9am-5pm)

Parent helpline 1300 364 100

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 www.kidshelp.com.au

beyondblue 1300 22 4636 www.youthbeyondblue.com/home

eheadspace 1800 650 890 www.eheadspace.org.au

reachout <http://au.reachout.com/>

Women's and Children's Hospital 8161 7000 www.wch.sa.gov.au/

Local Hospital _____

Youth Mental Health Services _____

CAMHS trauma information <http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/divisions/mentalhealth/traumainf/index.html>

Information to help staff identify students for referral

The following checklist is to remind staff of the kinds of behaviours that may suggest a need for further intervention or may require a referral to the counsellor/mental health professional. It is important to remember that this work is about getting professional support to the small minority of students in the school who need it.

“Referral” means a staff member talking with the counsellor or mental health professional about their concerns—it does not mean telling or sending a student to see a counsellor without prior discussion.

Changes in attendance	Unexplained significant drop in attendance at school/lessons or even patterns of non-attendance.
Changes in academic performance and participation	Unexplained significant drop in subject performance, difficulties with learning, difficulty thinking clearly, loss of interest and commitment.
Changes in relationships with others	Friendships are lost or broken, sport or other extra curricular commitments are dropped, chooses to be alone, engages in high risk behaviours with cars/drugs/alcohol/ weapons, misconduct.
Changes in mood and behaviour	Demonstrates intense unhappiness, hopelessness, fear, increased anger, irritability, tearfulness, emotional instability, withdrawn, disruptive.
Grieving a significant loss	Death of a significant person through illness, accident, suicide, family break up, relationship break up.
Expressing ideas of suicide/depression	Novel/film/video choice, personal writing, art work, social media posts, conversation has a focus on suicide, death and depression. Makes statements suggesting they have imagined being dead and the impact this will have on others.
Physical changes	Headaches, extreme weight gain or loss, fatigue/exhaustion, sleeplessness, tiredness, memory problems, changes to hygiene and self-care standards.

Should you have any concerns speak with the parent/guardian and encourage them to contact their General Practitioner or their local CAMHS service.

Don't feel you have to be certain before making a referral. Let a health professional evaluate the likelihood that the young person could benefit from some type of intervention.

Postvention checklist record - CHECKLIST

ACTIONS	N/A or ✓	Refer SPVG	Who	Date	School Documentation & Date
IMMEDIATE RESPONSE					
Section A					
Ensure the immediate safety of community members if an on-site event		p.1			
If not a site based event, find out the facts/circumstances as far as possible. Confirm facts with your sector incident unit.		p.1			
Ensure that affected students/parents/staff are not left alone		p.2			
FIRST 24 HOURS					
Section B					
Inform relevant sector office		p.3			
Convene emergency response team and plan the following steps:		p.5			
<input type="checkbox"/> Make contact with local CAMHS/YMHS or relevant mental health agency		p.6			
<input type="checkbox"/> Consider factors specific to attempted suicide		p.7			
<input type="checkbox"/> Identify and plan support for students who are at risk		p.8 (checklist p.38)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Set up a support room in the school		p.8			
<input type="checkbox"/> Inform staff and provide script and advice documents which do not describe method of suicide		p.9 (script p.27/28)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide staff with links to counselling services		p.9			
<input type="checkbox"/> Inform students via a prepared script, in small groups, not a whole school assembly		p.10 (script p.27)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Inform school/s of siblings if known					
<input type="checkbox"/> Inform the wider school community via prepared letter or email		p.12, 25, 26, 31, 32,			
<input type="checkbox"/> Contact the media liaison officer in your sector's central office. Refer all media enquiries to that office		p12			
<input type="checkbox"/> Monitor social media		P14			

Postvention checklist record - CHECKLIST

ACTIONS	N/A or ✓	Refer SPVG	Who	Date	School Documentation & Date
48-72 HOURS AFTER THE INCIDENT					Section C
Restore school to regular routine		p.15			
Liaise with bereaved/affected family		p.15			
Plan school involvement with funeral		p.16			
Advise staff of all relevant actions and seek their feedback/ observations during debriefs which should occur regularly over the first few days		p.17			
Monitor students and refer identified students for assessment with mental health agency		p.18			
Monitor staff wellbeing		p.19			
Keep parents informed via notices		p.19			
Protect all deceased student belongings for the police and family		p.20			
Continue monitoring social media		p.20			
Continue documentation of all actions including incident report		p.20			
DURING THE FIRST MONTH					Section D
Monitor staff and student wellbeing		p.21			
Plan for school events of (year book photographs, award nights)		p.21			
Gather relevant information from staff relevant for a critical incident review		p.21			
Conduct a critical incident review		p.22			
Consider offering information sessions for parent community with mental health agency		p.22			
Continue documentation of all actions		p.22			

Postvention checklist record - CHECKLIST

ACTIONS	N/A or ✓	Refer SPVG	Who	Date	School Documentation & Date
IN THE LONGER TERM					
Section E					
Continue support and monitoring of students and staff		p.23			
Keep parents, staff and students informed		p.23			
Plan for anniversaries, birthdays and significant events		p.24			
Implement recommendations from the critical incident review		p.24 guide p.43			
Include the postvention plan & relevant student plans when inducting new staff		p.24			

IMPORTANT SERVICES AND CONTACTS

Emergency Services

CAMHS local office

Ambulance/Police

Youth Mental Health Service

Poisons information centre

Women's and Children's Hospital

Needle clean up / DASSA

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM	Who	Contact Details
Leadership		
Year level coordinator 1		
Year level coordinator 2		
School based counsellor		
Social media coordinator		
Mental health professional		

In communications between schools and their communities the term 'suicide' should not be used. Although the cause of death may seem apparent this can only be determined by the Coroner at a later date after formal investigation of the full circumstances. Similarly, we should avoid using language that refers to suspected or attempted suicide.

(However, for internal use only, the guideline has referred to suspected, attempted and suicide death.)

Resources and other information

Where can parents, children and young people get more information and help?

The following information can be customised for different groups at the school as well as for the local area.

	Parents	Children	Young people
Women's and Children's Hospital 8161 7000 Emergency Department: 8161 7044	✓		✓
Parent Helpline 1300 364 100 (local call cost within South Australia)	✓		
Lifeline Free, confidential, 24 hour telephone and online crisis support service. 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au	✓		✓
Kids Helpline Confidential 24 hour telephone, email and web counselling. 1800 551 800 www.kidshelp.com.au	✓	✓	✓
Suicide Call Back Service The Suicide Call Back Service is a 24-hour, nationwide service that provides telephone and online counselling to people 15 years and over 1300 659 467 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au	✓		✓
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) (0-15 years) CAMHS provides free confidential therapy services for children and adolescents between birth and 15 years of age and their families who are having difficulties in emotional, behavioural and/or social areas of their lives. 8161 7198 9am-5pm www.wch.sa.gov.au/camhs	✓	✓	
Youth Mental Health Service (16-24 years) 24/7 Youth Mental Health Service will provide young people from 16 to 24 years of age with accessible mental health services that are youth friendly and supported by strong collaborative partnerships. Country locations can be found at: 13 14 65 http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/Public+Content/SA+Health+Internet/Health+services/Mental+health+services/Youth+mental+health+services/			✓
Centacare ASCEND is a Suicide Intervention Program providing a service to young people up to the age of 25 who are exhibiting depressive, suicidal or self-harming behaviours. (08) 8215 6700 www.centacare.org.au/services/suicide/	✓		✓
Child & Youth Health The Child and Youth Health website offers a range of news and practical health information for parents, carers and young people. www.cyh.com/	✓	✓	
Qlife 1800 184 527 Queer peer phone and online counselling (2.30pm-11.30pm 7 days) https://qlife.org.au			✓

Section G resources

	Parents	Children	Young people
eheadspace 1800 650 890 phone and online support and referral			✓
beyondblue Free, 24 hour telephone information and online chat from a trained health professional. 1300 224 636 www.beyondblue.org.au	✓		✓
B friend Bfriend offers mentoring, support, information and referral for people coming out as LGBTIQ, and their families. 8202 5805 or 8202 5192. http://www.unitingcommunities.org/find-a-service/services/bfriend/	✓		✓
Youthbeyondblue Provides information, resources and support for young people aged 12 to 25 dealing with depression and/or anxiety. www.youthbeyondblue.com			✓
Reachout An online youth mental health service that helps young people with information, support and stories on everything from finding motivation, through to getting through really tough times. www.au.reachout.com			✓
headspace headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25 year olds. www.headspace.org.au			✓
Living Beyond Suicide A free program providing practical and sensitive support to families and individuals bereaved through suicide. 1300 76 11 93 lbs@anglicaresa.com.au	✓	✓	✓
Standby Response Service The StandBy Response Service is a community-based suicide postvention program that provides a coordinated response of support and assistance for people who have been bereaved through suicide. http://www.unitedsynergies.com.au/program/standby-response-service/ Centacare Country Pt Lincoln 0438 728 644 Uniting Communities Mt Gambier 0437 752 458	✓	✓	✓
Apps			
The Check In – youth beyondblue The app takes you through four steps, super easy and super quick, getting you to think about where you might check in, what you might say and how might you support your friend.			✓
The Toolbox is a collection of health and wellbeing apps endorsed by professionals and reviewed by people under 25. https://au.reachout.com/sites/thetoolbox/browse			✓

Emergency contacts

Ambulance, Police

000

Ambulance, Police

112 (from a mobile phone)

Poison Information Service

13 11 26

Women's and Children's Hospital

8161 7000

Emergency Department: 8161 7044

Local Emergency Department

Phone _____

Local Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

Phone _____

Local Mental Health Service

Phone _____

Local Doctor/General Practitioner

Phone _____
Other _____
Phone _____

Sample documentation outline - post 24 hours

Background:

Name, gender, year level, DOB of student

Identified concerns:

- raised by
- managed by
- managed how/when
- communicated to

Information relating to attempted or completed suicide:

- date
- how school notified
- involvement of other students pre-event/immediately post event

Actions:

Students	Parents	Staff	Other Agencies
friends	bereaved/affected	counsellors	SAPOL
general peers	general	year level teachers	mental health
other campus	governing council	general	other school sectors
other schools	targeted groups	other campus	media
		other sites	sector office
managed—by whom, when and how communicated—to whom			

Documents to collect:

circulars, letters, notices, minutes, personal notes, emails, reports, critical incident review notes and recommendations

Critical incident review reflection guide

Note your thoughts and any ideas for improvement on the following topics:

1. Identification and support of students at risk of suicide
2. Staff and student understanding about what to do when they have concerns about young people's safety
3. Communication within the school
4. Communication with parents
5. Support for staff
6. Communication with and support from sector office(s) and mental health agencies

Note any additional concerns or ideas that have not been covered in your comments above and identify which takes priority.