



Academic Suicide Postvention Plan

Last updated
September 3rd, 2025

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Outline

- Introduction to Postvention Concept
- Manager's Guide to Suicide Postvention
- Dragonfly's Suicide Postvention Task Force
- GitHub Repository

What is Suicide Postvention?

- Suicide postvention builds upon prevention efforts by **providing immediate** and **ongoing support** to those impacted by a suicide loss. Postvention is critical for healing after suicide.
- The goal of suicide postvention plans is to limit and prevent harm within the department/community following loss of life to suicide.
- After a suicide or attempted suicide many actions need to be coordinated in a very short space of time.
- Unlike some other kinds of emergencies, the work of a suicide postvention plan may need to be sustained for a period of many months.
- Suicide is unique in that it, and mental illness which often underlie it, is highly stigmatized both socially and professionally within academia.

Why engage in Suicide Postvention?

“When an act of suicide causes the end of a life, it affects the community of survivors in a very profound way—much different from a death caused by heart disease, cancer, or an accident (Barrett & Scott, 1990). The unique social, cultural, and religious contexts regarding suicide are complicated by nearly pervasive misinformation and misunderstanding.

Consequently, stigma, shame, embarrassment, and unwarranted guilt add unnecessarily to the already heavy burden on those grieving (Worden, 1991). It is also important to note that people who are exposed to a loved one’s suicide have a heightened risk of suicide themselves. Therefore, leaders who can effectively respond to survivors can lessen the likelihood of future suicides.”

<https://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/aftersuicide.pdf>

What are the risks?

Who is affected?

Faculty, students, staff, colleagues, lab mates, classmates, roommates, mentors, family.

Who is at risk?

Those who are closest to the person and those with current mental illness especially with suicidal thoughts.

What are the benefits?

1. Protect those who are at risk of suicide themselves.
2. Compassionately and efficiently support those most affected by the loss.
3. Demonstrate community values through guidance, leadership, and security in the face of tragedy.
4. Build community & prevent deterioration of morale.
5. Signal to entire community that every life is valued.

What others have done:

Workplace Suicide Prevention Network

<https://workplacesuicideprevention.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/managers-guidebook-to-suicide-postvention-web.pdf>

20-page manual designed for workplace managers

Focuses on Immediate, Short-term and Longer-term steps to take following a death or attempt

Includes example communication strategies and templates as well as decision-making templates

Scoping Review of postvention on university campuses (2023)

<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/13/6/e068730.full.pdf>

The review identified no evidence-based postvention intervention studies on university campuses.

Conclusion: Staff and students require support measures due to the impact of suicide bereavement and the unique nature of the university context. There is a need for further research to move from descriptive studies to focus on intervention studies, particularly at universities in low-income and middle-income countries.

Dragonfly Mental Health Task Force

1. Convened in August 2020
2. Collected references and existing guides
3. Collected academic-associated suicide attempt stories and some media coverage of completed suicides
4. Initiated survey of academic institutions to see if any had existing suicide postvention plans (none did)
5. Reviewed and met to discuss academic-specific issues and topics
6. Put on hold Jan 2021
7. Reconvened in June 2021, formed sub-groups focused on immediate, short-term, long-term phases and communication
8. July 2022, supported UC Berkeley's MCB department in implementing short term phase of postvention plan in aftermath of unexpected student death
9. April 2024, assembled draft of compiled manual from subgroups
10. January 2025, supported UC Berkeley's MCB department in implementing short term phase of postvention plan in aftermath of unexpected student death
11. September 2025, published first draft of Dragonfly Mental Health's Academic Suicide Postvention Plan on GitHub

Dragonfly Mental Health Draft Manual

<https://github.com/dragonflywing/Academic-Suicide-Postvention-Plan>

Customization

1. Assemble local team
2. Copy repository
3. Look up local resources, websites, rules
4. Edit documents for your community