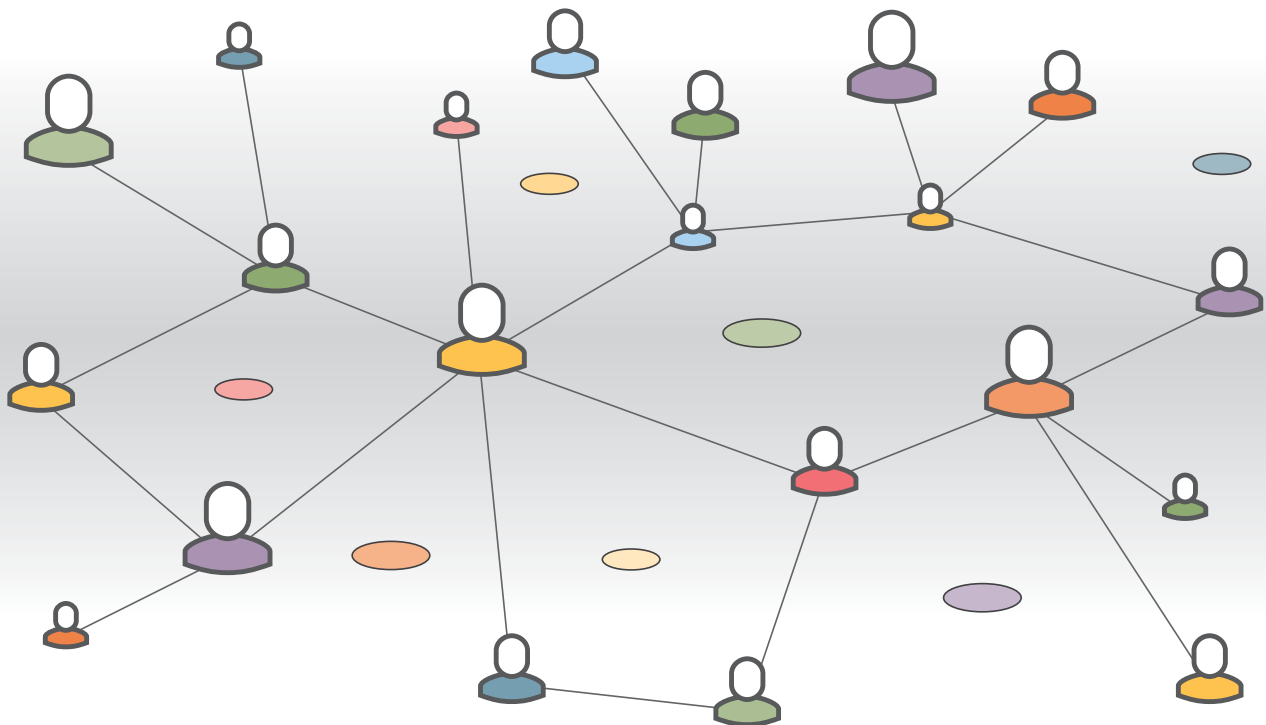


Workplace Considerations After a Suicide or Other Unexpected Death

A HANDBOOK

Postvention information that will aid in the response to a suicide or unexpected death that has occurred in the workplace or community.



BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



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This document was created by the Center for Health and Learning and Howard Center and may be replicated if acknowledgment is given.

Not sure where to start?

Call your local Designated Agency: **Howard Center**
802-488-6000

First Call For Chittenden County Offers:

- Phone and in-person support
 - Individual crisis assessment
 - Short-term crisis management
 - Referral to appropriate services
 - Information about community resources
 - Post-tragedy and disaster response
 - Suicide prevention training
- Available 24/7/365

A circular graphic with a teal background. At the top, the text "First Call" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font, with "FOR CHITTENDEN COUNTY" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. A white horizontal band across the middle contains the phone number "802-488-7777" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the Howard Center logo (a white 'H' inside a teal circle) is on the left, and the text "HOWARD CENTER" in a white, sans-serif font is on the right, with the tagline "Help is here." in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it.

ALSO AVAILABLE

Access
& Intake
802-488-6000

Street
Outreach
802-488- 7013

Community
Outreach
802-488-7778

Introduction

Professions such as Social Services, Mental Health, and Law Enforcement are well known as “helping professions,” but everyone has a role in suicide prevention. Even if you think you work in a field that is not related to suicide prevention at all, in the course of your duties as a **Workplace Supervisor**, you are in a position to be interacting with people affected by suicide in one of the places they spend most of their time – the work site.

In addition, no field or company is immune to the risk of suicide among employees or employee family members. Postvention protocols are applied in two situations: 1) attempted suicide, and 2) suicide death or other unexpected death.

What is Postvention?

Postvention is the organized response after a suicide or other unexpected death has occurred that aims to facilitate healing from grief and distress, mitigate the negative effects of exposure to suicide, and to prevent suicide among those who are at high risk. It is best practice for postvention to occur within the week following a death.

Application

Maintaining protocols on what to do under stressful circumstances helps us to respond quickly, appropriately, and effectively. Clear, specific protocols provide you with the steps to take, and also build your knowledge of why these evidence-based steps are the recommended best practices.

If your organization has an existing crisis response team, crisis policies and procedures, or if there are state or local laws about certain actions during crises, **integrate those with any new plans** that result from reviewing this document so there is no confusion.

When following postvention steps check in with those you work with, e.g. Human Resource Departments and Employee Assistance Programs for protocols that may be in place in order to establish roles and responsibilities.

Don't feel alone in your response. For those without human resources or an employee assistance program, please reach out to your local Designated Mental Health Agency to see what postvention support can be offered. Even businesses with human resources staff and an employee assistance program can reach out to the local Designated Agency for support.

It may be helpful to identify a point person or response leader. This individual can be a business owner or any other individual comfortable with taking on the role of being the designated liaison throughout the postvention process. All information (incoming and outgoing) is funneled through the point person/response leader.

CONSIDER POSSIBLE IMMEDIATE SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS

- 1. Offer resources and support** to the people close to the person.
 - Call your designated mental health agency, 2-1-1 or 9-8-8.
- 2. Recognize the individual's needs for privacy** in the workplace, unless authorized to do so, do not share information with other people.
- 3. Be prepared to be asked!** Respond as you would with any other medical emergency, by acknowledging the concern but not sharing details. If your organization has a Human Resources department, consult with them as soon as possible.

After a Suicide: Postvention Steps Quick Guide

PRIORITY ACTION

These priority action steps are critically important parts of postvention

01

IDENTIFY POINT PERSON/LEAD CONTACT

All information and communications should be channeled through the point person/lead contact.

02

GATHER INFORMATION

Before moving forward with any steps gather and confirm as much information as possible about the situation.

PRIORITY ACTION

03

RESPECT THE PRIVACY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Recognize the individual's needs for privacy in the workplace, unless authorized to do so, do not share information with other people. If asked for details, respond as you would with any other medical emergency – acknowledge concern without sharing details.

04

MAKE FOLLOW-UP CONTACT

Reach out as soon as possible, even if briefly, to family members and impacted staff.

05

IMMEDIATE PROFESSIONAL FOLLOW-UP

Have one person make all official statements and actively discourage rumors, gossip, and speculation.

06

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Recognize that you need support too, and ask for help if you are struggling.

PRIORITY ACTION

07

ASSESS NEED FOR IMMEDIATE SUPPORTS

Give out printed resources, talk with those affected and reach out to those who may need extra attention. Call your designated mental health agency or 2-1-1 to identify resources and support.

PRIORITY ACTION

08

PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT & CARE

Keep hard copies of resources in central locations and promote the availability of resources. Routinely check in with impacted staff.

09

WORK TO REDUCE STIGMA

Regularly find ways to promote open communication about mental health and lead by example by speaking up about the importance of mental health.

10

PREPARE FULLY CONFIRMED WRITTEN STATEMENT

You may want to issue a clear and specific written statement or have information on your website or social media; consult with the family about appropriate details to share, if applicable.

11

MAKE NOTIFICATIONS

Public announcements and notifications should only be made by the point person/lead contact or designated public contact for your organization.

12

OFFER EDUCATION

Offer suicide prevention training workshops after the community has had some time to recover.

Use of Sensitive Language

Whenever suicide is discussed, it is important to use respectful language and reduce stigma. An important objective of suicide prevention is to remove the stigma associated with mental health issues and suicide so people will be more likely to seek the help they need. One of the ways we can do this is to be conscious of our use of language.

Survivors of suicide and families who have experienced a death by suicide suggest using the following preferred language.

Try saying this:

- Died by suicide
- Took their own life
- Killed themselves
- Suicide attempt
- Non-fatal attempt
- Suicide survivor

Instead of this:

- Committed suicide
- Successful suicide
- Completed suicide
- Failed attempt

Postvention Steps

When following postvention steps please refer to any existing protocols that may be in place to know your exact role and responsibilities.

REACHING OUT AND FOLLOW UP

Identify Point Person to Become the Internal Crisis Contact

- This can be a business owner, manager, human resources staff, or any individual comfortable taking on the role.
- While responding to a suicide death or tragedy all information and communications should be channeled through the crisis response contact.

Gather Information

- Before moving forward with any steps gather and confirm as much information as possible to prepare for questions from employees and community members. Be prepared to be asked questions about the cause of death, or about details you may know but can't share.

Respect the Privacy of the Individual

- If your organization has a Human Resources department, consult with them as soon as possible.
- Recognize the individual's needs for privacy in the workplace, unless authorized to do so, do not share information with other people.
- Respond to questions as you would with any other medical emergency, by acknowledging the concern but not sharing details.

Make Follow-up Contact

- Reach out as soon as possible.
- Contact, even a brief text message, from people who helped during the crisis is helpful in keeping people safe after an attempt, and reducing further attempts.
- Do not try to force the interaction.

Immediate Professional Follow-up

- Have one person make all official statements.
- Give a short statement as soon as possible if your organization needs to respond to the death or will be asked about the death.

- Giving a response soon, even if it doesn't have all the information, can be more helpful than no statement.
- Use direct but nonspecific terms about the death until cause is confirmed.
- Tell people you will give more information as soon as you have it.
- Short statements of the facts will help stop rumors and guessing, while no statement at all leaves people wondering and can lead to more rumors.
- Actively discourage rumors, gossip, and speculation which can increase the **risk of contagion**.

Take Care of Yourself

- Recognize that you need support, too. This is true even if you are not close to the employee who has attempted suicide.
- If you find yourself struggling for any reason at all, ASK FOR HELP.
- Access your organization's resources: Human Resources, Employee Assistance Program, referrals, on-staff counselors.
- As you go about your job and your life, pay attention to your own responses and emotional reactions to the death.

Assess Need for Immediate Supports

- Giving out printed resources is a good step, but many people may need more encouragement to use the resources available to them.
- Talk to as many of these people in person as you can, or find an appropriate person to do so and give a resources list and encourage them to reach out to someone if they need to talk.
- Verbally and publicly support people seeking help as this can help reduce stigma.
- Consider the needs of your employees, you may need to bring in an interpreter or other support services for assistance.

PEOPLE WHO MAY NEED EXTRA ATTENTION INCLUDE THOSE:

- Who were close with the person – even those not close to the person may still be struggling with the news.
- Struggling with depression, other mental health challenges or a history of depression.
- Who have experienced a death by suicide in the past.
- Who have recently had a significant loss – the death of a loved one, a divorce or relationship ending, the loss of a job.

It is normal for people to experience typical signs of grief in the weeks following a tragedy, however some may be especially distraught or need additional support from what is provided in this document. Please don't hesitate to refer any individual to or call your local designated agency for assistance. You may not know the details of all your staff, and some may be at high-risk and so it is important to universally help others access help resources.

PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT AND REDUCING STIGMA

Provide Ongoing Support & Care

- People who experience loss, tragedy and trauma need support for much longer than a few days.
- Keep a hard copy of resources in central locations.
- Keep promoting the availability of Employee Assistance Programs if you have them in your organization. Recognize that there are many different kinds of vulnerability.
- Suicide is a shock and trauma to a community, not just to the immediate circle of family and friends.

- Find ways of supporting and nurturing those impacted like making a meal or donation in someone's honor, sending a card. May want to honor employee.
- Grief and healing looks different for everyone; it often takes space and time.
- Those most impacted by suicide are at heightened risk for suicide themselves. Be alert to warning signs.

Work to Reduce Stigma

- Break the stigma around talking about mental health and mental illness.
- Regularly find ways to promote open communication about mental health.
- Lead by example by talking openly about the stigma around mental illness, and how hard it can be to talk about mental health at all in our culture. Be open and approachable to people seeking help.
- Check in with people who are struggling and ask how they are doing.
- If someone approaches you and you are not the right person to directly help them, listen to their needs and have your resource list handy to give them a direct contact.

Prepare a Fully-Confirmed Written Statement

- Issue a **written statement** as soon as you can, even if you are also making a verbal statement.
- Be clear and specific in the written statement, using confirmed information.
- Use the word: "suicide."
- If the family doesn't want people to know the cause of death tell them you will do your best to respect their request but let them know that people may find out the cause of death.
- Gather up-to-date contact information for resources you can offer to people you are notifying. Hand out paper copies of the resource list.
- **DO NOT** give opinions.
- **For more in-depth information on making a public statement visit** <https://vtspc.org/postvention-for-employers/> and open Public Statements and Media Guidelines.

Make Notifications

- Public announcements and official notifications should be made only by the Crisis Contact or designated public contact for your organization. Always refer questions to that person, even if you know answers to the questions and/or know details about the suicide.

Offer Education

- Encourage and/or sponsor educational events on hard topics: grief, depression, suicide, Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and help seeking, stress reduction.
- Offer suicide prevention training workshops **after the community has had some time to recover**. Best practice research indicates that immediately after a suicide **is not the time** to jump into prevention skills workshops and training.
- Healing and help-seeking are the things to focus on right then, with already-trained professionals keeping a watch for warning signs.
- Put support and education materials in easy to see public places.

Contact and Resources Information

DESIGNATED AGENCY:



Available 24/7/365
802-488-7777
howardcenter.org

INTERNAL CRISIS CONTACT/ POINT PERSON:

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVAL

Below is a link to a collection of resources for those who have recently experienced a suicide loss.

Remember: You are not alone. There is a network of support available to you. It is important to prioritize taking care of yourself. Be kind to yourself. The path to healing is a journey. You can get through this.

Need to Connect? Call the Pathways Support Line (18+ Adult) **(833) VT-TALKS / (833) 888-2557**

Survivors of Suicide Resources:

www.vtspc.org/survivors-of-suicide-vermont-resource-packet

NEED HELP FOR MENTAL HEALTH?

Talk to someone you trust – a family member, friend, health care provider or faith leader.

Below is a list of numbers to call for immediate help.

In Crisis?

Text **VT** to **741741**

Call **2-1-1** or **9-8-8** to connect to your local mental health agency

Call **802-488-7777** to reach Howard Center

Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **800-273-TALK (8255)**

Call the LGBTQ Crisis Hotline - The Trevor Project: **1-866-488-7386**

Call the Veterans Crisis Line: **1-800-273-8255 & press 1**

