

Suicide Postvention Team, Town of New Fairfield A Community Response Plan after Suicide

A statement of the importance of suicide postvention

“Postvention” is a term used to describe the range of *timely, coordinated, and appropriate* activities following a suicide, that are designed to provide support to loss survivors and to prevent suicide contagion. Effective postvention can reduce distress among those impacted by a death and offers opportunities to educate the community at large about warning signs and how to help, potentially reducing the risk of future suicides.

Commented [1]: the statement of importance was taken from the letter of introduction we shared with many of our stakeholders already

Suicide is a death like no other

Grieving the death of a loved one or friend is never easy. Grief for survivors of suicide loss is very complicated and distinctive. Family and friends can feel bewildered, overwhelmed with guilt, experience self-blame, and sometimes anger or rage. Because of the stigma surrounding suicide, they may encounter blame or judgement from others. When the time is right, and welcomed by the family, it is important to have appropriate supports and response protocols in place, immediately after the death, and even during the days, weeks, and months ahead.

Postvention Plan- a step by step process

Task 1: Establish, confirm, and document facts and circumstances

ACTIONS



Ideally determine:

Name, age, gender, method, location of death or where body found, contact information for loss survivors and witnesses.

Also useful to determine:



Race/ethnicity, marital status, family information, employment, veteran/military status, health and mental health history.

WHO?

First Responders/Fire Chief or First Selectman contacts postvention team lead contact.

First Responders leave a postvention team brochure and contact information with the family of the deceased so that if/when they are ready, they know who to contact for support. Another approach is that the First Responders can ask the family/survivors if they would like to have the postvention team contact them (seek permission right away if possible).

Of note:

- The team can begin to mobilize even if the Office of Chief Medical Examiner or local coroner has not yet confirmed the death to be a suicide.
- It is best that the team lead be notified within 24 hours of the death.
- If the team is contacted by someone other than first responders or the First Selectman, they should contact the First Selectman to confirm the facts.

Task 2: Mobilize Postvention Team (upon confirmation that the death is a suicide)

ACTIONS

- ✓ Team leader contacts all other members of the postvention team to share information and begin to coordinate responses.
- ✓ Core postvention team holds daily debrief for the duration of the incident's impact to outline next steps, assign tasks, and support one another.

Who?

Previously established postvention team members consisting of various community stakeholders.

Of note:

- Where do we stand with disclosure/permission from the survivors/family?

- Among team members, establish the following ahead of time:
 - Who will be the team leader? (First point of contact)
 - Preferred method of communication among team members- email, phone, text, etc.
 - Establish roles and assignments to each team member

Task 3: Mobilize support to those directly affected (upon disclosure/permission from the family/survivors)

ACTIONS

- ✓ Verify with first responders that the loss survivors were provided with the postvention team brochure and contact information. Were they (the family/survivors) asked if we have permission to reach out to them? (more proactive approach)
- ✓ Determine if loss survivors and witnesses agreed to be contacted and learn any other information about survivor needs.
- ✓ If yes, reach out to loss survivors and witnesses to offer condolences and navigate support options (2-pocket folder of resources can be provided at this time). The first wave of support always goes to the family or others immediately affected.
- ✓ Broader targeted response: Identify agencies or organizations that should be prepared to support those directly impacted such as: (with permission from family/survivors and keeping in mind that we may not need to share every detail, just provide support)
 - Schools
 - Clubs
 - Places of Worship
 - Workplaces
 - Senior Center
 - Neighbors

Provide guidance about responding to loss survivor needs. Share resources with these affected organizations.

Who?

Coordination between first responders and the postvention team begins the process.

Utilizing the roles established within the postvention team, members can begin to do outreach and share support resources with the loss survivors and if necessary, to others in the community who are directly impacted. (Refer to list above)

Of note:

- Consider holding private meetings or forums with groups affected; providing grief supports, counseling. Offering education and training at a later date.
- Reach out a second time to survivors and witnesses 2 weeks or more after the death if contact was not established the first time around. It is important to offer this second chance to connect because an unexpected death is a shock and suicide can bring with it complicated grief, stigma, blame, anger, and guilt. They could have also lost the brochure or contact information. It may take multiple attempts to reach them. It may be necessary to lean on someone in their inner circle to help connect (clergy for example).
- Communicate carefully- do not focus on the details of the individual death, but promote support resources.

Commented [2]: Review with Pat DellMonaco what the best practice should be for that second or third attempt to reach out. Would the first responders who were originally on the scene be comfortable with that role? Maybe it is as simple as dropping off a second brochure or placing a phone call.

Task 4: Reach out to First Responders to receive any updated information, discuss level of response, and to offer support to them

Have resources available to support first responders ("caring for the care-givers")

Who?

Someone from the postvention team

Of note:

supporting first responders should be part of the on-going prevention efforts

Task 5: Addressing a Broader Community Response (if necessary)

- ✓ If a broader community response is planned (such as a memorial or vigil) reach out to the immediate loss survivors and/or witnesses to inform them of the plan. Explain rationale and address concerns.
- ✓ Review best practices and share concerns about how loss survivors and the community at large can be affected by this type of event.
- ✓ Assess and monitor contagion risk (factors include location, method, publicity, extent and type of social network)
- ✓ Issue a public statement if necessary or offer guidance to any other entity who may plan a public statement.

Who?

Postvention Team coordinating with the First Selectman and other community organizations

Of Note:

When is a community-wide response needed?

- When the suicide is a public event (suicide or attempt occurs in a public place, there were multiple witnesses, etc).
- When the person who died was a public or well-known figure in the community.
- When a suicide or attempt has received extensive media or social media coverage or has created a significant community reaction.
- When there is a homicide/suicide.
- When more than one suicide occurs in an unusually short time frame.
- Team should review best practices about memorials and vigils and be prepared to explain safety concerns re: glorification and contagion

Task 6: Monitor news and social media activity and respond as needed via public communications

- ✓ Engage others who already monitor or interface with social media and news media.
- ✓ Share recommendations for reporting on suicide, and safe messaging guidelines.
- ✓ Promote and share support suicide prevention resources for the community.

Who?

Postvention Team coordinating with the Town Tribune and with the First Selectman and/or those who host/monitor social media groups in New Fairfield.

Task 7: Respond to requests for information and guidance from members of the general or professional community

Who?

Someone from the postvention team