



Memorandum

To: School Administrators, School Counselors, and other school leaders

From: Jill Baker & Shanda Hochstetler, Youth Suicide Prevention Coordinators

Date: August 14, 2023

Subject: Call to Action - Suicide Prevention preparation for Fall

Each year, youth suicide [attempts and deaths](#) increase in the fall often corresponding to the start of the school year. This season of increased risk is a 20-year national trend, can be seen in many countries around the [world](#), and is also seen in [Oregon](#). This memo, and the supporting documents, are **an urgent request to all elementary, middle, and high school leaders to prepare your school community to be better equipped to identify students who may be at risk of suicide and to refer those students to help.**

The Oregon Health Authority monitors youth suicide data through county reports of youth suicide deaths and through the state medical examiner's office. These data are preliminary and not public due to being potentially identifiable. As of July 2023, the total number of youth suicide deaths in 2023 are similar to 2022. However, in that same timeframe, OHA has identified a higher-than-average number of youth suicide deaths in children 14 and younger. Because of this concerning uptick regarding younger youth, **we are asking those serving students in grades 4-9 to pay particular attention to their suicide prevention and suicide intervention policies and procedures.** To support this, you will find resources specific to elementary, middle, and high schools in this packet.

To be clear, youth suicide is largely preventable and there are almost always signs. Schools hold immense power to recognize risk, create safety, and to link students to lifesaving supports. With attention, supports, good training and thoughtful measures, schools can increase safety for our students against the risk of suicide. We also know that suicide is complex, and there is not one strategy or youth-serving system that can prevent suicide alone.

A trusted adult is one of the most impactful protective factors a young person can experience. As a youth-serving adult and school leader, your wellness is also essential to the wellbeing of the students in your school(s). Please consider your own well-being as you take steps towards supporting your students.

Suicide prevention is everyone's business. Thank you for finding ways to make it yours!

Call to Action for schools: Equip your staff, parents/guardians and students in suicide prevention as students return to school.

For Administrators

Suicide prevention readiness checklist: This fall, review these pieces of your school district's *Adi's Act* suicide prevention, intervention and postvention plan for your building. If your district needs support writing or updating its plan, contact your School Safety and Prevention Specialist at your regional Education Service District or the [Safe and Inclusive Schools team](#) at Oregon Department of Education.

- Staff Training: (OHA's recommended [training options for school staff](#))**
 - What suicide prevention training do faculty and staff receive? When is your school building's suicide prevention training scheduled?
 - What suicide prevention training do school counselors, or other mental health staff receive? Do any of your staff need renewed training?

- Building-level process for referring students that demonstrate concern:**
 - What is your school's process for staff to refer a student to help? How are your staff being reminded of that process? Do your teachers know where and how to refer a student?
 - In the event of risk for suicide, is there a backup plan in case trained faculty and staff are unavailable?
 - Who in your building experiences increased risk and what is being done to intentionally increase belonging and connection, particularly for [LGBTQ2SIA+](#) students?

- Curriculum: Suicide prevention lessons:** (Find curriculum options on [pages 26-31](#))
 - When are your students receiving classroom lessons on mental health and suicide prevention?
 - No-Cost Elementary Options:
 - [Erika's Lighthouse](#) – Level 1 lessons for older elementary. Free curriculum, must create account to access.
 - Sources of Strength [Elementary](#) (Costs supported by OHA)
 - No-Cost Middle/High Options:
 - [Erika's Lighthouse](#) – Level 2 lessons for middle school, Level 2/3 for older middle school and high school. Free curriculum, must create account to access.

- Parents/Guardians/Community Awareness:**
 - How are you [communicating](#) your school's suicide prevention activities and [resources](#) to your students homes?
 - How are you referring students and their families to [get-help resources](#) when risk is identified?
 - What [culturally and linguistically specific resources](#) have you identified for your students?

- Staff wellness support:**
 - How are you building in [wellness](#) supports for your [staff](#)? How are you taking care of yourself?
 - Option: [Educator Self-care Card](#)
 - Option: Monthly events for [educators](#) and [rural schools](#) from Trauma Informed Oregon

For School Counselors and Mental Health Staff

- Do staff at your school know how and when to refer a student to you? Do staff at your school know how to identify when a student needs an immediate check-in with you because of heightened risk?
- Do you know what forms to fill out if you receive a referral from staff about a student who may be at risk for suicide? Do you know where to submit or store the forms?
- Do you have enough training in brief suicide screening and basic safety planning? If not, consider taking [ASIST](#) and/or [YouthSAVE](#).
- Do you know where to refer a student who demonstrates risk of suicide after you've screened them?
- Do you know how to access crisis services or supports for a student that you identify as having imminent risk for suicide?
- Do you have another school counselor or mental health staff that you can consult with if you have a complex situation?

Resources:

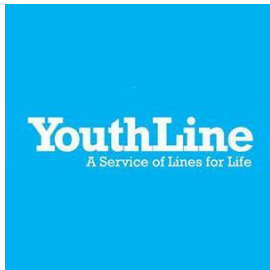
- [Practicing Strength at home](#) – This Sources of Strength packet has a wellness plan that is a great tool for working with all kids (and for staff). It has the wheel with definitions and a tool to identify strengths on the wheel. It has strengths-based conversation starters that would work for counselors or for classrooms.
- *If your school lacks staff to provide suicide safety assessments and safety planning, please call 988 or your [local crisis hotline](#).*
- Oregon's Sources of Strength team is developing Tier 2 lessons that can be used for groups or individuals. To receive access when these tools are published in Fall 2023, contact Darci at Darci@matchstickpdx.com.
- [Sources of Strength - Resources for at-home](#)—This was a packet Sources of Strength national created in 2020 when schools were meeting virtually. It remains a great tool for counselors to use with students or groups, teachers to use in classrooms, for use in staff meetings, or to give to families to use at home.
- 130 [ideas](#) for check-in questions. Connection and belonging are suicide prevention.

For Students and Families



For 24/7 support in English or Spanish:

The suicide and crisis lifeline never closes, it is always open for calls, texts, and chats. [Learn more.](#)



For older elementary, middle or high school students:

YouthLine's teen-to-teen crisis support and help line is open daily from 4 to 10 p.m. Pacific Time via call, text, and chat. Adults answer phone calls at all other times for support 24/7. [Learn more](#)



For all ages:

You'll find resources here to stay strong, create a wellness plan, care for yourself, and practice gratitude. [Learn more](#)



For students and parents:

When life feels heavy, Safe + Strong has resources to help. Connect to care, learn how to make sense of what you're going through, and get tips for supporting a loved one who is struggling. [Learn more](#)



Report concerns about suicide risk for you or someone else:

[SafeOregon](#) is a program created for Oregon students, parents, school staff, community members and law enforcement officers to report and respond to student safety threats – including suicide risk. NOTE: This tip line is not for immediate emergency response. Crisis situations should always go to 911 or 988.