

Suicide Prevention in the Schools: Protective Factors and Resiliency

Dr. Scott Poland

Cypress-Fairbanks ISD

(713) 460-7825

PolandNASP@aol.com

Suicide Statistics:

Florida

2002

Ranked 13th Nationally

Suicide 3rd leading cause of death
for youth aged 10-19

SCHOOL'S ROLE IN YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

Awareness

Assessment

Parent Notification

Referral and follow up

PREVENTION: **SCHOOL PERSONNEL**

Do not be afraid to talk to the child

Know the risk factors and warning signs of youth suicide

Take immediate action

Supervise student/notify crisis team

Pay attention to suicidal writings

CONTINUUM OF SELF- DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR

	WARNING	SUICIDE
STRESSORS	SIGNS	HOMICIDE

HIGH RISK GROUPS

White males

African American males

White females

Hispanic youth

Gay and lesbian youth

Native American youth

MENTAL HEALTH FACTORS AND YOUTH SUICIDE

Psychiatric disorders

Depression

Conduct disorder

Anxiety disorder

Impulse disorder

Alcohol/substance abuse

Self mutilating behaviors

Previous suicidal behavior

Understanding and Responding to Students who Self-Mutilate

Very complex behavior that fulfills a
multitude of needs

Episodic

Contagious: often runs in peer groups

Respond individually

Assess for suicide risk

Understanding and Responding to Students who Self-Mutilate

Warn and involve parents

Utilize school/community resources

It is not as simple as tell them to stop

Teach substitute behaviors that focus on

help-seeking/communication skills,

reduction of tension and isolation

Suicide Precipitating Events

Loss (death, divorce, transience, romance, humility)

Victimization/exposure to violence

Presence of a firearm

School crisis (disciplinary, academic)

Family crisis (abuse, domestic violence, running away)

Suicide in community

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Family cohesion and stability

Coping and problem solving skills

Positive self worth and impulse control

Positive connections to school and
extracurricular participation

Successful academically

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Good relationships with other youth
Seeks adult help when needed
Lack of access to suicidal means
Access to mental health care
Religiosity

WARNING SIGNS OF YOUTH SUICIDE

Suicide notes

Verbal threats

Symptomatic clues/loss of joy/dramatic
changes in behavior

Giving away prized possessions or
making a will

Liability Issues for Schools

Schools and personnel have been sued

Forseeability

Negligence

Examples of cases where schools were
found liable

Parent notification is essential

RESILIENCY IN A WORLD OF TERRORISM

Resiliency is learned and keys are:

Coping skills

Caring family and friends

Optimistic view of future

Adults need to value diversity, model coping
and maintain routines

SCHOOL CONNECTION AND RELATIONSHIPS

Maslow's hierarchy

Carnegie foundation recommendations

N.I.M.H. study of adolescents

Disconnection leads to violence, suicide
and substance abuse:

Parent Suggestions

Faculty connections

SIMPLIFIED SUICIDE RISK ASSESSMENT

Ideation now?

Previous suicide attempt?

Suicide plan now?

INTERVENTION: PARENTS

Available/cooperative?

Increase supervision/remove lethal means?

Recognize severity/seek community treatment?

Share treatment info with school/release of information

SUICIDE POSTVENTION IN THE SCHOOLS

Tell the truth but the answer why died with them

Emphasis is placed on helping survivors cope

Avoid glorification/no assemblies or memorials for suicide victim and limit media coverage

No one is to blame and it was their choice

Teach the warning signs and the importance of getting adult help

Know the imitative factors

YOUTH SUICIDE: Resources

American Association of Suicidology

suicidology.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

afsp.org

National Association of School Psychologists

nasponline.org

Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention

yellowribbon.org

SUICIDE INTERVENTION: Resources

Poland, S. & Lieberman, R.A. (2002). Suicide intervention. In Thomas, A. & Grimes, J., Best practices in school psychology IV. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Poland, S., & McCormick, J.S. (1999). Coping with crisis: Lessons learned. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Poland, S. (1989). Suicide intervention in the schools. New York: Guilford.

*Suicide Prevention is everyone's
responsibility.*

*Together we can make a
difference*

Scott Poland

Publications www.sopriswest.com