Preventing Suicide: What can Schools Do?

ALISSA BRIGGS, PHD;
COLLEEN CORNELIUS, MS;
CHELSEA SHEEHAN, MS

ADOLESCENT MEDICINE AND YOUNG PARENTS PROGRAM

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
Objectives

- Participants will be able to describe:
  - The Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework
  - Evidence-based suicide prevention activities in schools that align with the MTSS model
  - The implementation of post intervention in schools after a suicide
Suicide is the 2\textsuperscript{nd} leading cause of death for 10-24 year-olds

School is where people in this age group spend most of their day

In 2008, 33\% of school psychologists reported that a student in their school died by suicide
MTSS
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

- **Tertiary**—intensive, individualized
- **Secondary**—targeted, small group
- **Universal**—primary prevention
MTSS with Suicide Prevention

- **Tier 1**: School-wide prevention activities

- **Tier 2**: Targeted interventions for students at higher risk for suicide

- **Tier 3**: Intensive interventions for students at the greatest of suicide
Suicide Prevention
Tier 1

Target: All students (and possibly everyone in the school community)

- Educate
- Reduce risk factors
- Promote protective factors
- SOS Signs of Suicide High School Program
- Good Behavior Game

(2, 16, 15)
Protective Factors

- Connectedness
- Contact with caregivers
- Availability of care
  - Easy access to physical and mental health care
- Coping ability
- Problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills

See: http://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/RiskProtectiveFactorsPrimer.pdf,
http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/riskprotectivefactors.html
Risk Factors

- Oppression and victimization
- At-risk groups
  - Students with mental health disorders
  - Students who are using substances
  - Hispanic females
  - Native American males
  - LGBTQ
  - Victims of bullying
  - Children with a trauma history
  - Runaway/homelessness
  - “Frequent fliers”
Risk Factors

- Family history of suicide
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Impulsive or aggressive behavior
- Local epidemics of suicide
- Barriers to accessing mental health treatment
- Loss
- Physical illness
- Easy access to lethal means
- Unwillingness to seek help

Tier 2

Target: At-risk students

- Possible Activities:
  - Teaching tolerance
  - Group counseling
  - Gay/Straight Alliance
  - Reduce barriers through a Family Resource and Youth Service Center
  - Check and Connect
Tier 3

Target: Individual students who have engaged in suicidal behavior

- Resolve any immediate crises and address risk for future suicidal behavior

- Possible Activities:
  - Risk assessments
  - Linking students with appropriate care
  - Evidence-based mental health interventions
  - Planning for re-entry to school (if hospitalized)

(2, 17, 18)
Tier 3

- Respect and empower the student throughout the process by:
  - Clearly explaining the limits of confidentiality
  - Empowering the student to communicate with caretakers
  - Creating a clear picture of future steps
  - Involving the student in planning future treatment
Suicide Post-Intervention
Tier 1

- Support the school community
- Prevent contagion
Tier 2

- Provide mental health interventions:
  - Groups at increased risk
  - Those close to the person who committed suicide
Tier 3

- Identify and respond to individuals:
  - Who are having particular difficulty coping
  - Who are at high risk for suicide
Resource

- After Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools
Resources
Miami-Dade County Public schools implemented systematic suicide prevention and suicides attempts went from 45.5 per 100,000 to 9 per 100,000 (over 18 years).
Toolkit

- Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools
Websites

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- National Institute of Mental Health
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Erika’s Lighthouse
Next Steps
Ahhhh, Where Do We Start?

- Gather a team
- Review existing activities and protocols
- Be prepared to respond to a crisis
- Develop a screening procedure
- Design and implement prevention efforts at Tier 1 and Tier 2
References


Questions?