

Suicide Prevention Training for the Oregon Workforce

Making the Case

Oregonians are seeing too many young people die by suicide, thinking about suicide and struggling with feelings of hopelessness and isolation. As a nation, Americans are working on better ways to communicate the urgency of these issues while also promoting a culture of hope, resilience, help-seeking and healing. Within Oregon, The Alliance is part of a suicide prevention movement galvanized to bring people and communities together to promote prevention, intervention strategies and support healing in communities after a suicide (postvention).

Suicide is preventable and involves everyone in the community. You can be part of the solution and as a leader in your organization:

- Apply policies that create a safe, healthy and supportive work environment
- Provide resources for staff who may be experiencing a crisis
- Train staff to identify and support someone at risk of suicide

This paper focuses on how to plan, develop and implement a **suicide prevention training** program at larger service-oriented organizations. This specific workforce has contact with people who may experience a broad range of challenges, some of who may be at risk of suicide. Preparing employees to spot risk factors and warning signs, engage with an at-risk individual, and make referrals for assistance, creates an opportunity to reach those who may otherwise not receive help. These same skills can be used within the organization to ensure employees struggling with suicidal thoughts have the support they need.

Smaller organizations and businesses that may not be positioned to implement an internal training program are nonetheless important players in suicide prevention efforts. There are excellent training sessions held across the state and the Alliance encourages organizations and businesses to take advantage of these opportunities by supporting employee attendance. There are “small steps” that an organization can take to make a big difference in someone’s life. For example, providing information to employees about mental health and crisis supports and displaying help line phone numbers.

The following discussion centers on the benefits of training and key considerations for development and implementation of suicide prevention training within larger government and not-for-profit organizations.

Why suicide prevention training?

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in Oregon. Each death by suicide leaves grieving families and communities who find themselves struggling to understand this complicated loss.

The impact of each suicide ripples out across the workplace as well. Hundreds more are treated each year for suicidal ideation or attempts. Many go on to live productive and full lives because they were able to find the right help at the right time. Much like organizations commonly train staff in CPR, having a staff who knows how to identify signs and symptoms of suicide and know how to connect people to supports can save lives.

Suicide prevention training also raises awareness that suicide is preventable. It is an opportunity to remind staff there are organizational resources and community supports available to employees who may be in crisis and potentially at risk. It can be an avenue to talk openly about how the stigma of mental health concerns that may discourage staff from seeking help. Suicide prevention training is one tool for keeping both the workforce and those they serve safe.

Training changes practice by 1) increasing staff knowledge and understating of attitudes about suicide and 2) developing staff skills so they are able to identify warning signs, talk about concerns for someone's safety, and make referrals for assistance.

KNOW THE SIGNS

Though the warning signs can be subtle, they are there. By recognizing these signs, knowing how to start a conversation and where to turn for help, you have the power to make a difference- the power to save a life.

- Talking about death or suicide.
- Seeking methods for self-harm, such as searching online or obtaining a gun.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.

- Know the Signs
www.suicideispreventable.org

Planning, Development and Implementation

Planning

The planning stage is the first opportunity to engage staff in the process of designing a training approach for suicide prevention that prepares supervisors and staff for practice changes. One way is to establish a planning team comprised of managers, supervisors and line staff. The planning team's task is to develop implementation strategies and orient all staff about what is in the making, provide ongoing communications to keep them informed of progress and allow for feedback loops. Early buy-in is essential. Before the planning stage begins, it is helpful for organizational leadership to take time with managers and supervisors. Prepare them for the likelihood staff will share their experiences and feelings related to the loss of a family member, friend or acquaintance to suicide. Being sensitive to staff needs and having support resources available is crucial.

Key activities include: a) exploring the benefits of and identifying the need for training; b) setting training goals and confirming desired outcomes; c) reviewing curriculum options; and, d) assessing system capacity to implement a new training, collect related data, measure practice change and provide follow-up.

The planning phase includes taking a look at anticipated financial and human resource needs as well. Keep in mind resource development may require refining existing budgets or securing additional funding to cover cost for curriculum and training materials, preparing in-house trainers or contracting with outside trainers, staff to manage start up and roll out activities, evaluation, and ongoing maintenance/quality control to ensure fidelity to the selected curriculum model.

Development

This stage is for completing operational components tailored to your organization, personnel and consumers served. Areas that will need to be finalized before you begin training are:

- Selection of a training curriculum - More than one type of curriculum may be appropriate based on the roles and responsibilities of staff in organizations providing an array of services such as mental health counseling, children's services, health care, employment supports and benefits screening. See resource section at the end of this paper for potential training curriculums.
- Determine whether trainers will be in-house staff and require a training of trainers based on selected curriculum or secured through contract services. If contract services are required, meet with contract management staff to finalize arrangements.
- Review policies and procedures related to training staff and determine if adjustments are needed to accommodate the suicide prevention training. For example, will suicide prevention training be a standard component of new employee orientation/pre-service training? How often will it be offered as part of ongoing in-service for staff? If the organization provides professional development, will the training qualify for credits? It is also important to identify potential need for coaching resources post training and how this need will be met. Assess availability of resources and determine how to meet the needs of staff who may need additional support related to experiences and feelings that surface as a result of training.
- Explore options for facility use and secure training room/location.
- Determine whether or not to evaluate the training process. Identify data collection tools and evaluation methodology to measure output as well as practice and policy change; determine how data collection and measurement will be conducted.

- Map out timeline for first set of staff to be trained and sequence training for rollout to full organization. For example, the first phase might include all managers and a selected group of line supervisors.
- Finalize budget and secure financial commitments and human resources.

Implementation

Time to launch! Key steps in the implementation process are:

- **Schedule training sessions** - Select first cohort of personnel to be trained, engage trainers, prepare materials and facility, and draft a roll out plan for subsequent groups to be trained.
- **Feedback** - One of the most critical components of implementation is establishing an infrastructure for employee feedback. The feedback loop is an opportunity to assess how the training is working for staff and the organization and to consider modifications if indicated. Working through small glitches and major difficulties when training a few personnel will improve the training process before rolling out to the full workforce. Maintaining the feedback loop over time will continue to improve the quality of the training as well as provide an avenue for staff engagement.
- **Communicate results** – Keep leadership, management, supervisory personnel and staff informed throughout the process. Communications about staff feedback as well as initial data indicators supports ongoing training program improvement and engages the full organization in practice change.
- **Scaling up** - The goal of scaling up is to train all personnel within the organization. Prior to implementing training across the organization, determine what supports are required to maintain model fidelity and solidify practice change. All components of the training initiative will be affected by scaling up particularly in terms of human and financial resources. Secure necessary resources and commitments to ensure an organized and successful roll out.
- **Evaluation** –Activate data collection and measurement procedures including timelines for reporting findings. Measurement includes both output (how many staff trained, hours of training completed, how many consumers received referrals for assistance, etc.) and changes to policy and practice. Coupled with staff feedback, evaluation informs whether the goals of training are being met and provide markers of success.
- **Post-training** - Initiate coaching and/or other follow-up processes to support staff during practice change and particularly when staff identifies and refers someone at risk of suicide. Confirm resource availability and processes to assist staff who may need additional support.



The guides for planning, development and implementation of workplace suicide prevention training offered here provide opportunities to engage staff in conversations about suicide and suicide prevention. Training, often the cornerstone of a more comprehensive approach, can serve as a catalyst for finding options for staff supports that span prevention, intervention and postvention. We see employers and organizational leaders as key partners in our mission to prevent suicide. With your workplace training in place, you will join others across Oregon to:

- Promote a sense of **hope** and highlights **resilience**
- Make it safe to ask for **help** and ensure the right help is available
- Engage individuals and communities in the **healing** process after an attempt or suicide

For more information, join the Alliance conversation about suicide prevention, intervention and postvention in Oregon.

Resources

Crisis

Suicide LifeLine - If there is an immediate crisis:

Call **800-273-8255** (24/7/365)

Text **273TALK** to **839863** (8am-11pm PST daily)

Military Helpline

Call **888-457-4838** (24/7/365)

Text **MIL1** to **839863** (8am-11pm PST daily)

Support for service members, veterans, and their families that is independent of any branch of the military or government.

Youthline

Call **877-968-8491**

Text **teen2teen** to **839863**

Chat at www.oregonyouthline.org

A teen-to-teen crisis and help line. Teens available to help daily from 4-10pm Pacific Time (off-hour calls answered by Lines for Life).

Trevor Project - www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help-now

The Trevor Project provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning youth. Available 24/7/365:

TrevorLifeline 1-866-488-7386

TrevorText – text **START** to **678678**

Standard text messaging rates apply.



Training

Many areas of Oregon have a Suicide Prevention Coalition. To learn about local trainers and available trainings, see the Alliance website for contact information.

<https://oregonalliancetopreventsuicide.org>

Please note this is not an exhaustive list of training options nor an endorsement of a specific training curriculum. For example, you may want to explore training curriculums developed for specialized occupations such as law enforcement, education and health care.

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)

ASIST curriculum teaches participants to recognize when someone may have thoughts of suicide and work with them to create a plan that will support their immediate safety.

<https://www.livingworks.net/programs/asist>

Connect Suicide Prevention/Intervention Training

Participants learn to recognize and respond to early warning signs of suicide, how to connect with individuals at risk and get them help.

<https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/connect-suicide-preventionintervention-training>

Mental Health First Aide

This training teaches how to respond, identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness or substance use challenge. It also has a specific suicide prevention component. For more information training offered throughout Oregon, contact:

<https://mhfaoregon.org/>

safeTALK

This is a half-day alertness training that prepares anyone 15 or older, regardless of prior experience or training, to become a suicide-alert helper. Trained helpers are an important part of suicide-safer communities, working alongside intervention resources to identify and avert suicide risks.

<https://www.livingworks.net/programs/safetalk/>

Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR)

QPR training focuses on how to question, persuade and refer someone who may be suicidal; it also covers common causes of suicidal behavior, warning signs and how to get help for someone in crisis.

<https://qprinstitute.com>



Workplace

Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)

SPRC is the federally supported resource that offers an array of information on topics such as the role of managers and co-workers in suicide prevention and a manager's guide to suicide postvention in the workplace. Resources cover a wide range of occupations.

<https://www.sprc.org/settings/workplaces>

Each Mind Matters

Each Mind Matters, California's Mental Health Movement. This site provides suicide prevention information and materials related to the workforce.

<https://www.eachmindmatters.org/change-agents/resources-for-workplace-suicide-prevention/>

Know the Signs

This statewide campaign for suicide prevention in California is built on three key messages: Know the Signs. Find the words. Reach out. The site provides tools on how to recognize warning signs of suicide, how to find the words to have direct conversation with someone in crisis and where to find professional help and resources.

www.suicideispreventable.org

Oregon Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Project (YSIPP)

This five-year plan focuses on preventing suicide at the earliest ages where it begins to occur, among youth aged 10 to 24 years.

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PREVENTIONWELLNESS/SAFELIVING/SUICIDEPREVENTION/Pages/plan.aspx>

Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide

The Alliance is charged with overseeing implementation of YSIPP and advising the Oregon Health Authority on suicide prevention.

<https://oregonalliancetopreventsuicide.org>