**Provide Suicide Prevention Training ~~at K-12 Schools~~**

In 2018, 11 states passed laws mandating suicide prevention training in public schools, with New York becoming the first to require it in both public and private K-12 institutions. Currently, more than 20 states have such laws to combat the [second leading cause of death](https://www.cdc.gov/injury/images/lc-charts/leading_causes_of_death_age_group_2016_1056w814h.gif) for young people between the ages of 10 and 24.

While most state suicide prevention laws focus on training teachers and other school staff, some states require student training on warning signs and how suicide risk is exacerbated by alcohol or illegal drug use. Despite the prevalence of legislation mandating training, a 2018 nationwide survey of school principals found that only 25 percent knew their state’s suicide prevention requirements. Only 66 percent indicated that their school complied.

United Educators (UE) recommends schools consider implementing suicide prevention training, regardless of whether your state requires it.

**Train faculty and staff on suicide risk factors and warning signs as well as how to respond to a suicidal student.** This “gatekeeper” training can make a difference. Incorporate suicide prevention training into broader training on identifying student mental health issues. Suicide risk factors include:

* Mental illness, including depression
* Conduct issues
* Stress or family dysfunction
* Situational stressors, such as bullying or a family death

**Look for warning signs:**

* Direct and indirect threats to harm oneself
* Suicidal notes or plans, including social media postings
* Changes in behavior or appearance
* Preoccupation with death

**Be prepared to respond properly if a student turns to you for help:**

* Remain calm
* Ask, without judgment, if the student is thinking about suicide
* Listen calmly and offer reassurance
* Not shame or blame the student for their feelings
* Remove any means of self-harm
* Remain with the student while immediately seeking help

**Train students to understand their mental health and to look out for their peers.** They should understand that notifying adults about concerning behavior is the right thing to do. Conduct age-appropriate student training so they can respond appropriately and seek help when necessary.

**Help elementary students learn:**

* Empathy and how to be a good friend
* Signs of sadness in themselves and others
* How to reach out to a trusted adult for help
* Who to contact if someone says they want to harm themselves or others

**Help middle and high school students learn:**

* Suicide warning signs
* How to respond if a friend shares a desire to harm themselves
* Risks (alcohol use) and protective factors (strong friend network)
* Where to seek help

**Train parents on suicide warning signs and identify school and community resources.** Making parents aware of what to look for in their children and where they can go for help is another opportunity for suicide prevention.

Reviewing and selecting an appropriate training program can be challenging. Look to your state’s education department for approved programs, many of which are produced through or endorsed by state health departments. Additional programs can be found at The Jason Foundation. Even if your state does not require suicide prevention training, consider adding it to your curriculum to reach students before they need help.

*By Heather A. Salko, senior risk management counsel*