



# POSTVENTION GUIDE





## ABOUT ACTIVE MINDS



Active Minds is the nation’s leading nonprofit organization promoting mental health awareness and education for the next generation. Active Minds has a presence at more than 1,000 campuses, schools, communities, and workplaces nationwide, and is powered by a robust Chapter Network, the nationally acclaimed Send Silence Packing® exhibit, inspiring Active Minds Speakers, and our tailored Active Minds @Work initiative. The organization is dedicated to ending the silence and changing the culture around mental health for everyone.

Founded in 2003 and based in Washington, DC, Active Minds inspires nearly 15,000 volunteers to lead a movement creating lasting change in the way mental health is talked about, cared for, and valued nationwide.

**Join the Active Minds movement to change the conversation about mental health.**

[activeminds.org](https://www.activeminds.org)



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## POSTVENTION IS PREVENTION

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If your neighborhood, school, or workplace has recently experienced a loss to suicide within your community, unfortunately, you are not alone. Suicide remains one of the leading causes of death worldwide.

**If you are navigating the response of this loss with the goal of promoting reflection and healing, while seeking to prevent further loss and harm, this guide is here for you.**

Our purpose here is to assist you with leading an effective community-wide, public health-informed response.

## AFTER A SUICIDE

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A death by suicide impacts people in the community profoundly, even among those who did not know the person who died. The following section will guide you as you communicate with others about the event, grieve with the community, and engage in action and advocacy to prevent future deaths by suicide. The deep-seated effects of a death by suicide can reverberate through communities for years. That is why addressing the tragedy is so important – healing relies heavily upon talking about what happened.



## THE DOS AND DON'TS OF TALKING ABOUT A SUICIDE

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Suicide is a heavy topic and people often feel a wide range of emotions in the immediate aftermath of these tragedies. Advocates and leaders can set a powerful example through their own communications. The following are a few helpful guidelines to keep in mind when communicating about suicide on social media, through media, at public venues, or with others.

DO:	DON'T:
Do keep the family's wishes in mind. Talk to those who may be in touch with the family to guide you on this.	Don't use stigmatizing phrases such as "taking one's own life," "killed oneself," "committed suicide" or "successful suicide attempt." Instead, say that the person "died by suicide."
Do be as clear and honest as is reasonably justifiable. Addressing death allows for people to better understand and process the events.	Don't mention the means of death, location of suicide, or other unnecessary information that could sensationalize the suicide and or be emulated by others. Instead, stick to what is necessary or helpful to share.
Do share <a href="#">safe reporting guidelines</a> with media outlets and communications teams.	Don't use phrases such as "crazy," "nuts," "psychotic," or "schizophrenic." Instead, use person-first descriptors such as "the individual lived with bipolar disorder" or "was diagnosed with major depression."
Do be ready to respond immediately and direct people to resources and services. Recommended national resources are included below.	Don't ascribe blame or glorify suicide by suggesting that the person is "in a better place".

### Sample Language for Reporters:

- Suicide is preventable. If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts or know someone who is, help available 24/7/365. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **800-273-TALK (8255)** or text **"BRAVE"** to the Crisis Text Line at **741-741** anytime for free and confidential support and resources from a trained crisis counselor.
- Experiencing a crisis? Call [Name of Community Services] at [000-000-0000] from [hours of operation]. [Names of Additional Local Mental Health/Suicide Prevention Resources] are also available to those in crisis.

## PROVIDE SAFE, OPEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFLECTION AND HEALING

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Contrary to many people's beliefs, talking about suicide does not increase risk of suicide. In fact, by providing opportunities for people to talk about suicide openly, those who may be struggling may feel less alone. It can also be difficult for people to feel like themselves and do their best until they have had an opportunity to process difficult events within a community. Below are a few suggestions for actions, events, or activities you may engage in to promote connection:

- Host listening sessions and/or town halls so that members of the community can communicate how they are feeling and about their needs.
- Use a project, such as art, vision boarding, or community service, to create opportunities for a shared vision of a healthier, more connected future.
- Formalize a space for people to come together and create change. This can look like an employee resource group, coalition, or school club that meets on a regular basis and creates an action plan together.
- Encourage leaders, managers, and educators to check-in with the groups of people they serve and allow people to speak openly to process the events before jumping into business.

These kinds of informal spaces can powerfully support people who may be experiencing trauma after a suicide. Ensure that the space allows people to be their authentic selves and that they feel welcomed and supported. This means listening to the community to find out what they want and need, and developing together the kinds of opportunities for healing and reflection will best meet their needs, not just for healing, but also for creating change.

## CREATE A CULTURE OF HEALING AND SUPPORT

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In addition to communicating about the death, advocates and leaders can also support those impacted by providing the appropriate resources and engaging in active listening.

### Promote Mental Health Resources

Share information about preventive resources and mental health services as well as positive stories of hope and healing:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **Call 800-273-8255** for 24/7 crisis support from a trained counselor
- Crisis Text Line: Text the keyword **BRAVE to 741-741** for 24/7 support from a trained counselor
- Find other resources and ideas for seeking help at [activeminds.org/gethelp](https://www.activeminds.org/gethelp)
- Don't forget to include local and community resources.

## Dispel Myths about Suicide and Mental Illness

There are often no readily observable differences between those with and without mental illness or suicidal thoughts. However, most people who are suicidal do exhibit [warning signs](#). Share information about the warning signs while also being careful to not speculate about the cause(s). Suicide is a multifaceted issue with environmental, interpersonal, psychological, and biological implication. We rarely know the exact cause of death by a suicide.

## Support Each Other through Active Minds' Validate, Appreciate, Refer® (V-A-R)

It can be difficult to know exactly what to say to those who are grieving, stressed, or struggling in the aftermath of a suicide. Active Minds' [V-A-R](#)® empowers people to know what to do and say during challenging times. These three steps are a helpful guide to listening and responding in a meaningful way. You can also let other people know about V-A-R so that their conversations are also rooted in active listening and validation. Remember, you don't have to be an expert to help, you just have to be there.

## De-stigmatize Mental Health in the Everyday

Leaders can integrate positive mental health messaging in day-to-day conversations by pointing out how many common phrases (i.e. "He's crazy." or "This is really depressing.") perpetuate stigma. When a peer or colleague is stressed or depressed or anxious, remind them of the services available. Ask people how they are doing and try to get a straight answer beyond "I'm fine" or "I'm OK." Spreading awareness about mental health and its importance can bring students closer together and build a culture of support and understanding.



### A Note on Self-Care

Be sure to practice personal and group-based self-care on a regular basis. Personal self-care can look like confiding in someone you trust, going to therapy, and taking a break (and being respectful and understanding of others who need to take a break). Group-based self-care can include observing [Stress Less Week](#) in your community, volunteering together, or just having fun or socializing as a community.

## TAKE ACTION AS A COMMUNITY TO PREVENT SUICIDE

Proactive prevention is undoubtedly the best counteractive measure that can be taken against suicide. Mindful programming and advocacy efforts are effective strategies for helping a community cope after a suicide. They can also help prevent future suicides by fostering an environment that makes the community feel safe and understood. In addition to the recommendations below, check out Active Minds' [Resources, Guides, and Campaigns](#) to explore additional ways you can impact your community.

### Review Existing Policies

What policies and protocols exist to support the mental health of people in your community? Examples include accommodations and flexibility for people who are struggling with their mental health and requiring leaders to participate in mental health trainings.

### Mental Health/Suicide Prevention Task Forces

Some communities, workplaces, and schools have mental health or suicide prevention task forces already in place. It's important to ensure diversity among task force members in terms of demographics, power dynamics, and lived experience.

### Mental Health Promotion and Education

Many people have never learned about mental health or where to go for support. Mental health education or training does not need to be intensive. Most people can benefit significantly from simple training that makes mental health accessible to everyone - regardless of whether or not they have a mental illness - and teaches how to support others through challenging times.

Getting the word out, generating a conversation, and providing resources are some of the best ways to promote mental health and connect people to mental health services. Advocates and leaders can also encourage people to share their stories to offer hope to those who need help and demonstrate that mental health impacts everyone. Or, hire a professional mental health speaker to share their story and inspire people to get the help that they need. [Active Minds](#) provides basic information about mental health and suicide. Other credible sources include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

**Active Minds' Speakers Program** provides engagements and trainings from professional speakers and trainers who have personal experience with mental health and suicide. They provide compelling and safe mental health education that's tailored for all groups. Learn more at [activeminds.org/speakers](https://activeminds.org/speakers).

### Sample Social Media Posts to Share with Your Networks:

- "Don't be afraid to ask a friend how you can support them when they're struggling, and share with your loved ones how they can support you when you're struggling."
- "Remember to prioritize your needs today and every day. Go outside, disconnect from your phone for a while, turn to your support network, learn something new, and most importantly, treat yourself with kindness. You're doing the best you can."
- "You are not alone. If you are struggling with suicidal thoughts, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **800-273-TALK (8255)** or text '**BRAVE**' to the Crisis Text Line at **741-741**. It's free, confidential, and could really make a difference."
- "Are you concerned that someone you know may be struggling? Ask them directly. Then, use Active Minds' V-A-R tool to validate their feelings, appreciate that it took courage for them to share, and then refer them to skills and support. Learn more at [activeminds.org/var](https://activeminds.org/var)."

## CONCLUSION

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We hope that these recommendations will be helpful in supporting your community to heal and recover after a suicide and promoting positive mental health efforts moving forward. We also hope the guide urges advocates to eliminate stigma in their communities, to rebuild after tragedy, and to engage in suicide prevention efforts.

Active Minds is here to help. We have a robust set of programs and resources available for communities, the workplace, K-12 schools, and colleges and universities. Learn more at [activeminds.org/programs](https://activeminds.org/programs).