Suicide Prevention

Fostering Protective Factors to Prevent Suicide in K-12 School Settings

the school setting. Identifying individuals with these often-invisible risks requires a multi-method approach. Individual screening for suicide risks is like checking vital signs during a routine check-up, the results tell you about the general overall function of the system. An unusual result may occur for an understandable and temporary reason and pose little, if any threat. Conversely, anomalies discovered during routine check-ups often save lives. Screening whole school communities provides a view into the health of the system as a whole and more importantly into the health of the individuals within the system.

Students identified as at-risk through clinical assessment should receive evidence-based services to promote improved mental health and reduce the risk of suicide. School mental health personnel, parents, and community mental health providers use Tier II clinical assessment data to determine the level (group/individual) and intensity of service delivery (school-based/outpatient, clinical/in-patient hospitalization) recommended for the student.

If the school cannot meet a student’s needs through school-based group supports, the student should receive prevention supports through Tier III services. Targeted/Indicated prevention services for suicide are rarely available within school settings. Memoranda of Understanding between schools and community mental health providers typically describe how to provide these services when required.

Resources


Suicide Prevention

The PROBLEM

Suicide is a public health problem with strong connections to environmental and individual factors. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in children (10-14), adolescents (15-19), and young adults (20-24) (WISQARS, 2009). While suicide is uncommon in young children, it increases through adolescence and young adulthood.

The SOLUTION

School environments can create and foster risks (peer related conflicts, bullying, academic failure, social isolation) or protective factors (personal connectedness, education, opportunities to succeed) that are associated with suicide. We often refer to the balance of these positive and negative factors within a school community as the school climate. Identifying school climate variables that could mediate individual behaviors in at-risk students is a primary prevention method for reducing the potential for a suicide in a school community.

Individuals within the school community bring risk factors (previous suicide attempts, mood disorders, family conflict/loss, and substance abuse) into...