

## **Fall 2020 Guidance for Student Suicide Prevention Delivery to Meet KRS 156.095 Requirements**

### **Why do we need to talk about suicide prevention, especially this year when we aren't sure what back-to-school will look like?**

Kentucky legislation, KRS 156.095, requires that all middle and high school students receive suicide prevention information before Sept. 15. That requirement remains in place for the 2020-21 school year. But experts recommend that it is important to tailor the delivery of required suicide prevention trainings to fit the context of the current situation.

When we return to school, students may not feel safe in the physical classroom. They may be scared of contracting COVID-19. They may be scared of how they and their friends have changed during this separation. Those who may have not fit in before may struggle even more. For students who don't return to an in-person classroom, there may be issues related to staying connected with friends. They may have anxiety or wonder even how they continue to learn in a virtual environment

Being proactive in addressing the feelings of safety will support youth in improving their mental health, but also in decreasing the potential of self- and peer-inflicted victimization behaviors. Youth who feel safe are also more likely to achieve academically.

### **Can I use prevention curricula I've used in the past?**

Many school systems have used national evidence-based or locally created evidence-informed suicide prevention curricula for many years. These are considered best practice in suicide prevention delivery for students. However, national school suicide prevention experts have recommended a different approach in light of the circumstances surrounding COVID.

Suicide prevention curricula that focus on training youth to be gatekeepers for their peers by knowing and recognizing warning signs and risk factors are not recommended to be delivered within 6 months of suicide death in a school or community. This gives those impacted a chance to heal after the trauma by focusing on getting well instead of taking care of others. School suicide prevention experts recommend similar precautions be taken in light of the current situation.

National subject matter experts also indicate that with delayed school openings, teachers will not have had as much of a chance to get to know and understand students' baseline behaviors to be able to identify when a suicide prevention lesson may be triggering for a student.

For these reasons, they recommend utilizing an "intervention" or "postvention" approach to suicide prevention, that focuses more on mental health wellness and accessing resources, rather than focusing on being a gatekeeper for their friends.

### **What content should be included in student lessons this year?**

Experts recommend the 2020-21 suicide prevention delivery to meet KRS 156.095, should:

- Focus on building resilience and coping skills rather than focusing on suicide risk and warning signs.
- Normalize help seeking by including signals of when it is appropriate to contact someone for help.

- Include access to local and national resources, such as local Community Mental Health Center crisis lines, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-272-8255) or the Crisis Text Line (741741).
- Identify which school staff students should contact if they need to talk to someone regarding their mental health.
- Include a way for students to signal they need help during the lesson (private chat function to the teacher for virtual lessons, etc.). In an in-person delivery, having a second adult present to monitor the class would be helpful. During a virtual lesson, having someone present to monitor the class video to watch for signs of distress is imperative.

The Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID) is teaming with *The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide* (SPTS) to provide a series of videos called “*Navigating Back to School*.”

- The videos are designed to help students focus on the feelings they are currently experiencing and encourage them to ask for help if those feelings become overwhelming.
- The videos are available for high school, middle school, upper elementary, and lower elementary students. While Kentucky law doesn’t require elementary students to receive suicide prevention instruction, DBHDID recommends elementary school utilize the “*Navigating Back to School*” videos for this population as younger students also have mental health concerns.
- Videos will be available on Aug. 5 on the [sptsusa.org](http://sptsusa.org) website and will support schools in meeting the legislative requirement while supporting youth safety.
- The videos are free to all schools in Kentucky.

Additionally, the SPTS is creating middle and high school video guides for use by Kentucky schools.

- The guides will support teacher-led discussion of the “*Navigating Back to School*” videos that focuses on help seeking and recognizing signs of distress in oneself and friends, as opposed to addressing suicide specifically.
- These will be available no later than Aug. 15.
- Resource links will be emailed to all schools as soon as the materials are available.

A “booster” suicide prevention training should be considered for delivery in January as a way to improve student safety and to provide additional resources on accessing mental health services. The “*Suicide Staff Student Recommendations Aug. 2020* (also known as ‘Good, Better, Best’ document)” provides information about components and programs that can be used for the booster sessions.

### **How can I train my staff?**

- Staff members should receive training before delivering training to students. Staff training should focus on identifying students in distress, especially if delivering in a virtual environment.
  - The “*Navigating Back to School*” series will include videos for high school, middle school and elementary certified staff and classified staff, each designed for its specific audience (four videos total).
  - The SPTS site also offers a new 40-minute video called “*Support, Control, and Structure: Self-Care for Educators*,” which can be coupled with the “*Navigating Back to School*” videos for staff and a review of school policies and procedures for identifying youth at risk of suicide, to meet the one-hour of suicide prevention training requirement for school staff.

- The “*Making Educators Partners in Youth Suicide Prevention, Act on FACTS*” is available on the SPTS website. This training also meets the staff requirement.
- These staff solutions are free and are created by national suicide prevention experts.
- Staff should be provided a review of the school’s policies and procedures for connecting youth at risk for mental health issues with appropriate care.

**Who else should be trained?**

- Whether a district goes back to school in person or virtually, DBHDID recommends that parents be educated on warning signs they may notice in their child and be provided information on access to mental health care.
  - A “Navigating Back to School” video for parents will also be available on Aug. 5.
  - Gatekeeper trainings, such as QPR, can be delivered virtually and the Regional Prevention Centers in each region can support delivery of this programs in a virtual environment.
    - Contact information for the Regional Prevention Center serving your community can be found at <http://dbhdid.ky.gov/ProviderDirectory/ProviderDirectory.aspx>
    - A contact sheet is also provided in the “Good, Better, Best” document.
  - Additional parent resources can be found at <https://sptsusa.org/not-my-kid/>

**Are there other resources available?**

Additional resources are available from the National Association for School Psychologists to support these recommendations include (hyperlinked):

- [Preparing for Virtual School Suicide Assessment Checklist](#)
- [Conducting a Virtual Suicide Assessment Checklist](#)
- [Comprehensive School Suicide Prevention in a Time of Distance Learning](#)

**Is there anyone who can assist as I plan student and staff sessions?**

DBHDID staff are available to assist in planning delivery of sessions for students.

Feel free to reach out to:

- Beck Whipple, State Suicide Prevention Coordinator, [beck.whipple@ky.gov](mailto:beck.whipple@ky.gov)
- Cathy Prothro, Suicide Prevention Enhancement Specialist, [cathy.prothro@ky.gov](mailto:cathy.prothro@ky.gov)
- Patti Clark, DBHDID Prevention Program Manager, [patti.clark@ky.gov](mailto:patti.clark@ky.gov)