



SIEC ALERT

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SIEC ALERT is a quick reference guide to some of the newest resources in the field of suicide prevention.

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Please contact us if you'd like to be added to our free mailing list, or if you have an idea for a future topic!
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Considerations for School Suicide Prevention Programs

In the past two decades, school-based suicide prevention programs have been one of the key elements in youth suicide prevention efforts. A well-planned school program gives students permission to examine their attitudes toward suicide, provides the opportunity to dispel myths surrounding suicide, and teaches students ways to seek help for themselves and their peers when they are in distress.

Teachers, guidance counsellors, administrators, in fact, all school personnel are in a critical position as gatekeepers to identify and assist a suicidal young person. A better-informed knowledge-base on program design and evaluation, drawn from program experience is now available.

Five Steps for Setting Up a Successful School-Based Awareness Program

1. Gain entry into the relevant youth-serving systems.
2. Select a suicide awareness education curriculum for your school.
3. Provide suicide prevention training for school personnel.
4. Develop school policies & procedures.
5. Develop & maintain linkages with the community mental health system.

from: *Before the fact interventions: A manual of best practices in youth suicide prevention*,
Suicide Prevention Information & Resource Centre of B.C. See verso for details.

Consider the following comments, derived from evaluation experience:

- Curricula need to be well-conceived, and neither *sensationalize* nor *normalize* suicide for youth.
- No evidence of increased ideation or suicidal behaviour was found to support the concern that discussion of suicide with teens will lead to a contagion effect. (CDC, 1992)
- Students need to learn that the commonly heard statement: "*people who talk about suicide do not commit suicide*" is **false**, as this idea can interfere with helping a suicidal peer. (Kalafat, J., SIEC #940816)
- It is important to teach that males commit suicide more often than females, because males tend to take suicide talk from peers less seriously. (Kalafat, J., SIEC #940816)
- Representing suicide as a response to common stressors to which everyone is vulnerable is not only inaccurate, but possibly dangerous since it may increase the likelihood that suicide will be imitated. Suicide may be seen as a less attractive, and less viable solution to problems if it were accurately portrayed as a manifestation of mental illness. (Garland, A., Shaffer, D., & Whittle, B., SIEC # 900665)
- Schools need to be aggressive in convincing teens of the need to seek help for a friend, and in teaching how to handle confidences, how to develop trust & encourage disclosure, and in supplying information on where to turn for help. (Vince, C.J., & Hamrick, K.R., SIEC #950585)
- Schools need to strengthen their formal ties with community agencies to form a support network when the school or teacher anticipates or experiences a crisis. (Vince, C.J., et al., SIEC # 950585)
- Parent education needs to be a vital component. If parents can both recognize and understand the 'problem' behaviours of their adolescents, they are more likely to act in an appropriate rather than punitive way. (Vince, C.J., et al., SIEC #950585)
- Suicide education needs to be integrated into the health education curriculum, and be seen as part of a broader primary prevention scheme that builds self esteem and teaches students coping & life skills, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution.

"An essential factor in providing assistance for young people is meaningful connection with helpful peers, with caring adults who do not need to be experts, but who do need to be able to help; and in many situations, with professional helping resources. Such meaningful connections are developed, encouraged, and implemented in comprehensive suicide prevention programs."

(Tierney, R. J., SIEC #980313)

Student at Risk: 7 Factors

- unexpected reduction of academic performance
- ideas & themes of depression, death & suicide
- change in mood & marked emotional instability
- significant grief or stress
- withdrawal from relationships
- physical symptoms with emotional cause
- high risk behaviours

This is an abridged list from: **The prevention, recognition and management of young people at risk of suicide: Development of guidelines for schools**, New Zealand: Ministry of Education. See "Guides & Books" for info.

Youth Suicide Backgrounder

✎ In Canada and the United States, suicide is the second leading cause of death for 15 to 19 year olds. In 1996, 17% of injury hospitalizations for 15-24 year old Albertans were self-inflicted. (Alberta Injury Data Report, 1996) According to data from New Zealand - by the age of 18, about one person in 20 will have made a suicide attempt.

✎ In a survey of more than 10,000 U. S. high school students, 24.1% had serious thoughts about suicide, 17.7% had made a specific plan to attempt suicide, and 8.7% reported a suicide attempt during the twelve months preceding the survey. (CDC: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 1995).

✎ Suicidal thoughts & attempts are more likely to be known to a teenager's peers than to adults. It is estimated that only one-fourth of teens who know of a suicidal friend report this to an adult, partly due to the importance of maintaining a confidence, and partly due to their concerns about adults' responses. (Kalafat, J. & Elias, M., SIEC #940816)

✎ Since teens can be the 'rescuers of choice' of fellow teens, they need to know how to respond effectively. If they are not prepared, they can be overwhelmed, afraid of embarrassing themselves or their friend, or they may overreact, joke about, or minimize the problem.
(Ryerson, D., & Kalafat, J., SIEC #940646)

If the article we have cited includes a SIEC #, you can order a copy from SIEC. Please see verso for more details.

Guides & Books

White, J., & Jodoin, N. (1998). **Before the fact interventions: A manual of best practices in youth suicide prevention.**

Vancouver: Suicide Prevention Information & Resource Centre of British Columbia, Co-Operative University-Provincial Psychiatric Liaison (CUPPL), University of British Columbia

Limited copies available for \$12.00

phone: 604-822-0740

fax: 604-822-7786

email: rouse@unixg.ubc.ca

SIEC #980686 (Loan in Alberta available)



N.Z. Ministry of Education & the National Health Committee. (1998). **Young people at risk of suicide: A guide for schools.** (Item # 98137).

ISBN: 0-477-05074-3

Photocopy of original report available from SIEC for \$8.00 (34 pages): SIEC #980458

Also ask about the title Development of guidelines for schools. (SIEC # 980459)



B.C. Council for Families. (1997). **Suicide Prevention & Intervention Training for School Personnel: Program Design & Implementation Issues: Annotated Bibliography.**

Contact: Cheryl Haw, Program Director

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Other Helpful Books:

If you reside in Alberta, the following books are available for loan.

• **Suicide Prevention in Schools** (1991). by Leenaars, A. A. & Wenckstern, S. (Eds.) SIEC #910171

• **Preventing Youth Suicide: A Handbook for Educators & Human Service Professionals** (1994) by McEvoy, M. L. & McEvoy, A. W. (Eds.) SIEC #950781

• **Planning & Managing Death Issues in the School: A Handbook** (1995) by Deaton, R. L. & Berkan, W. A. SIEC #950208



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Studies to Consider for School Prevention Programs:

(SIEC price: \$6.00 per document. Please quote SIEC # to order.)

SIEC #930945 Angerstein, G., Linfield-Spindler, S., & Payne, L. (1991). Evaluation of an urban school adolescent suicide program. School Psychology International, 12(1-2), 25-48.

SIEC #950135 Eggert, L., Thompson, E. A., Herting, J. R., & Nicholas, L. J. (1995). Reducing suicide potential among high-risk youth: Tests of a school-based prevention program. Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior, 25(2), 276-296.

SIEC#900665 Garland, A., Shaffer, D., & Whittle, B. (1989). A national survey of school-based, adolescent suicide prevention programs. Journal of the Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 28(6), 931-934.

SIEC #980728 Hazell, P., & King, R. (1996). Arguments for & against teaching suicide prevention in the schools. Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 30,(5), 633-642.

SIEC #950078 Kalafat, J., & Elias, M. J. (1995). Suicide prevention in an educational context: Broad and narrow foci. Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior, 25 (1), 123-133.

SIEC #940816 Kalafat, J., & Elias, M. (1994). An evaluation of a school-based suicide awareness intervention. Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior, 24(3), 224-233.

SIEC #940267 Klingman, A., & Hochdorf, Z. (1993). Coping with distress & self-harm: The impact of a primary prevention program among adolescents. Journal of Adolescence, 16(2), 121-140.

SIEC #970033 Ploeg, J., Ciliska, D., Dobbins, M., Hayward, S., Thomas, H., & Underwood, J. (1996). A systematic overview of adolescent suicide prevention programs. Canadian Journal of Public Health, 87(5), 319-324.

SIEC # 940646 Ryerson, D., & Kalafat, J. (1994). The crisis of youth suicide. In R. G. Stevenson (Ed.), What will we do? Preparing a school community to cope with crises (pp. 79-94). Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing.

SIEC #890285 Spirito, A., Overholser, J., Ashworth, S., Morgan, J., & Benedict-Drew, C. (1988). Evaluation of a suicide awareness curriculum for high school students. Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 27(6), 705-711.

SIEC # 901278 Tierney, R., Ramsay, R., Tanney, B., & Lang, W. (1990). Comprehensive school suicide prevention programs. Death Studies, 14, 347-370.

SIEC # 980313 Tierney, R. J. (1998). Youth suicide prevention in schools & community: A progress report. In A. A. Leenaars, et al. (Eds.), Suicide in Canada (pp. 291-308). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

SIEC #950585 Vince, C.J., & Hamrick, K. R. (1990). Preventing youth suicide: what works? Program and policy choices for schools. In P. Cimboric & D. A. Jobes (Eds.), Youth suicide: Issues, assessment, and intervention (pp. 87-101). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

SIEC #971275 Zenere, F. J., & Lazarus, P. J. (1997). The decline of youth suicidal behavior in an urban, multicultural public school system following the introduction of a suicide prevention & intervention program. Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior, 27(4), 387-403.

More Information for School Personnel available from SIEC:

- **Suicide Prevention in Canadian schools: A Resource** (1995): \$10.00
- **SIEC Information Kit for School Personnel (new)**: \$12.00
- **Understanding Depression & Suicide: A Student Booklet**: \$0.50 each
- **SIEC Film & Video List**: \$5.00