

Suicide Postvention:

How managers can support the mental health of employees following a suicide loss

While it can be challenging to think about a suicide loss impacting your workplace, having a plan for how you will respond in the aftermath of a suicide event is essential to ensuring the mental health and well-being of your employees.

Suicide Postvention focuses on providing resources and support to those who are impacted by a suicide loss, minimizing the negative effects of exposure to suicide, and preventing further suicides.

Managers and supervisors are uniquely positioned to play an integral role in workplace suicide postvention. Your actions can help to address the immediate and on-going needs of employees following a suicide loss and can contribute to healing and recovery within your organization.

Before a Suicide Event

Consider forming a [suicide postvention committee](#) to guide the development of a suicide postvention plan that is tailored to your workplace setting and company policy. Consult [expert resources](#) and [guidelines](#) as well as internal stakeholders (e.g., Human Resources, Employee Relations, Legal, Corporate Communications, management, employees) to:

- Develop a step-by-step postvention plan
- Develop needed tools (e.g., internal and external communication procedures, communication templates)
- Identify and train suicide postvention team members who will mobilize and assist with executing your organization's postvention action plan

Responding in the Aftermath of Suicide

Consider taking the following steps as part of your organization's suicide postvention action plan:

Notify Employees. Once a suicide death is confirmed, coordinate timely communication to notify employees. Initial communication from your organization can set the tone for all that follows. Consult with company guidelines and include clear, factual, and accurate information that uses a respectful tone (e.g., avoids stigmatizing language, conveys empathy) and complies with confidentiality requirements and requests (e.g., if family requests cause of death be withheld). If the cause of death is revealed, do not include information regarding method or location (see *Preventing further loss of life* section below). Example templates can be found [here](#).

Outreach to Family. Consult with Human Resources and use your best judgment about what is appropriate interaction and outreach to the family of the deceased. Consider offering workplace condolences or offering practical support and assistance if appropriate and consistent with workplace policy (e.g., providing information about Lyra as the mental health benefit alongside any other EAP benefits that family members are eligible for).

Partner with your EAP to Provide Emotional Support Resources. Work with Lyra or your EAP to provide appropriate educational and emotional support resources that are tailored to your workplace setting and circumstances. Educational resources should include information about common reactions following suicide loss as well as tools for taking care of one's mental health (e.g., self-care, when to reach out for professional support). Partner with Lyra or your EAP to make needed mental health services, such as on-site individual and group crisis counseling, available to those in need. Ensure all employees are aware of immediate crisis intervention and ongoing mental health service options.

Lead by Example. Acknowledge your own experience and share your ways of coping, such as prioritizing self-care or connecting with others. This can be as simple as sharing an emotion you've felt, describing how it has impacted you in the workplace, and noting what you've done to cope (e.g., "I've felt a profound sense of sadness and it has made it hard to focus at times. I've tried to be mindful of taking breaks throughout my day to do something restorative—for me that's a short walk"). The intention here is to demonstrate that it is normal to have an emotional response to a distressing event, to show that you recognize the need to stop, honor and/or acknowledge what has occurred in some way, and to share coping tools. Communicating with empathy and understanding will help to create a workplace culture that promotes help-seeking and increases the likelihood that employees will be open about their needs.

Provide Time and Space for Healing. Create time and space for employees to come together to process and support one another. Offer practical support, such as available short-term workplace productivity concessions (e.g., flexibility in work schedule, taking breaks, time off). Know that employees may not feel a sense of permission to ask for this flexibility so offer it proactively, freely, and publicly.

Identify Employees in Need of Support and Connect Them to Resources. Individuals within your organization will have varying reactions to a suicide loss. A subset of employees may respond with more significant emotional distress and would benefit from immediate crisis intervention or from engaging with Lyra or your EAP for on-going assistance. The strategies below will help you to identify employees who may be in need of additional support:

- **Use Wellness Check-ins.** Show that you're particularly visible as a source of support during this time via casual check-ins and wellness checks over instant message or email, by walking around the workplace, and during 1:1 and small group meetings. Keep the focus on how people are doing and how you can support them. Consider scheduling more formal check-ins with impacted employees individually or in small groups based on employee preference.
- **Notice and Respond to Signs of Emotional Distress.** Keep your eye out for changes in the overall demeanor and functioning of employees and coworkers, particularly deviations from someone's baseline presentation or functioning. Here are some signs of emotional distress that you might see:

Changes in mood	Withdrawal from regular activities	Increased use of substances
Persistent irritability, anger, anxiety, or sadness	Withdrawal from relationships	Reckless behavior
Sleeping more or less	Personal neglect	Statements about feeling trapped or hopeless
Decline in work performance	Difficulty concentrating	Statements about suicide
Decreased motivation		

If you notice signs of emotional distress in an employee or co-worker, consider consulting with an HR colleague or Lyra. If it is appropriate for you to intervene, consider the following steps:

- **Be Direct.** "I'm concerned about you. You haven't seemed like yourself lately."
- **Describe What You See.** "I notice you haven't been responding to email and you seem down."
- **Ask Open-ended Questions.** "I know many of us have struggled recently. How have you been doing?" "Tell me more." Do more listening than talking.
- **Connect to Resources.** Let the employee know about immediate crisis intervention services available as well as longer term emotional support services offered through Lyra or your EAP.
- **Avoid Common Pitfalls.** Try not to be judgmental, don't try to diagnose, and avoid giving advice or becoming the employee's sole source of support. The goal of this conversation is to convey concern and learn a bit more so that you can connect the employee to the appropriate resources.

Implement Long Term Support Plans. Develop a plan for providing on-going support as needed. Consider reactions to anniversaries, events and milestones. Continue to evaluate and revise your long-term support plan.

Facilitate Return to Day-to-Day Functioning. A suicide postvention plan should also give consideration to the transition back to regular workplace functioning. Managers can play a role in this effort by consulting with HR and leadership to determine limits and expectations related to workplace accommodations and by providing clear communication as their team transitions from immediate crisis to recovery and prevention.

Preventing Further Loss of Life

Reducing Potential Contagion Effect. It is possible that a suicide death may trigger suicidal thoughts and feelings in individuals already vulnerable to suicidal ideation and that these individuals may be at risk for responding to the initial death by attempting suicide themselves. To minimize risk, use a respectful tone in all communication but avoid providing detailed information on the means of death, glamorizing or romanticizing suicide death, or memorializing suicide death in a dramatic or sensational manner. For instance, instead of creating a memorial on a person's work station, consider creating a memory book for family members or a donation to an organization of meaning or importance to the deceased.

Transition from Suicide Postvention to Suicide Prevention. Once the crisis has passed, return focus to on-going suicide prevention efforts. Partner with Lyra or your EAP for educational resources, tools, and suicide prevention trainings.