



Education First –
Safety A



May 2017

WSSCA Newsletter

The "news you can use" periodical for Wisconsin's school safety and security professionals



May is Mental Health Awareness Month. As of this writing, many of our colleagues are addressing significant issues in their schools on the heels of a recent Netflix series about teen suicide. Prom season is in full swing, and graduation parties are right around the corner. All too often, spring brings with it a return of dangerous, thoughtless behaviors, and tragedies are close at hand.

Barbara Dorff, WSSCA Board Advisor, and retired Executive Director for Student Services is a recognized expert in addressing the ways that school personnel can most effectively help, students and colleagues cope with and overcome the severe effects of grief following the death of a child, friend, colleague. This is the third and final installment of a three-part series from Barbara. ED

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Coping with the Death of a Student:

Part 3: Best Practice regarding Student Memorials and Funerals

In part 1 of this three-part series of articles the ways in which children and adolescents understanding the concept of death and the behaviors that might be accompany their grieving were discussed. Part 2 discussed the ways that one may be able to help students who are dealing with the death of another student. This segment will focus on memorials and funerals.

Student memorials can serve an important function in the healing process following a traumatic experience such as the death of another student. The focus should be to bring people together to express feelings and concerns together to reduce feelings of isolation.

It is important to strive to treat all deaths in a similar fashion and not have different approaches for students who pass away from an accident or disease and another for a student suicide. The focus is to engage students in a discussion that explores their feelings and allows these feelings to be out in the open rather than hidden.

Each district should have a policy or procedure in place to deal

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with memorials. The goal should be to balance students' need to grieve and limit the risk of inadvertently glamorizing the death. Spontaneous memorials, such as flowers, stuffed animals, etc. should not be actively encouraged and should be removed within about a week. Large assemblies are discouraged as it can be difficult to control and deal with the emotions that may result.

Do not hold funerals at the school if at all possible. The use of a gym or school auditorium to hold a funeral can generate very negative feelings when students need to go back to the area in the course of the school day. The area can become a place of grieving and sadness, and this should be avoided.

If a permanent memorial is established, it is recommended that it be placed off of school grounds. This will support the school's goal of normalizing and maintaining emotional regulation. Permanent memorials on school grounds have the potential to upset students and are constant reminders. It is also important to remember that if a memorial is established on school grounds, such as a tree or plaque for one student, other requests may follow and this may become impossible to sustain over time.

Temporary memorials allow students, staff, and families to express their grief in a positive and constructive manner. Temporary memorials may include a nonrenewable scholarship; a temporary website or online memorial; a onetime monetary donation to charity; a message on a poster or banner; a memory book; writing an individual or group letter; keeping a journal; creating a personal song, poem, or other art project; a candlelight vigil; or an impromptu memorial site (collection of balloons, flowers, stuffed animals, and photos). Most temporary memorials are short term, can be given away as a gift or donation, or they will expire or come to an end within a year. In most school-related deaths, it is most appropriate to create temporary memorials.

Click [here](#) for information from NASP (The National Association of School Psychologists) that will give you further guidance on memorials.

I hope this series of articles has been helpful.

Barbara Dorff

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I referenced this Netflix series in the introduction to Barbara's article. WSSCA has been receiving inquiries from members about how other districts are handling the issues that this series has brought to the forefront. I am reprinting the "For Educators" portion of an article from the National Association of School Psychologists that many district have been using as the foundation for communications to parents who, rightly, have concerns about how the show is portraying the issues of teen suicide. This is long, but it is important. ED

"13 Reasons Why"

Netflix Series: Considerations for Educators

Schools have an important role in preventing youth suicide, and being aware of potential risk factors in students' lives is vital to this responsibility. The trending Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*, based on a young adult novel of the same name, is raising such concerns.

The series revolves around 17-year-old Hannah Baker, who takes her own life and leaves behind audio recordings for 13 people who she says in some way were part of why she killed herself. Each tape recounts painful events in which one or more of the 13 individuals played a role.

Producers for the show say they hope the series can help those who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. However, the series, which many teenagers are binge watching without adult guidance and support, is raising concerns from suicide prevention experts about the potential risks posed by the sensationalized treatment of youth suicide. The series graphically depicts a suicide death and addresses in wrenching detail a number of difficult topics, such a bullying, rape, drunk driving, and slut shaming. The series also highlights the consequences of



teenagers witnessing assaults and bullying (i.e., bystanders) and not taking action to address the situation (e.g., not speaking out against the incident, not telling an adult about the incident).

Cautions

We do not recommend that vulnerable youth, especially those who have any degree of suicidal ideation, watch this series. Its powerful storytelling may lead impressionable viewers to romanticize the choices made by the characters and/or develop revenge fantasies. They may easily identify with the experiences portrayed and recognize both the intentional and unintentional effects on the central character. Unfortunately, adult characters in the show, including the second school counselor who inadequately addresses Hannah's pleas for help, do not inspire a sense of trust or ability to help. Hannah's parents are also unaware of the events that lead to her suicide death.

While many youth are resilient and capable of differentiating between a TV drama and real life, engaging in thoughtful conversations with them about the show is vital. Doing so presents an opportunity to help them process the issues addressed, consider the consequences of certain choices, and reinforce the message that suicide is not a solution to problems and that help is available. This is particularly important for adolescents who are isolated, struggling, or vulnerable to suggestive images and storylines. Research shows that exposure to another person's suicide, or to graphic or sensationalized accounts of death, can be one of the many risk factors that youth struggling with mental health conditions cite as a reason they contemplate or attempt suicide.

What the series does accurately convey is that there is no single cause of suicide. Indeed, there are likely as many different pathways to suicide as there are suicide deaths. However, the series does not emphasize that common among most suicide deaths is the presence of treatable mental illnesses. Suicide is not the simple consequence of stressors or coping challenges, but rather, it is most typically a combined result of treatable mental illnesses and overwhelming or intolerable stressors.

School psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals can assist stakeholders (e.g., school administrators, parents, and teachers) to engage in supportive conversations with students as well as provide resources and offer expertise in preventing harmful behaviors.

Guidance for Educators

1. While we do not recommend that all students view this series, it can be appreciated as an opportunity to better understand young people's experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Children and youth who view this series will need supportive adults to process it. Take this opportunity to both prevent the risk of harm and identify ongoing social and behavior problems in the school community that may need to be addressed.

2. Help students articulate their perceptions when viewing controversial content, such as *13 Reasons Why*. The difficult issues portrayed do occur in schools and communities, and it is important for adults to listen, take adolescents' concerns seriously, and be willing to offer to help.

3. Reinforce that school-employed mental health professionals are available to help. Emphasize that the behavior of the second counselor in the series is understood by virtually all school-employed mental health professionals as inappropriate. It is important that all school-employed mental health professionals receive training in suicide risk assessment.

4. Make sure parents, teachers, and students are aware of suicide risk warning signs. Always take warning signs seriously, and never promise to keep them secret. Establish a confidential reporting mechanism for students. Common signs include:

- Suicide threats, both direct ("I am going to kill myself." "I need life to stop.") and indirect ("I need it to stop." "I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up."). Threats can be verbal or written, and they are often found in online postings.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Preoccupation with death in conversation, writing, drawing, and social media.
- Changes in behavior, appearance/hygiene, thoughts, and/or feelings. This can include someone who is typically sad who suddenly becomes extremely happy.
- Emotional distress.

5. Students who feel suicidal are not likely to seek help directly; however, parents, school personnel, and peers can recognize the warning signs and take immediate action to keep the youth safe. When a student gives signs that they may be considering suicide, take the following actions:

- Remain calm, be nonjudgmental, and listen. Strive to understand the

intolerable emotional pain that has resulted in suicidal thoughts.

- Avoid statements that might be perceived as minimizing the student's emotional pain (e.g., "You need to move on." or "You should get over it.").
- Ask the student directly if they are thinking about suicide (i.e., "Are you thinking of suicide?").
- Focus on your concern for their well-being and avoid being accusatory.
- Reassure the student that there is help and they will not feel like this forever.
- Provide constant supervision. Do not leave the student alone.
- Without putting yourself in danger, remove means for self-harm, including any weapons the person might find.
- Get help. Never agree to keep a student's suicidal thoughts a secret. Instead, school staff should take the student to a school-employed mental health professional. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources. Students should tell an appropriate caregiving adult, such as a school psychologist, administrator, parent, or teacher.

6. School or district officials should determine how to handle memorials after a student has died. Promote memorials that benefit others (e.g., donations for a suicide prevention program) and activities that foster a sense of hope and encourage positive action. The memorial should not glorify, highlight, or accentuate the individual's death. It may lead to imitative behaviors or a suicide contagion (Brock et al., 2016).

7. Reinforcing resiliency factors can lessen the potential of risk factors that lead to suicidal ideation and behaviors. Once a child or adolescent is considered at risk, schools, families, and friends should work to build these factors in and around the youth.

- Family support and cohesion, including good communication.
- Peer support and close social networks.
- School and community connectedness.
- Cultural or religious beliefs that discourage suicide and promote healthy living.
- Adaptive coping and problem-solving skills, including conflict resolution.
- General life satisfaction, good self-esteem, and a sense of purpose.
- Easy access to effective medical and mental health resources.

8. Strive to ensure that all student spaces on campus are monitored and that the school environment is truly safe, supportive, and free of bullying.

9. If additional guidance is needed, ask for support from your building- or

district-level crisis team. The team may be able to assist with addressing unique situations affecting your building.

See [Preventing Suicide: Guidelines for Administrators and Crisis Teams](#) for additional guidance.

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) and the JED Foundation have created talking points for conversations with youth specific to the *13 Reasons Why* series, [available online](#).

Read these [helpful points](#) from [SAVE.org](#) and the JED Foundation to further understand how *13 Reasons Why* dramatizes situations and the realities of suicide. See [Save a Friend: Tips for Teens to Prevent Suicide](#) for additional information.

Additional Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text "START" to 741741
- [Center for Disease Control Suicide Datasheet](#)
- [SAMHSA Prevention Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center, After a Suicide: Toolkit for Schools](#)
- [Memorials: Special Considerations for Memorializing an Incident](#)

Websites

- National Association of School Psychologists, www.nasponline.org
- American Association of Suicidology, www.suicidology.org
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, www.save.org
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, <https://afsp.org/>
- www.stopbullying.gov
- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, www.rainn.org

Additional note: The entire article, including guidance for families and messaging for students is found here:

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/13-reasons-why-netflix-series-considerations-for-educators>



WSSCA Board member Dave Young of Kelmann Restoration in Wauwatosa, WI offers some excellent thoughts and advice for any of us who may go through a potentially devastating property catastrophe. I believe that there aren't many reading this article who have not gone through something like this, or at least have known those who have. ED

Preparing for Property Disasters

School officials can ask themselves the following: What would I do if I received a phone call tonight and was told that a water main had burst and one of my schools was completely flooded? Where would I turn if devastation would leave a school unexpectedly uninhabitable? Is your district prepared for that which is unimaginable? And, are you willing to put your trust in a complete stranger to choose an unknown contractor?

Forward-thinking managers understand that is prudent to have a fully vetted, high level, emergency service contractor, familiar the district's infrastructure as part of your strategic crisis plan.

Floods, fire damage, wind damage and vandalism occur each day in school districts throughout the country. Statistics say that there is a 21% chance that a building will have significant water event or flood in a 30-year time span. There is a 9% chance a fire of some sort will be experienced. Vandalism, of course, occurs even more often.



Understand, in a water event, time matters. The longer water impacts building materials, the less the chances are that those materials can be saved. In a fire, time matters. Emergency shore-up, securing and tarping can prevent additional damage. Pre-cleaning of certain items will allow them to be saved. Preparation is the key that the correct calls be made to save your

district countless thousands of dollars and troublesome down classroom time.

Many emergency service contractors now offer pre-planning agreements that situates your district in a much better position when the unthinkable occurs. Most of these programs offer service priority guarantees. Some agreements are free of charge, some are not. Many offer a walk through and the ability to store confidential information so, in the event of a disaster, your handpicked contractor is prepared to get your district back on its feet.

Your insurance carrier may or may not want to get involved. Consider that insurance is in place, not to mitigate and repair a claim, but to pay a fair amount for a covered loss. Some carriers may have agreements with national restoration franchises which they might refer. Other carriers may instruct you to simply call an 800 number after a devastating event. Either way, without some basic pre-planning on the districts part, you will most likely lose control of which contractor is selected. Understand that some larger restoration projects might take several months to complete. Remember also that the district is the customer and it is the districts determination as to who is hired.

Emergency teams helped numerous school districts which incurred disasters over the past year. Those districts which were members of an emergency response priority program knew what to do and how to respond when the disaster struck. Tens of thousands of dollars and weeks of down classroom time were saved.

It makes sense to prepare for that which is unthinkable. Reach out to a qualified emergency service restoration contractor and ask them about pre-planning for disaster. Know who to call in the middle of the night.

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WSSCA's 50th Anniversary
Conference and Expo

February 26 - 27, 2018

The 49th Conference is still fresh in our minds
and we are still gathering the evaluations, final
financial details and other follow-up data. The

49th was quite successful by all preliminary accounts and hard on the heels of that fine event, I encourage you to mark your calendar for next year's 50th Anniversary Conference and Expo.

Through the generosity of WSSCA Member and Friend, Dave Trudeau of TruArmor LLC, our keynote speaker will be Lt. Col. Dave Grossman. I know that Col. Grossman is well-known to many who are tasked with safety and security, and he is sure to be a big draw. I anticipate great interest in the 50th, and our Professional Development and Communication Committees will be working hard in planning for the 50th.



Quotes of the Month

“We need, ultimately, to be able to view mental health with the same clear-headedness we show when talking about physical health.” - Matt Haig, Novelist

“Mental health is measured though motivation to live; the more plans you have and the more significant they are, the more healthy you are.” - Mark Brightlife, Author.”

Borrowed Humor

I THINK WE MAY NEED TO
UPDATE OUR DISASTER RECOVERY PLAN.
THIS ONE SUGGESTS WE ALL RUN
AROUND IN CIRCLES SHOUTING
'WHAT DO WE DO???' 'WHAT DO WE DO???'



WARNING

**DUCT TAPE
MAY FAIL**

School Safety Certification

2017 Course Schedule

Modules	Course Titles	Dates	Location
1&6	Health and Safety Compliance Part A General Aspects of Crisis Management	October 25, 2017	Madison, WI

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