

Having been on the frontlines of both suicide prevention and postvention for the past four decades, I am pleased to offer some quick tips and comment on a great resource that all college administrators and counselors should have.

A postvention is an intervention conducted after a suicide, largely taking the form of support for the bereaved (family, friends, professionals and peers). For years, we've been reminding people that postvention is also prevention for the next generation. Postvention is the third of the three pillars of suicidology (prevention, intervention, postvention), and is a critical aspect that sometimes is not given its due after a suicide has been completed. It is even more critical when a few or several suicides take place in a short period of time, particularly on a college campus.

The practice of postvention activities and planning should encapsulate the following basic tenants:

- Nothing should be done to glamorize or dramatize the event, but doing nothing can be as dangerous as doing too much.
- Every college should have policies and procedures that address the needs of the students, administrators, faculty/staff and parents after a suicide.
- A planned response after a suicide can help with healing and reduce the risk of further suicide incidents.
- Postvention can be developed in three phases:
 - Immediate: Acute Phase
 - Coordinate (contain crisis)
 - Notify (protect/respect privacy rights)
 - Communicate (reduce potential for contagion)
 - Support (practical assistance to family/others).
 - Short Term: Recovery Phase
 - Link (identify and link people to support resources)
 - Comfort (support, comfort and promote healthy grieving)
 - Restore (restore equilibrium and optimal functioning)
 - Lead (build and sustain trust and confidence in organizational leadership).
 - Long Term: Reconstructing Phase
 - Honor (prepare for anniversary reactions and other milestone dates)
 - Sustain (transition postvention to suicide prevention).

Developing and implementing a postvention plan using these tips allows you to be prepared if a suicide touches your campus.

A great resource to help you get started is [Postvention: A Guide for Response to Suicide on College Campuses](#), a collaborative effort by the Higher Education Mental Health Alliance (HEMHA) and the American College Health Association (ACHA). Their work partnered with nine professional associations and the work of fourteen individuals to give colleges and universities a roadmap for postvention planning. Among the highlights are:

- Forming postvention committees that have interdisciplinary coordination.
- Coordination and protocol.
- Actual implementation.
- Use of clinical services.
- Planning memorials and related events.

The “wheel” need not be reinvented; the guidelines present a solid foundation for campuses to consider and include many references to best practices. As they note in their guide: *Every campus is different and every campus crisis or suicide is different and impacts the campus in a unique way. We have attempted in this guide to provide guidance that is general enough to be useful in the widest array of campus settings and circumstances while at the same time specific enough to provide direct and actionable help.*

So take a minute, go [here](#) and hit print.... Help turn postvention into prevention on your campus!

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