

RAPID RESPONSE PROTOCOL FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

In our current climate, with the evolving information that is shared frequently and world-wide, it creates a unique challenge. It is very important we are prepared, calm, and confident during this COVID-19 outbreak. The stressors associated with the pandemic have created a “perfect storm” for suicide risk. Not only is there an increase of people experiencing job loss, financial instability, and possibly homelessness, but the social distancing needed for health is keeping many away from wellness routines. The rise in stress and feelings of hopelessness can lead to an increased risk of suicidal thoughts, attempts and deaths.

Creating and building a community-based suicide crisis response is needed but can take time and dedication from a variety of partners. In addition to saving lives and easing the suffering of people in a suicide crisis, clear and consistent protocols can also be an effective way to minimize uncertainty and fear, raise community awareness and build capacity in addressing overall mental health and more specifically, suicide issues.

Objectives of a Suicide Prevention Rapid Response Team:

- To support, de-escalate and debrief those affected by suicidal ideation, a threat, or an attempt: and
- Reduce the possibility of other suicidal crises from ever taking place by increasing prevention education, referral for intervention, and provide postvention activities.

Team Composition and Duties: The Crisis Response Team should consist of 5 to 10 participants and include first responders (law enforcement, emergency medical personnel), behavior health workers, school representatives and community members. Within the team, identify a Team Lead and a backup Team Lead. The Team Lead is responsible for setting up meetings and calling team responders when needed (<https://www.responsecrisiscenter.org>, 2019).



In addition to responding to crises, team tasks may include:

- Contacting volunteers, stakeholders, and loved ones who may know the person experiencing a suicidal crisis.
- Developing suicide crisis response reporting and follow-up forms.
- Creating a flow chart of the response process specific to your community.
- Implementing a suicide surveillance instrument to track information and data received by responders.
- Training team members in necessary areas regarding their role on the team.
- Conducting suicidal crisis mock drills with your team to identify gaps and/or sustain proficiency.

Strategies to de-escalate an individual experiencing suicidal thoughts:

- Ask them how they were feeling before it happened and how they are feeling now.
- Try to be patient if they are angry or refuse to talk. If they won't talk to you, maybe they will talk to someone else.
- Listen to them non judgmentally, treat them with respect and try not to be critical.
- Provide empathy by showing that you care about them, and are trying to understand things from their point of view.
- Reassure them that desperate feelings are very common and can be overcome. Things can and do change, help can be found and there is hope for the future.
- Provide practical support and help them to cope with any extra pressures by creating a safety plan. It may not be possible to deal with all the things that are troubling them but assist them in agreeing on what they will do if a suicidal crisis happens again.

Strategies to provide individuals experiencing stress and suicidal thoughts:

- If you are feeling overwhelmed with sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others, call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 or text the National Crisis Text Line - TEXT "MOSAFE" to 741741.
- Be mindful of your intake of information from news sources and social media about the virus and consider taking breaks from it.
- Maintain social contact with supportive relationships like friends, family, or others, by phone, text, or internet.
- Treat your body kindly: eat healthy foods, avoid excessive alcohol, get quality sleep, and exercise as you are able.
- Call your health care provider if your stress or thoughts interfere with your daily activities.
- Learn about additional strategies to manage your stress for health.



Debriefing and Self-Care tips for Suicide Prevention Rapid Response team:

- Develop protocols to provide workers with stigma-free counseling so that workers can address the emotional aspects of their experience (CMHS, 2004).
- Provide educational in-services or workshops around stress management and self-care.
- Promote an atmosphere where attention to one's emotional state is acceptable and encouraged rather than stigmatized or disregarded.
- Create debriefing protocols after every crisis situation.

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To learn more about Missouri Suicide Prevention Network please follow us on Facebook, Twitter or scan the QR code → to be linked to our website- **MOSPN.org**

