

## School Personnel Training Legislation: Frequently Asked Questions

---

1. Why should youth suicide awareness and prevention training be required for teachers?
  - a. According to the latest (2014) data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth and young adults ages 10-24 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). As children and teens spend a significant amount of their young lives in school, the personnel that interact with them on a daily basis are in a prime position to recognize the signs of suicide and make the appropriate referrals for help. To be able to do this, they will need effective training to acquire the necessary skills and confidence to intervene with youth at-risk, and mandated training is one way to ensure that all school personnel have a baseline understanding of suicide risk and the referral process.
  - b. In a national survey conducted by The Jason Foundation, the number one person that a student would turn to for helping a friend who might be suicidal was a teacher. It is imperative that when a young person comes to a teacher for help, the teacher has the knowledge, training, tools and resources to respond.
  - c. Certain gatekeeper training models have demonstrated increases for participants in perceived knowledge about suicide (Cross et al., 2010; Keller et al., 2009; Reis & Cornell, 2008; Tompkins, Witt, & Abraibesh, 2010), confidence and belief in their own competence (Cross et al., 2010; Keller et al., 2009; Reis & Cornell, 2008; Wyman et al., 2008), likelihood that they would approach a student perceived to be at-risk (Tompkins, Witt, & Abraibesh, 2010; Wyman et al., 2008), and ability to ask directly about suicidality, to be persuasive about getting help, and to provide an appropriate referral (Cross et al., 2010). Research has shown that “Where the roles of gatekeepers are formalized and pathways to treatment are readily available...educating gatekeepers helps reduce suicidal behavior” (Mann et al., 2005).
2. How will this legislation work to combat youth suicide?
  - a. Suicide can be prevented. While some suicides occur without any outward warning, most people who are suicidal do give warnings. School personnel and others who have regular contact with youth can prevent youth suicides by learning to recognize the signs of someone at risk, taking those signs seriously and knowing how to respond to them.
  - b. Knowing what to look for (warning signs) and having a plan of action increases the chances that a young person will be referred to a mental health professional, increases the chances that the suicide attempt can be prevented, and possibly saves a young life.

3. What will it cost the states that choose to pass this legislation?
  - a. In some states, this legislation can be passed without a fiscal note attached, dependent on the existing resources in the state. In several states, local AFSP Chapters have been able to offer AFSP's More than Sad program at little to no cost to schools, and have been able to provide volunteers to facilitate the training during in-service or professional development days. Other states have chosen to use free online programs available, such as those available through the Jason Foundation. Each state will ultimately choose what program(s) will best fit their unique needs.
  - b. Some states require a fiscal note. If this is the case for your state, AFSP is committed to working with the legislature and Department of Education to ensure voluntary contributions of training resources that will lessen the financial burden.
4. Will my state have to use certain programs to fulfill the training requirements?
  - a. The legislation is purposely worded to allow flexibility to states to choose what training resources and programs fit best for them. The legislation does not require that any specific materials/programs be utilized for the training. Our goal is to have the teachers and school personnel trained on youth suicide awareness and prevention. Each state will choose and use the suicide awareness and prevention program(s) they feel best suits their needs and meets the requirements of the legislation.
5. Are teachers and school personnel in states that have passed this type of legislation held legally liable for their actions after training?
  - a. Federal law (Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, 42 U.S.C.A. §5106g) provides guidance to states by setting minimum standards for definitions of child abuse or neglect. Under individual state laws (that must meet those minimum Federal standards), educators are already required to report many of the signs of emotional distress that may indicate suicidal ideation under their duty to report signs of child abuse or neglect. This legislation will ensure that school personnel are better equipped to recognize these and other signs of suicide risk and refer youth to the appropriate resources and professionals for help.
  - b. Language that addresses these liability concerns has been incorporated into AFSP's Model Policy, and is based upon language from legislation passed in Alaska, Louisiana, and South Carolina:
    - “(a) No person shall have a cause of action for any loss or damage caused by any act or omission resulting from the implementation of the provisions of this Section or resulting from any training, or lack thereof, required by this Section.
    - (b) The training, or lack thereof, required by the provisions of this Section shall not be construed to impose any specific duty of care.”

## References

- Cross, W., Matthieu, M., Lezine, D., & Knox, K. (2010). Does a brief suicide prevention gatekeeper training program enhance observed skills? *Crisis, 31*(3), 149-159.
- Keller, D.P., Schut, L.J.A., Puddy, R.W., Williams, L., Stephens, R.L., & McKeon, R. et al. (2009). Tennessee Lives Count: Statewide gatekeeper training for youth suicide prevention. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 40*(2), 126-133.
- Mann, J.J., Apter, A., & Bertolote, J. et al. (2005). Suicide prevention strategies: A systematic review. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 294*(16), 2064-2074.
- Reis, C. & Cornell, D. (2008). An evaluation of suicide gatekeeper training for school counselors and teachers. *Professional School Counseling, 11*(6), 386-394.
- Tompkins, T.L., Witt, J., & Abraibesh, N. (2010). Does a gatekeeper suicide prevention program work in a school setting? Evaluating training outcome and moderators of effectiveness. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 40*(5), 506-515.
- Wyman, P.A., Brown, C.H., Inman, J., Cross, W., Schmeelk-Cone, K., Guo, J. et al. (2008). Randomized trial of a gatekeeper program for suicide prevention: 1-year impact on secondary school staff. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 76*(1), 104-115.