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TEXAS
Health and Human Services

Connection to Hope: A Suicide Prevention Newsletter

OMHC - Office of Mental Health Coordination



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Suicide Care in Texas

Suicide Care in Juvenile Justice Settings Learning Collaborative

In 2023, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) was awarded grant funding to adapt the Zero Suicide framework for application within the county-level Texas juvenile justice system. This effort is being implemented in partnership with the Texas Juvenile Justice Department and the University of Texas at Austin's Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health. Funding is being used to develop a technical assistance toolkit and to operate a learning collaborative for county-level teams of mental health and juvenile justice professionals.

The Suicide Care in Juvenile Justice Settings Learning Collaborative began in November 2023 to increase awareness of Zero Suicide values and elements, to assist teams in developing plans for implementation of the Zero Suicide framework, and to help teams initiate changes in policy or practice to promote suicide safer care when serving adolescents who are justice-involved.

Key components of the learning collaborative include training and education, discussion of evidence-based suicide-specific screening tools, and best practice treatments and interventions for youth at risk of suicide. The emphasis on collaboration and knowledge sharing across different behavioral health care sectors has proven to be a strength of this collaborative. Through learning sessions, the participants have had the opportunity to share experiences, discuss challenges, and

develop innovative approaches to suicide prevention and intervention within their youth-serving agencies.

Several county teams applied to be a part of this learning collaborative. We would like to recognize the following county teams for their commitment and participation in The Suicide Care in Texas Juvenile Justice Setting Learning Collaborative:

- Anderson and Cherokee counties
- Bell County
- Denton County
- Ector County
- Fort Bend County
- Guadalupe County
- Hays County
- Howard County
- Hutchinson County
- Jefferson and Jasper counties
- Randall County

Postvention

Postvention Suicide Strategies in Schools

The HHSC State Suicide Prevention Team hosted a workshop on May 3, 2024 by Dr. Jonathan B. Singer, PhD, LCSW, one of the authors of *Suicide in Schools: A Practitioner's Guide to Multi-level Prevention, Assessment, Intervention and Postvention*. The second edition of this book was published in 2023 and provides school-based professionals "with clear step-by-step guidelines on how to work proactively with school personnel and community professionals; how to screen, assess, and monitor suicide risk; create collaborative safety plans; and plan for reentry after a suicidal crisis…this new edition [has] detailed case examples and innovative approaches such as upstream prevention strategies, usable handouts, and internet resources to effectively work with youth facing a suicidal crisis as well as students, families, and school staff who have suffered a suicide loss."

The book also includes insights gleaned from the COVID-19 pandemic, a review of the most up-to-date data on youth suicide morbidity by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a new chapter dedicated to technology, the importance of self-care during all phases of suicide prevention, summaries of current legal cases, and updated risk assessment and monitoring.



Dr. Singer is a Professor of Social Work at Loyola University Chicago, Past-President of the American Association of Suicidology, and host of the award-winning Social Work Podcast, for which he was named in 2023 a Social Work Pioneer by the National Association of Social Workers. He serves on national advisory boards for the Jed Foundation, Suicide Prevention Resource Center, and the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

This workshop was made possible in collaboration with the Texas Education Agency's Project Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education consortium grant.

Self-Care

The Healing Power of Pets

Pets are more than just companions; they are lifelines in the battle against mental health struggles. Research increasingly shows that the bond between people and their pets significantly aids in suicide prevention. Pets can offer unwavering companionship, countering feelings of loneliness and isolation by providing comfort and love. Their presence soothes troubled minds and creates a safe space. Interacting with pets also lowers stress levels and boosts feelings of bonding and relaxation. Caring for pets encourages a sense of routine and purpose. Activities like walks and playtime not only benefit our physical health, but they also release mood-enhancing endorphins and can ease symptoms of depression and anxiety. Pets offer a profound sense of connection and belonging, acting as stable sources of comfort during emotional distress. They may also facilitate social interaction, fostering community among pet owners. Pets are more than just furry companions; they are pillars of strength in the fight for mental wellness. Let us recognize and cherish the invaluable role our pets play in enriching our lives, offering unwavering support, and contributing to suicide prevention. Learn more at the American Psychiatric Association.

Call to Action

2024 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

On April 23, 2024, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released the 2024 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and the Federal Action Plan. This is the first update to the National Strategy, originally published in 2012. The strategy incorporates advances in suicide prevention research and is designed to guide, motivate, and promote a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention. For the first time, the release of the national strategy is accompanied by a federal action plan which outlines over 200 actions to be taken by the federal government in support of the strategy. Learn more about how your agency can support the national strategy by downloading it here.[2024 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention | HHS.gov](HHS.gov).

Upcoming Events

Long-Term Survivors of Suicide Loss Summit



The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is hosting a Long-Term Survivors of Suicide Loss Summit in Austin, Texas this summer. This conference is best suited for long-term loss survivors who have found ways to integrate the experience of losing a loved one to suicide into their lives. Presentations focus on the needs of long-term survivors through a variety of mediums. To register or to learn more, visit:

https://whova.com/portal/registration/lsosl_202405/

Texas Suicide Prevention Symposium and LOSS Team Conference

Save the date! The 2024 Texas Suicide Prevention Symposium and Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors (LOSS) Team Conference will be in Mesquite, Texas from September 18-19, 2024. Registration information will be distributed by the Texas Suicide Prevention Collaborative. Visit their website for more information.

Share Your Success Story

The HHSC State Suicide Prevention Team would like to recognize you! If you have a suicide prevention program, success story, or event you would like to share with others, please email suicide.prevention@hhs.texas.gov to have it featured in the next edition of the newsletter.