



suicide postvention

GUIDELINES

A framework to assist staff in supporting their school communities in responding to suspected, attempted or completed suicide



Government of South Australia

Department of Education and
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This document is designed to assist schools in responding to the tragic occurrence of completed, attempted or suspected suicide within their student community, a process known as postvention. It aims to support communities in grief and to guide schools in recognising and responding to the risk of suicide contagion. Important to achieving both these purposes is the requirement for sensitive sharing of information across government and non government schools, between mental health agencies and schools and between families and schools.

These guidelines form part of a set of child protection related policies that have been developed collaboratively by the Department of Education and Children's Services, Catholic Education South Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia. The government and non government school sectors are committed to promoting consistent child protection standards across all South Australian schools.

This document should be seen as a resource which complements schools' efforts to promote mental health and supports their critical incident management processes.



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In the past, suicide was sometimes treated as a taboo subject. Today, we have a much better understanding of the connections between mental health and suicide and we appreciate that some level of openness about suicide is necessary for the protection and promotion of wellbeing in young people.

A student's attempted, completed or suspected suicide is, in itself, a traumatic event for a school community. However, it can also contribute to an increased risk of suicide in other vulnerable students and members of the student's family. International research has identified the phenomenon of suicide "contagion" where a vulnerable person's knowledge of, or exposure to, a suicide increases the likelihood of them viewing suicide as an option. For this reason, suicide postvention represents a rare but essential component of a school's contribution to suicide prevention. Identifying, referring and supporting vulnerable students are tasks that all schools undertake as part of their normal health promoting practice. After a student suicide or attempted suicide, this work is intensified and becomes a significant focus of a school's long term postvention work.

Containing the spread of information about an attempted or completed suicide is almost impossible given that young people can communicate with each other instantly and globally. It is also counterproductive to stop young people from sharing their feelings about such a profound event. Therefore, the best way for schools to manage the impact of suicide on young people is to take as much control as possible over what and how information is shared between students, parents and staff. This process partly relies on a degree of understanding and cooperation from the bereaved or affected family which, in rare cases, may not exist either initially or later. These guidelines outline the tension schools may need to manage in respecting the wishes of family and at the same time meeting their duty of care to others. Staying connected with the bereaved/affected family will help the school be aware of the family's wishes and, over time, will provide an opportunity to share the school's aims in supporting other students.

While schools should respect a family's wishes in the way they refer to a young person's death or attempted suicide, they must also take action in communicating with, supporting and monitoring the rest of the school community. Inaction is not an option.

"Schools need to have emergency plans on how to inform school staff, especially teachers, and also fellow pupils and parents, when suicide has been attempted or committed ... The aim being to prevent a cluster of suicides ... A suicide cluster ... may involve not just children or adolescents who know one another: even young people who are far removed from or entirely unknown to suicide victims may identify with their behaviour ... Schoolmates, school staff and parents should be properly informed about a student's suicide or attempted suicide and the distress caused by such an act should be worked through."¹

¹ *Preventing suicide. A resource for teachers and other school staff*
World Health Organization
Geneva 2000
(WHO/MNH/MBD/00.3, pp 15, 16)

How to use these guidelines

These guidelines provide a checklist of the immediate and longer term steps that should be taken in responding to completed, attempted or suspected suicide (see following page). Some of the information is clearly relevant to completed suicides only.

The checklist is followed by five sections containing detailed advice on why and how these steps should be taken within the particular time frames. Sample letters and handouts for use with parents, staff and students are provided in Section F.

The guidelines must be read in sequence and in their entirety. This is not a document that can be used partially. It is essential that leaders and their emergency response teams re-familiarise themselves with all the information in the guidelines as soon as they are aware of a suicide or attempt.

Support for these guidelines

School structures

- Information or policies that outline the school's support structures for vulnerable students and its health promoting programs and practices.
- An identified emergency response team (ERT) and emergency response plan.
- Emergency school contact details made available to parents (for example on the school's recorded phone message and website).
- A process for the reporting of suicide related information to the relevant sector office within 24 hours.

Sector structures

- Systems that provide immediate advice and ongoing assistance for school communities in their management of critical incidents.
- Processes by which suicide related information can be shared with other school sectors.

Agreement between the education sectors

- To collaborate on child protection related policies and practices and to share information about risks to students' safety.

Understanding between mental health providers and schools

- To share information that will assist the school, family and mental health worker to provide the best possible coordinated support to identified young people, as well as contributing to the protection of other students.

A IMMEDIATE RESPONSE (see Section A)

- Ensure the immediate safety of community members if an on-site event (eg providing first aid, lock down procedures, ambulance, police, quarantining areas or substances)
- If not a site based event, find out the facts/circumstances as far as possible. Do not ignore rumours—investigate immediately. Confirm facts with the family and/or police
- Ensure that affected students/parents/staff are not left alone

B FIRST 24 HOURS (see Section B)

- Inform relevant sector office
- Convene emergency response team and plan the following steps
- Make contact with relevant mental health agency
- Consider aspects specific to attempted suicide
- Identify and plan support for students who are at risk
- Set up a support room in the school
- Inform staff and provide script and advice documents which **do not describe method of suicide**
- Inform students via a prepared script, in small groups, not a whole school assembly
- Inform the wider community via prepared letter
- Contact the media liaison advisor in your sector's central office (see p 9). **Refer all media enquiries to that office**

C 48–72 HOURS AFTER THE INCIDENT (see Section C)

- Restore school to regular routine
- Liaise with bereaved/affected family
- Plan school involvement with funeral
- Advise staff of all relevant actions and seek their feedback/observations during debriefs which should occur regularly over the first few days
- Monitor students and begin assessment of identified students in collaboration with mental health agency
- Monitor staff wellbeing
- Keep parents informed via notices
- Collect all deceased student belongings for the police and family
- Continue documentation of all actions

D DURING THE FIRST MONTH (see Section D)

- Monitor staff and student wellbeing
- Plan for school events of relevance (year book photographs, award nights)
- Gather relevant information from staff relevant for a critical incident review
- Conduct a critical incident review
- Consider offering information sessions for parent community with mental health agency
- Continue documentation of all actions

E IN THE LONGER TERM (see Section E)

- Continue support and monitoring of students and staff
- Keep parents, staff and students informed
- Plan for anniversaries, birthdays and significant events
- Implement recommendations from the critical incident review
- Include the postvention plan when inducting new staff

F SAMPLE DOCUMENTS

If a school based event, ensure the immediate safety of community members

- Ensure no other students or staff are in immediate danger.
- Administer First Aid as necessary following basic casualty care practices (avoid contact with blood or other body fluids by using protective gloves).
- Call Emergency Services 000, or 112 if using a mobile, for medical advice, ambulance/police support.
- Alert emergency response team for assistance.
- If the student is physically unharmed, call the Emergency Mental Health Nurse at the Women's and Children's Hospital (08) 8161 7000 for advice.
- Move witnesses to pre-established safe locations where they must be supported and supervised by staff/counsellors until police have taken statements or advised other actions.
- Isolate the site from student or unauthorised staff access by using screens, blocking corridors, using invacuation procedures etc. Do everything possible to protect others from viewing the site without disturbing the area that the police will need to inspect. Do not remove or disturb items from the site until police have concluded their work and advised that the area is no longer a secured area.
- Depending on the means of the attempted or completed suicide, begin consideration of whether changes to the environment or access to materials is necessary.

If not a school based event, find out the facts

- Do not ignore student, parent or staff "rumours" about suicide. Do not ignore suicide notes/emails/messages sent to staff by students. Immediate follow up should occur in both these situations.
- If, after following up on notes or rumours, a student is found safe in the school, organise a counsellor to meet with them straight away to assess their wellbeing and the background to the suicide concern. In most cases it will be essential to share this information with the student's parents and refer the young person to a mental health provider if one is not already involved.
- If the student cannot be located at school, make contact with the family immediately. If parents are unaware of the student's whereabouts and safety, contact police.
- Suicide reports made by people other than direct family members should be verified through the police, hospital staff or, with extreme sensitivity, the family.

If a suicide report is made or confirmed by the family

It is appropriate to seek the family's feelings straight away about informing the school community of the attempted or completed suicide. If the family asks for advice it is appropriate to talk about:

- these guidelines for government and non government schools
- the damaging impact of misinformation
- the importance of parents being made aware of how best to support their own children's grief
- the option of only naming their son/daughter to their peer group and referring anonymously to the suicide or attempt with the rest of the school population.

Ensure that affected students, parents and staff are not left alone

Exposure to suicide or attempted suicide is a traumatic experience. Staff, students and parents immediately affected by a suicide or attempted suicide should not be left alone but should be comforted and supported by others until family members can take over that care. Safe and secure environments where this kind of crisis support can be provided to staff and students should be identified in the school's emergency response plan.

Inform relevant sector office

Youth suicides or attempted suicides can increase the risk of harm to family members as well as other vulnerable young people. International research confirms the risk of suicide “contagion”, where a vulnerable person’s knowledge of, or exposure to, a suicide increases the likelihood of them viewing suicide as an option. Based on this phenomenon it is important that schools are alerted firstly to any immediate connections between a deceased student and members of their own school community and secondly to the possible influence of suicide information being exchanged across their student population. Given the instant and global communication networks that young people utilise, schools need as much advance warning as possible so that sensitive enquiries can be made between schools and extra monitoring can be put in place for identified vulnerable students.

1. School informs their sector office

Catholic Education Office:

Director or Assistant Directors: (08) 8301 6600
CEO Principal Consultants Direct: (08) 8301 6885

Department of Education and Children’s Services:

Relevant Regional Director (Director ensures School Care is notified on the 24 hrs number: (08) 8463 6564, followed by the Critical Incident Form. School Care forwards information to Offices of Chief Executive and Minister)

Association of Independent Schools SA:

Executive Director or Assistant Director Human Resources has responsibility for informing principals (08) 8179 1400

2. Sector offices inform each other

The sector in which the incident occurs takes responsibility to inform the other two sectors via the contacts above

3. Sector offices inform their school leaders

Catholic Education Office:

Director, Assistant Director or Principal Consultant will advise schools

Department of Education and Children’s Services:

School Care will advise relevant schools once notice is received from Regional Director

Association of Independent Schools SA:

Executive Director or Assistant Director Human Resources will advise schools

Convene emergency response team (ERT)

The emergency response team is a previously identified group of staff who will lead the school's response to emergencies. New members can be added as necessary from within and outside the school and, in the case of suicides or attempted suicides, a mental health professional is an obvious example.

The team should have a nominated leader and be updated annually. After a suicide or attempted suicide many actions need to be coordinated in a very short space of time. However, unlike other kinds of emergencies, suicide postvention also needs to be sustained for a period of many months. A team is essential to ensure that:

- the wellbeing of all members of the school community is monitored and protected
- all responsibilities are undertaken efficiently
- accurate and consistent advice is provided to students, staff and parents
- no single member of staff assumes the full burden of responsibility.

Once the immediate safety needs of staff and students have been met, the ERT must meet to establish the school's postvention plan by delegating the following responsibilities.

Responsibilities list

- Liaising with family (see Introduction and advice in all sections A to F)
- Identifying vulnerable students, staff and close friends for personal contact and follow up
- Preparing written information for students, staff and parents
- Liaising with mental health professionals
- Liaising with police and protecting student belongings (secure student's locker)
- Liaising with sector support staff
- Managing all incoming and outgoing information (including sympathy cards, newspaper notices, etc)
- Managing media contact
- Documenting all actions
- Making appropriate environmental changes if the suicide or attempt occurred at school (eg barring access to a roof top, locking away certain materials such as ropes or poisons)

All members of the ERT should have their own copy of the guidelines. Generally, it will be necessary for the ERT to meet daily for the first week following the event, and consistency in sticking to delegated roles is critical.

The school's postvention work will be helped if the following processes are followed:

- ERT members do not act alone but channel all information through the leader
- everyone is kept informed of the ERT's work, knowing *who* they need to speak to and about *what*.

Make contact with relevant mental health agency

Having the immediate support of mental health professionals is invaluable in assisting a school to manage its postvention responsibilities. For this reason it is sensible to invite a mental health representative to be a part of the ERT for a period of time appropriate to the circumstances. This will assist the longer term negotiation between the school and the mental health agency about the level of support requested.

The involvement of mental health professionals means the school can share some of the work of meeting its community's needs and ensures expert advice is available to guide its actions. This is both a physical and psychological support for the whole school community.

Mental health professionals will be able to work alongside the school in the following key areas:

- planning support for a student who has attempted suicide
- helping meet the immediate counselling needs of affected students
- identifying other vulnerable young people
- screening young people at risk
- taking referrals from families and staff
- providing information sessions as required for parents, staff and students
- planning the management of significant occasions such as funerals, anniversaries, etc
- liaising with hospital personnel and the media where relevant.

Postvention collaboration between schools and mental health professionals is greatly enhanced when there is a relationship or partnership already established.

Features of a partnership

Schools ensure mental health professionals are:

- included in regional counsellor network meetings
- consulted/involved in mental health related professional development in the school/region
- consulted on the management of individual students identified as being at risk
- kept informed of any significant changes in students who are clients of the mental health service.

Mental health professionals ensure key school staff are:

- included in discussions about protective management of high risk clients
- notified when high risk clients discontinue with the service.

Mental health professionals encourage parents and clients to:

- consent to information sharing with key school staff as a routine component of support planning
- understand that their wishes may be overridden if the client is seen to be in immediate critical danger.

Considerations specific to attempted suicide

This page is not a summary of what a school needs to do in the event of an attempted suicide. The advice provided here is to alert schools to some immediate considerations that are specific to an attempted suicide. The rest of these guidelines must be followed. It is assumed that by now the sector office has been contacted, the ERT has been convened and the mental health agency has been contacted.

Communication with staff, students and the community

If the school is informed of an attempted suicide that took place away from the school or the attempt occurred without other students being aware, there is a small possibility that the spread of information may be contained. If complete containment of information is a real possibility it should be discussed with the family as soon as possible. In such circumstances any communication with staff, students and parents will be on a “need to know” basis only. The student, the mental health professional, the family and the school representative must determine who will be included in a “need to know” group. The major consideration in this exercise is how many individuals need to be informed in order to keep the student safe and supported in the school environment.

Complete containment is likely to be a very rare situation and the ERT will need to have a secondary plan to follow if information about the suicide attempt begins to circulate across the school community.

If details of the attempted suicide are already known in the school population then all the advice that follows regarding communication within the school community should be carefully considered. Schools should seek advice from their sector office if they are unsure about their communication responsibilities.

Liaison with the family

Critical areas for sensitive discussion with the family are:

- what information is provided to which sections of the school community
- the support plan for their son/daughter’s return to school
- the support for any siblings in the school
- liaison with the mental health professional.

Liaison with the mental health professional

An ERT member must take responsibility for liaising with the mental health professionals who were, are or will be supporting the student who has attempted suicide. The mental health professional on the ERT can greatly assist in this process of liaison.

It is essential that a support plan is developed and agreed to by an identified staff member (usually the counsellor), the student, the family and the mental health professionals before the student returns to school.

Identification of and support for other vulnerable students

Schools must not underestimate the impact of an attempted suicide on other students. All of the advice that follows in these guidelines regarding support for and monitoring of identified and vulnerable students is just as important in the case of attempted suicide as it is with completed suicide.

Identify and plan support for students at risk

The most important aim of postvention is to help limit and prevent harm to others. A crucial responsibility for schools is to ensure their processes of identifying, supporting, referring and monitoring vulnerable students are well understood and effective. More advice is provided on this in Section C.

In the first 24 hours it is important that:

- the closest friends of the student who has completed or attempted suicide (and any other identified vulnerable students) are informed personally by appropriate staff and provided with immediate support and information about where they can receive continuing assistance at school
- the affected students' cooperation is sought in not spreading sensitive information about the student and in following the protocols for leaving the school grounds
- direct contact is made with the parents of these students and any others about whom staff have serious concerns so that support at home can be planned
- direct contact is made with the principals of schools attended by siblings or known close friends to ensure awareness.

Set up a support room for students

The value of a support room is that it provides a safe, supervised location where students' grief and needs can be expressed, responded to and monitored. While a support room would normally be established following a student death, it may be the case that a very public suicide attempt also warrants the provision of a support room. An appropriate staff member such as a counsellor or a mental health provider must supervise the room at all times and, following normal protective practices, the room's door should be left ajar rather than shut. The support room should provide where possible, protection from noise, bright light or high student traffic and an ongoing record (sign in sheet) of the students who have accessed the room.

Allow distressed students access to this room for several days after the incident. Monitor student movement to and from the support room to ensure they return to class, are collected by parents or return to the company of supportive friends if during recess or lunch.

Inform staff (as soon as possible after the ERT has met)

Brief staff about:

- the facts of the situation including any parent wishes about what information they want to be shared/withheld. If a death is not confirmed as suicide and/or parents have asked that the term suicide is not used, then refer to it as a student “death” at this stage
- **following up immediately all unauthorised/unexplained student absences**
- the members of the ERT and their roles, particularly identifying the staff member to whom people should convey any new or relevant information they receive
- the response plan for the day, in particular changes to responsibilities or routines such as more staff on yard duty and interim measures to track movement
- how phone enquiries are to be managed
- the importance of **not asking students for information relating to the attempted or completed suicide** but passing on what they are told or observe
- forwarding items of student work to a nominated ERT member (art work, assignments journals etc)—these will be held for police and family
- the principles of postvention—to prevent further harm to others by identifying people at risk and by managing the school's responses so that attempted or completed suicide is neither glamorised nor made secret (see p 5 on attempted suicide for a rare exception to this)
- contact to be made with staff who were absent at that time or who are on leave.

Display relevant information about roles and special procedures in the staff room and ensure all adults who will have contact with students in the following 24 hours are briefed—regular bus drivers, sports coaches, canteen staff, school support staff, Out of School Hours Care staff, tutors etc.

Provide staff with:

- a script to follow in informing students (sample provided in Section F)
- information on how to offer support, how to manage discussion about suicide, signs to watch out for and information on grief (samples and links provided in Section F)
- sources of support they can access for themselves (see below) and the option of not being involved in supporting students or reading the statement if they feel this will risk their own wellbeing.

Ideally, individual staff members will have been spoken to ahead of the meeting if they are considered to be particularly vulnerable for any reason. However, it is important to encourage **all** staff to access support or respite whenever they need it.

Ask staff about:

- which students they consider will need particular support and which students are of concern
- what they know that may be relevant—connections with other students, particular events that need to be monitored or changed, possessions of the deceased student that need to be collected for the family, etc.

All staff briefings in the postvention period should be used to both convey and seek information. This contributes to a sense of collegiality and shared responsibility which helps protect the wellbeing of staff.

Counselling services for staff

CESA/AISSA: ACCESS—Confidential counselling 1300 667 700

DECS: Davcorp Employee Assistance Program—Confidential counselling 1300 360 364

Inform students

(do not provide details of the method of suicide or attempted suicide)

If a completed suicide

Friends closest to the student

Ideally, these students will have been spoken to individually, or in small groups, by a counsellor or a staff member. Depending on their responses they should be offered the opportunity to use the support room or arrangements should be made for them to be collected by their parents. No students affected by the news should be allowed to leave the school unaccompanied, unless by direct arrangement with parents.

Students in the same year level

A modified statement (see sample in Section F) should be provided to students in the same year level in recognition of their closer association with the student, their anticipated desire for more information and a different need for support.

Students in the same class as a sibling

This group will need to be given additional assistance in understanding how to support their classmate once they return to school. It may be appropriate to have the counsellor or mental health professional speak to this group as well as the class teacher.

General population

The general student population should be informed as soon as possible via a statement prepared by the ERT (see samples in Section F). This is an important way to support those staff for whom the task of informing students is stressful. It also ensures that accurate and consistent information is provided to students as a way of countering the rumours and misinformation that inevitably arise in any crisis. This first statement should also promote the important notion of students looking out for each other.

The issue of naming the student will vary and schools should be sensitive to any parental requests regarding this. Student grapevines will eventually name a student, but in recognition of family feelings it may be more appropriate initially to name the student only to the students in the year level concerned or the class of a sibling.

Home or pastoral groups, class groups or year level groups are the preferred environments in which to inform students, assuming staff are comfortable to do so.

Whole school assemblies are not recommended because student reactions are more difficult to manage and it is harder to support individuals.

Information about professional support for students is provided on p 14.

If an attempted suicide

An ERT member must liaise with the family to ascertain their feelings about communication with the school community. Depending on the level of student awareness and where the attempt took place, the ERT will need to consider each of the student groups mentioned above. A sample script for students covering the situation of a very public suicide attempt at a school is provided in Section F. However, there are many possible scenarios in this situation and schools will need to consider carefully their responsibilities to protect the wellbeing of students as well as to respect the express wishes of the family.

Schools should utilise the support and advice within their sector in managing these situations as all options should be considered. For example, if there are conflicting needs between the broader student population and the family, it may be possible to provide appropriate, honest counselling and support for students without issuing any public written statements.

Inform the wider community (see sample letters in Section F)

Statements should not provide details of the method of suicide or attempted suicide.

Giving parents immediate and accurate information about the school's response to a suicide or attempted suicide protects the school in a number of ways. It:

- limits misinformation and distress to the parent population
- reduces the number of enquiries to be managed
- encourages actions and attitudes that complement the school's postvention plan
- helps parents to take supportive and protective action with their own children
- promotes communication with the school about wellbeing concerns
- engenders confidence in the school's capacity to return to a normal routine.

How widely the school community should be informed may differ depending on circumstances. However, because young people can be profoundly influenced and affected by suicide, schools have a very strong duty of care to inform parents so they can take supportive and protective actions with their own children.

A method of checking that parents have received notices should be considered.

Plan media liaison

The first action the nominated ERT member must take is to contact the media liaison officer within their own sector.
No comments have to be made, or should be made, to the media until advice is received. See contacts below.

- **Catholic Education SA: (08) 8210 8147 (Catholic Communications)**
- **Department of Education and Children's Services: (08) 8226 7904 (Media Liaison Officer)**
- **Association of Independent Schools SA: (08) 8179 1400 (Assistant Director Human Resources)**

Research indicates a potential link between inappropriate reporting of suicides and a subsequent increase in "imitative" suicides. Any media interest in a suicide has the potential to hinder a school's postvention work so careful planning to protect against this is essential. One member of the ERT should act as the link with the sector's media advisor as this will help accuracy and consistency of actions.

Appropriate media reporting	Inappropriate media reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Works closely with mental health authorities in presenting facts• Highlights alternatives to suicide• Includes discussion of depression and mental illness• Provides information about help lines and community resources• Publicises risk factors and warning signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives details of the method of suicide• Uses photographs or suicide notes• Suggests simplistic explanations for the suicide• Glorifies or sensationalises the person and their suicide

Restore school to regular routine

The use of the support room should reduce as time passes and schools will need to use their discretion as to when this is “closed” and normal counselling processes resume. As far as possible (and appropriate) school routines should return to normal after three days. The return to regular daily routines and activities is an important contribution to the recovery of all affected members in the school community.

Returning to normal routines does not mean that vigilance and awareness of student and staff wellbeing are lessened. This must continue for a number of months and longer for particular individuals.

Liaise with bereaved/affected family

The member of the ERT with this responsibility will have to use considerable discretion and sensitivity in managing this role. There will be great variation in the accessibility of the family during this time and their capacity or willingness to communicate. This will be influenced by many factors including:

- the relationship already established between the family and staff at the school
- the family’s cultural or religious practices in dealing with death or suicide
- the level of extended family or community support the family can draw on
- whether there are siblings attending the school.

Wherever possible, identify an extended family member or close family friend to act as a go-between if it is not possible to speak directly with the family. The main aims of this early liaison are to:

- offer the condolences of the whole school community, where appropriate
- extend the offer of all forms of support and liaison available in the school
- alert the family to anticipated or advised media contact
- determine the family’s wishes regarding school representation at a funeral/service
- meet the family’s wishes regarding support arrangements for any siblings attending the school
- plan support for a student’s return to school following a suicide attempt
- offer to keep them informed of relevant aspects of the school’s postvention plan and, if appropriate, issues that arise for students
- limit the number of times the family have to relay information about a traumatic event.

If the family do not wish the death to be referred to as a suicide or attempted suicide, keep them or their liaison person informed of the information being exchanged between students. If the family are made aware that attempted or completed suicide is being discussed by many students they may change their mind about confirming this aspect of the incident.

Continue to use opportunities to talk about:

- the advice in these guidelines (for government and non government schools)
- the damaging impact of misinformation
- the importance of parents being made aware of how best to support their own children particularly if attempted or completed suicide is being discussed within the peer group.

Coroner's Court Counselling Services

A counselling, information, and support service is provided by experienced social workers via the Coroner's Court Counselling Services. Family and friends are invited to use this service, either by telephone or by appointment in person. This service includes:

- initial grief and crisis counselling during the time immediately following the death
- counselling at key points following the death, for example when a finding is made
- in appropriate circumstances, assistance to view the body of the deceased
- provision of specific information about the coronial process
- help in preparing for inquests
- information about bereavement support groups
- information on helping children to understand death
- referral to longer term counselling and other resources
- community education about the State Coroner's Office and related matters.

These services are free of charge and any family member or friend may use them by phoning (08) 8204 0600 during office hours. The Coroner's Court website www.courts.sa.gov.au has many links to specific grief counselling services.

Plan school involvement with the funeral

In order to monitor and support students and staff, the school should know who attends the funeral and, if it occurs on a school day, students must have parental consent to attend.

Ideally, attendance at a funeral should be limited to only close friends and staff and only after the wishes of the family have been sought. Appropriate arrangements should be made to support and supervise students before and after the funeral especially if they have played a role in the proceedings, for example as a pall bearer or speaker.

Students and/or family members may wish to hold a memorial in the school. Generally memorials involving large numbers of students are not recommended. Schools are encouraged instead to use the support room (in the first few days) as a place where reflective activities can occur with small groups of students. Later, staff may use routine prayer or assembly opportunities to acknowledge the grief felt by family and friends, particularly at the time of the funeral or an anniversary. It is critical that these acknowledgements are delivered and managed in such a way as to ensure that death by suicide is not glamorising for the student population.

Advise staff of relevant actions

Regular debriefs are designed to help create calm and restore order. Keeping each other informed and sharing the postvention responsibilities is a way of protecting staff and student wellbeing and demonstrating that a situation is being managed.

Staff should be debriefed regularly over the first week. The ERT's relevant actions should be outlined and, at each meeting, staff should be invited to share any information, concerns or observations which they consider to be of importance. Debriefs should be held before, after or instead of normal staff meeting business. They should not become an agenda item of normal staff business.

The mental health representative on the ERT should attend some or all staff debriefs in the first week.

Regular topics for all staff debriefs

Students of concern

- Staff should be provided with a handout which describes what to look out for and respond to in student behaviour (see sample in section F).
- They should discuss this information and ask questions particularly of the mental health professional about interpretation etc.
- They should be directed to immediately pass on names of students about whom they are concerned to the ERT member delegated with this coordination.

Activities of concern

- Use staff to brainstorm all upcoming events or activities which might need to be altered or cancelled in view of the attempted or completed suicide. Staff should think about:
 - curriculum (eg projects, plays, research, novels that invite a focus on suicide)
 - excursions or camps which may now be seen as inappropriate or too difficult to manage safely
 - all the roles that a deceased student would have been playing in the near future (eg sporting, academic, community)
 - events where a deceased student would be expected to be honoured (this is not to decide how to manage the situation immediately, just to know what has to be planned).

Emergency response team actions

- What has been planned for funeral attendance, parent consent requirements etc
- The presence of additional personnel such as social workers from sector offices or mental health agency staff and their roles
- When staff can expect that a deceased student's name will be removed from the roll—this is easier for staff to cope with if it is anticipated rather than a surprise
- Media involvement
- Any new requirements (eg reporting absenteeism)
- Collecting information for the documentation process

Monitor students and refer for assessments with mental health agency

This work must occur in collaboration with a mental health agency. Ideally, a mental health professional will be on the ERT and will be helping with this work from the outset. School counsellors should be part of the team who undertake this area of responsibility.

In the first 24 hours, the closest friends and associates of the student and any students who witnessed the suicide or attempt will have been contacted and provided with immediate support.

The next steps are to identify other students of concern and to develop response and support plans.

1. Identify students who are immediately or already considered at risk

- Siblings of the student concerned/students with a history of suicide attempt
- Students who are or have been accessing mental health services for depression/suicide ideation/self harm
- Students known to be struggling with grief or trauma related to other deaths, accidents, catastrophes, family breakdown or emotional, physical or sexual abuse

2. Identify other young people who may be profoundly affected by the death or suicide attempt, using staff, student, parent and family networks

- Friends or boyfriends/girlfriends who attend other schools (best followed up by counsellor-to-counsellor)
- Friends/acquaintances who communicated with the student in some fashion in the last hours before the suicide or attempt took place
- Students who are expressing guilt about “messages” that they were given by the student but did not act on or share with an adult

3. Identify other students of concern via referrals from staff, students or parents

- Students and parents are encouraged to contact the school if they are worried about young people through the statements and notices provided by the school
- Staff will refer students based on the guidance provided at debrief meetings (see sample handout in Section F)

4. Develop response and support plans for all identified students, in collaboration with mental health professionals

- Contact with parents (unless it is believed that such contact will place the student at further risk)
- Contact with the young person
- Referral to a mental health professional for suicide risk screening, if appropriate
- A documented plan of the support to be provided to the student by the school, family and mental health agency

Only mental health professionals should assess students for suicide risk. School staff need to be caring listeners and observers. Their role is to refer rather than treat.

Monitor staff wellbeing

Staff wellbeing must be monitored and responded to at regular intervals. Teachers need to be encouraged to put their own wellbeing first and to ask for respite or a change of responsibilities if necessary. The school's return to a normal routine relies on a level of positive mental health in staff and this must be promoted and protected in transparent ways.

It is not uncommon for staff to experience levels of guilt about a student's completed or attempted suicide. In hindsight it is possible to read signs in a student's behaviours that were not seen at the time to be significant. Debriefs are an opportunity to acknowledge this and to encourage staff to talk with appropriate professionals about their feelings.

The ERT should be considering all avenues of sector and interagency support to assist the school in maintaining its normal routines. Additional social workers in the school can help manage the load placed on counsellors and ERT members in responding to parent, staff and student needs. All outside support personnel must be briefed on the school's emergency response plan and must follow it.

Keep parents informed via notices

Ensure that parents are advised of any significant events or changes to the school's routine relating to the attempted or completed suicide. In this early stage notices may address:

- funeral arrangements and consent requirements
- advice about the wellbeing of a student who attempted suicide
- changes to previously planned activities or excursions
- availability of additional counselling services in the school
- changes to attendance/sign in/sign out procedures, and planned building changes.

Protecting a deceased student's belongings for the police and family

The collection and protection of a student's belongings is an important act of respect for a grieving family and is critical to the work that police will undertake. It is vital that students don't unwittingly distress parents or compromise police work by taking their friend's belongings or distributing them to other friends. Any items can assume a precious status for family members or be significant to police/coronial work.

In the first instance, a staff member needs to secure, where possible by padlock, the deceased student's locker so that the contents remain intact. That staff member or the principal should advise the attending police that the student's items, including pieces of work forwarded by staff, have been safely secured and where the items can be located for inspection/collection as is required in the circumstances.

Once the items have been cleared for release by police, a staff member should empty the student's locker (when students have been dismissed) and keep its contents together with the student's other belongings. An inventory should be made of these items and they should be stored securely in the school until collected by the family.

Schools need to be prepared for the grief that parents will be experiencing. Collecting a student's belongings protects the family from having to move around the school, perhaps in a distressed state, looking for items or emptying a locker in the presence of other students. An empty locker space is a particularly distressing "symbol" of a student death for close friends so it is appropriate to forewarn them when this is going to happen.

Continue documentation of all actions

A member of the ERT has responsibility to document the school's postvention actions. There are a variety of formats that can be followed for documentation but the main purpose is to assist the school in:

- being able to provide organised details of its postvention actions if an authorised agency seeks it
- having information ready to assist with the critical incident review process.

Having documentation managed by an identified ERT member ensures actions are not “lost” and protects the school from the stress of receiving urgent information requests that can not be answered quickly and comprehensively. A sample documentation outline is provided in Section F.

Monitor staff and student wellbeing

This conscious and deliberate process should continue to be a focus for the ERT. The impact of a completed or attempted student suicide will continue for as long as there are students and staff in the school who were present at the time of the incident. In the first month, the ERT should be looking for obvious signs of staff or student distress and responding to them in the ways outlined in sections B and C and in partnership with mental health professionals.

The ERT may consider that the needs of staff and students and the impact on ERT members themselves warrants extra longer term support from their relevant sector office. The interim appointment of an additional, experienced school leader can provide invaluable support to a school managing suicide postvention. It can relieve school leaders from the day-to-day administrative responsibilities and allow them to devote their attention to specific postvention tasks.

The school should be aware that any other crises in the school community are likely to be felt more profoundly by those who have been affected by the attempted or completed suicide. If further deaths, attempts or accidents occur it should be anticipated that many staff and students will return to their earlier levels of grief and therefore require their earlier levels of support and monitoring.

Plan for school events of relevance

The ERT may need to make decisions about planned events or documents that would have involved or represented a deceased student. Examples are year books, graduation nights, and awards the student may already have been given. Schools can and should celebrate the young person's achievements in the normal way without fear that they are sensationalising the suicide. However, very careful liaison with the family should occur regarding their wishes and these should be respected.

Each school community will approach these decisions differently but cultural and family sensitivity and awareness must guide their decisions.

Gather relevant information from staff for a critical incident review

Before the ERT conducts a critical incident review it is wise to allow all staff an opportunity to contribute their views on how the school community has managed the postvention responsibilities and their perceptions of the prevailing school culture that preceded the attempted or completed suicide. The easiest way to collect candid staff opinion is to provide a written survey that can be completed anonymously if desired. A member of the ERT should collate the responses and provide them to all staff as well as those participating in the critical incident review.

Conduct a critical incident review

The purpose of a critical incident review is to ensure that ideas for improved emergency responses or school practices can be shared, considered and incorporated into school policy and planning. It is also an opportunity for the ERT to acknowledge the commitment and efforts of all members of the school community and the effectiveness of its actions. Participants in the review will vary but normally it will involve all members of the ERT and a facilitator from the relevant sector office. Before the review, the ERT must collect and provide to all participants:

- data from the staff survey (see previous paragraph)
- a summary of the documented actions to date
- a reflection guide (example in Section F).

Reviews are most effective when all participants:

- have had time to consider and reflect on the above material
- have organised their thoughts ahead of time
- can share their main ideas in a single uninterrupted response (ie one at a time)
- know their ideas will not be debated during the review
- believe that the review is an opportunity to refine and improve school processes and to acknowledge the achievements of the school community.

Using a reflection guide ensures all participants have an opportunity to contribute to the same topics at the review meeting. Participants can read pre-prepared notes if they wish. All contributions should be recorded, collated and used by the school leadership to determine agreed actions, persons responsible and processes for communicating the outcomes of the review with all members in the school community, including parents. An ERT may choose to use a facilitator for the review process.

Consider offering information sessions for the parent community

What parents need or want will vary hugely depending on the circumstances of an attempted or completed suicide. What is important is that the ERT continues to consider what parents may need. The following are examples of what schools have offered parents under varying circumstances:

- general parent information sessions on recognising signs of suicide risk, current research on building resilience, understanding grief and loss, supportive parenting etc
- year level based information sessions to address specific issues that may exist for that cohort of students (eg Year 12 students about to leave school or enter stressful exam periods)
- year level or general parent sessions to discuss the outcomes of the critical incident review
- information sessions for targeted parents of an identified group of at risk students.

Schools must use their mental health partners in running these sessions.

Continue documentation of all actions

The amount of documentation will ease over time but schools should expect to record postvention actions for a minimum period of 12 months.

Continue support and monitoring of students and staff

Students

The team of staff with direct responsibility to support students at risk will by now have an identified group of young people who will be receiving ongoing support and monitoring in partnership with mental health professionals and parents. The management of this group of students should be conducted as part of the school's ongoing and multi-layered systems of student support.

Specific attention should be given to identified students whose social support networks may change through:

- a holiday period
- an exam period
- leaving school (transition to work, further learning or a family move).

Similarly, identified students whose family support is likely to change (eg through divorce, separation) should also receive increased attention.

Close friends of a deceased student can put pressure on each other by insisting on a particular way of “remembering” their friend and forgetting that people manage grief in very different ways. Staff should not underestimate the damaging impact of these sorts of disagreements between students who are already very vulnerable. Staff can help these students by reinforcing at appropriate times that there is no right way to remember or grieve the loss of a friend and that they must be kind to each other and respect their differences.

Staff

At this stage the school leadership and ERT should consider again the need for additional personnel support in the school. This would apply particularly if the school was managing more than one critical event. It would also be at this stage that school leaders would be taking advice from their ERT about whether compassionate transfers or changed appointments should be offered to identified staff. Continued liaison with the relevant sector office is important in helping to quickly facilitate this kind of support.

Keep parents, staff and students informed

The reasons for regular and relevant communication with parents, staff and students are just as important in the long term as they are in the short term. Advice about anniversaries involving the deceased student, media coverage, or any other forms of potential stress will continue to help protect the wellbeing of the school community and reinforce a consistent and supportive approach from the ERT. Keeping people in the dark about possible stressful events is not protective. It increases people's vulnerability and risk of harm.

People's desire to see something positive emerge from a tragedy like completed or attempted suicide is very strong. The results and recommendations of the critical incident review can help the community achieve some of this sense of moving forward.

Plan for anniversaries and significant events

As with deaths from any cause, the anniversary of a death or the birthday of someone deceased are occasions that can take friends and family members back to their original levels of mourning. Being aware of and prepared for this possibility is a significant long term postvention responsibility.

Students may wish to do something to recognise different anniversaries. Staff should try to ascertain if this is the case and assist with the arrangements wherever possible. These occasions are best handled in very small groups, with parent knowledge/consent and where an adult can be close by if not actually present. Year level or large group memorials are discouraged.

A limited group of staff, students and parents may also need to be kept informed of police processes, inquests and legal proceedings. These events have the potential to create high levels of stress and again schools need to be alert and responsive to people's needs.

Implement recommendations from the critical incident review

At this stage, schools should begin to plan and implement any recommendations that were agreed to as part of the critical incident review. Seeing the results of the critical incident review being implemented helps people appreciate the positive work that the school community has undertaken.

Include the postvention plan in staff induction

All new staff (teaching and non teaching) and volunteers to the school should be made aware of the school's postvention plan. In particular, teaching staff must be made familiar with relevant aspects of the school's support processes for identified students and be given very clear advice about the expectations of referral pathways. A member of the ERT should act as the nominated staff member to whom new staff can direct queries regarding the school's postvention work.

The postvention plan should include the scheduled ERT meetings to be convened over subsequent years until the population of students complete their schooling.

Memo/email from sector offices to school communities

Dear Principal

You and your school counsellors/senior leaders need to be aware that there may be some information circulating amongst students related to the (attempted) suicide today of a Year ... boy/girl in a north/south/east/west suburbs DECS/Catholic/Independent school. The connections between young people are widespread and rapid and there is the chance that this incident may affect your community in some way.

Please consider the possible impact of this on vulnerable students you are currently supporting.

If you need any further information, please contact ...

An ERT member must liaise with the family to ascertain their feelings about communication within the school community. Situations will vary and schools should seek support from their sector office about this important area of postvention responsibility.

Script for general student population

Today/yesterday the school was given the very sad news that on ... one of our year ... students died by suicide and all of us are thinking of his/her family and friends. Some students in our school, particularly his/her friends in Year ... will find this news very difficult to understand and accept. Other students—not just close friends—are also likely to be upset perhaps because it reminds them of another sad event in their own life. Because of this, a support room has been set up in ... for any students to go to if they feel they can't be in the classroom over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times. You need to get your teacher to fill out a movement slip if you wish to use the support room.

The school counsellors will be available in the normal way to see students and we may have some extra counsellors/ social workers in the school for a while. A notice is going home today to inform your parents about the death so they will understand if you want to talk with them today or sometime in the future. Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds, and if you are approached by anyone asking for information about this death please tell them they should speak with Ms/Mr ...

Be sensitive to people's feelings about this death, look out for each other and let a teacher or your parents know if you are worried about anything or anyone.

Script for students in the same year level

Today/yesterday the school was given the very sad news that on ... [name of student] died by suicide. This happened away from school/at his/her home. This will be a very difficult time for [name of student's] family and close friends and for all of us who knew him/her and for a while it will be difficult for some students to think about anything else. For this reason a support room has been set up in ... for any students to go to if they feel they can't be in the classroom over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk with if you want to. Otherwise it is a quiet place for you to retreat to if you need to. You need to get your teacher to fill out a movement slip if you wish to use the support room.

The school counsellors will be available in the normal way to see students and we may have some extra counsellors in the school for a while. A notice is going home today to inform your parents about the death so they will understand if you want to talk with them today or sometime in the future. Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds. If you are approached by anyone from outside the school asking for information about this death please tell them they should speak with Ms/Mr ...

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. This is a time to be especially sensitive to each other's feelings and to look out for each other. Let a teacher or your parents know if you or your friends are worried about anything or anyone.

The script below has been designed for the year level cohort of a student who attempted suicide at school with a small number of student witnesses. A similar notice for the other year levels in the school would not necessarily name the student and neither would the notice to parents. An ERT member must liaise with the family to ascertain their feelings about communication with the school community.

There are many possible scenarios in relation to attempted suicide and the school's ERT should seek support from their sector office about this very important aspect of the postvention responsibilities.

Script for students in the same year level (for an attempted suicide)

Today/yesterday the school was involved in supporting [name of student] who attempted suicide. This will be a very difficult time for [name of student], his/her family and close friends. You are being informed so that you can be sensitive to all these people's needs. [Name of student] is being well cared for at present and if you want information about him/her please do so via [name of staff member], rather than approach any of the family members for information.

The school counsellors will be available in the normal way to see students and you are encouraged to talk with them if you have any concerns you want to share. You are asked to contribute to the wellbeing of everyone involved by restricting your discussions about [name of student] to your close friends, your parents, staff or counsellors. We all want to make [name of student's] return to school as supportive as possible and being sensitive about the way you discuss this incident is the best way to support him/her. A notice is going home today to inform your parents so they will understand if you want to talk with them about this information.

Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds. We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. This is a time to be especially sensitive to others' feelings and to look out for each other. Let a teacher or your parents know if you or your friends are worried about anything or anyone.

Information to assist staff in talking with students following an attempted or completed suicide

Student reactions will range from confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt, sadness, curiosity and indifference. Teachers can expect tears or silence from some and excitement from others. Any students who appear to be in real distress should be accompanied to the support room or offered the opportunity to contact their parents to be collected.

Students must be allowed to talk about the incident

The first classes following the news should be conducted flexibly. Wherever possible, be guided by the students' need to talk, particularly if they are in the year level of the student concerned. The best way to do this is to set work for those who wish to resume normal lessons but allow others to speak quietly with each other or write in a journal, or simply sit and think. Where appropriate, provide students with the following ideas during any discussions in the days that follow:

- there are always solutions to problems and there are always people to help
- suicide takes away your chance to find solutions to problems
- problems are temporary, death is permanent
- people will help for as long as it takes to feel better
- no one is ever to blame when people attempt or complete suicide
- suicide is never about just one thing
- tell an adult if you're worried about yourself or a friend.

These messages are important to get out as early as possible as some students are likely to feel inappropriately guilty or responsible for their friend's actions.

What if they want to talk about the method of suicide?

It is natural for this area of interest to be in students' minds and it is highly likely the information will eventually get out via young people's networks. However, always gently stop discussion about this when it occurs. If students find this difficult to accept, try to help them understand through the following ideas:

- discussing this very personal and upsetting aspect of a death is disrespectful to the feelings of the family and close friends
- discussion is likely to spread inaccuracies that may be harmful to others
- relatives and friends will want people to remember the good things about a young person's life
- discussing these details can be very distressing and harmful to other young people even if they do not know the student.

Remind students that counsellors are available to talk with them in more detail and that some discussions are better held in a more private environment.

Don't be judgemental, criticise, blame, do most of the talking, make promises or deviate from facts.

Do allow and accept expression of feeling, including your own.

Information to help staff identify students for referral

The following checklist is to remind staff of the kinds of behaviours that should result in a referral to the counsellor/mental health professional. It is important to remember that this work is about getting professional support to the small minority of students in the school who need it.

“Referral” means a staff member talking with the counsellor or mental health professional about their concerns—it does not mean telling or sending a student to see a counsellor without prior discussion.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in academic performance 	Unexplained significant drop in subject performance, unexplained absences, loss of interest and commitment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in relationships with others 	Friendships are lost or broken, sport or other extra curricular commitments are dropped, chooses to be alone, engages in high risk behaviours with cars/drugs/alcohol/weapons, misconduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in mood 	Demonstrates intense unhappiness, hopelessness, increased anger, irritability, tearfulness, emotional instability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grieving a significant loss 	Death of a significant person through illness/accident/suicide, family break up, relationship break up
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing ideas of suicide/depression 	Novel/film/video choice, personal writing, art work, conversation has a focus on suicide, death and depression Makes statements suggesting they have imagined being dead and the impact this will have on others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical changes 	Headaches, extreme weight gain or loss, fatigue/exhaustion, sleeplessness, changes to hygiene and self care standards

Up to date fact sheets on suicide related grief and loss can be downloaded from:
www.grieflink.asn.au

Catholic Education SA parent letter

Consent must be obtained from the family if a student will be named.

Dear Parent/Caregiver

I am writing to you with some sad news about a member of our school community.

One of our Year ... students, took his/her own life yesterday/today/Saturday/during the holidays. We remember especially, and pray for, his/her family and friends.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about your child's reaction, or expressions of feelings about this unexpected loss. These reactions and feelings may be part of the grieving process.

Your child's behaviour may be different from normal. They may find it hard to concentrate and complete their school work. They may be unusually quiet, or show displays of anger, or they may show very few reactions at all, particularly if they did not know him/her. Following the suicide of a friend, the normal grief reactions can be very intense, for children/adolescents. Each person experiences and copes with grief and trauma in different ways and with different intensities.

Your child may want to share his/her feelings with you. If your child shares his/her emotions and feelings with you, try to listen and to positively support them, even though this may be uncomfortable for you. If your child prefers to talk about this situation with friends, this is normal and is more likely to occur with young people.

Additional professional counselling has been made available at the school, through ACCESS Counselling from the Centacare Office in Adelaide. The school routine will continue as normally as possible. Your child may like to talk with a Counsellor, or class Teacher or Priest.

Such a loss can heighten a young person's emotions. The length of grieving can vary for each person. If you have any concerns, please contact your child's class teacher or myself and we will arrange support.

In dealing with death, we need to remember the value and dignity of life. Please pray for him/her who is now at peace with God. I also ask you to remember his/her family that they will be comforted and strengthened by the love of God and the whole school/parish community.

Please feel free to contact the following staff for information about the school's support plan or if you have any concerns about your son/daughter. Contacting the nominated staff is an important way of ensuring you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all parent concerns.

If visiting the school, please remember to follow our signing in process.

Ms on

Mr on

Yours sincerely

Principal

Different wording will need to be considered with multiple deaths or an attempted suicide. Also it is acknowledged, that some of the above resources may not be available in country schools. Sample parent attachments that follow may be considered useful.

Department of Education and Children's Services parent letter

Dear Parent/Caregiver

I am writing to you with some sad news about a member of our school community.

One of our Year ... students attempted suicide/died by suicide yesterday/today/Saturday/during the holidays.

Our thoughts are with the student's family and friends.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about your son's/daughter's reaction or expressions of feeling about this news. These reactions and feelings may be part of the grieving process. Many students will wish to talk with their parents, so I have attached some general information which may assist you in those conversations. I also encourage you to let your son/daughter know that you are aware of this incident and that you will listen to their concerns at any time they wish to share them. Staying connected and engaged with your son/daughter is one of the best ways to support them. When talking about the issue of suicide try to include discussion about positive ways of managing problems.

Two important messages to promote are that all of us should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable and that young people should tell an adult if they are worried about a friend hurting themselves.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our students and staff over the next months. This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible and recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come. If your son/daughter is already using the services of a mental health professional, you should ensure this information is passed on to them. A list of helpful websites and services is included in the attachments to this letter.

Please feel free to contact the following staff for information about the school's support plan or if you have any concerns about your son/daughter. Contacting the nominated staff is an important way of ensuring you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all parent concerns.

If visiting the school, please remember to follow our signing in processes.

Ms on

Mr on

Yours sincerely

Principal

The sample parent attachments are provided on the next two pages.

Parent letter attachment

Each child's or adolescent's response will be unique and a wide range of reactions are possible.

Their reaction will be influenced by their personality, their past relationship with the deceased or injured person, what is happening in their life now and their ability to adjust to change. Your child, whatever age, needs to find safe ways to express their feelings. They may feel confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt and sadness. Parental understanding, reassurance and attention is very important at this time. Be guided by your child's need to talk but make it clear to them that you will be available whenever they need you.

Children and adolescents who have experienced other concerns or losses in their lives may find it harder to cope.

Children and adolescents who have experienced other concerns or losses (eg separation/divorce of parents, death of a relative or pet, moving house/school) may find it harder to cope. They may become upset and need to express their feelings about these other concerns, even though they may have appeared to be coping before the event. If your son/daughter is already using the services of a psychologist or psychiatrist for wellbeing concerns, you should ensure they are made aware of this event.

Children and adolescents may have many questions. They may want to know exactly what happened.

The school will have provided your son/daughter with consistent information about the incident. Details about the way a suicide or attempted suicide occurred aren't provided to students as this information is generally considered to be potentially harmful to students' wellbeing. As parents, it is important to steer discussion towards the positive "help seeking" actions young people can take, such as talking to a trusted adult (eg parent, counsellor, teacher, relative or friend), or using the agencies or websites listed in another attachment.

"Tell an adult if you are worried about a friend."

This is an important message to share with your son/daughter in any discussion about suicide. Adolescents sometimes share their feelings about death with friends—in conversations, letters, emails, text messages, on the internet, etc. If young people are aware of friends who they fear may hurt themselves they should tell an adult immediately. Nothing is more important than protecting a life.

Be aware that you or your child may be affected by possible media responses to the event.

You may decide to protect against certain coverage or watch television news coverage together so that you can discuss any reactions or concerns and ensure your son/daughter feels supported. Hopefully, media reporting of specific youth suicides will not occur. However, if it does, be aware that it can contribute to young people's vulnerability.

Some adolescents may show reactions weeks/months/a year after an event.

If you are concerned about your child's reactions—for example, if there are changes to their behaviour such as their socialising or school work patterns—it is important to speak to the principal or student counsellor at the school. This may result in a referral to one of the agencies listed in the other attachment.

Be aware that school staff will also be affected.

While everyone will be working towards normalising school routines, some staff will be managing difficult emotions. Adult counselling support is provided to all our school staff through a process outside the school.

Respond to community concern with respect.

If speaking with other members in the community, try to reinforce that the approach is to respect the bereaved/affected family, to avoid romanticising or sensationalising suicide and to encourage help seeking actions in young people—for their own wellbeing and when they have concerns about their friends.

Parent letter attachment

Where can parents and young people get more information and help?

Grieflink is a South Australian based website that provides a wide range of information on death related grief for the community and professionals.

www.grieflink.asn.au

beyondblue: the national depression initiative, although not a counselling service, is an initiative working towards increasing awareness and understanding of depression, anxiety and related disorders throughout Australia. This site provides information about the signs and symptoms of depression, available treatments, how to get help and links to other relevant services and support groups.

www.beyondblue.org.au

Ybblue, the youth program of *beyondblue*, promotes the message that it's acceptable to talk about depression and encourages young people, their families and friends to look out for each other and to get help when it is needed. A set of youth fact sheets with information on a variety of topics, including how to recognise depression and how to talk about it, what services are available to help young people and how to help friends and family who may be going through a tough time can be downloaded from the site.

www.youthbeyondblue.com

Headroom is a youth website that has been developed to inform young people, their caregivers and service providers about positive mental health. It includes information about mental health, strategies to help young people and links to other support services.

www.headroom.net.au

Reach Out! is a web based service that encourages young people to help themselves through tough times. The aim of the service is to improve young people's mental health and wellbeing by providing support, information and referrals in a format designed for young people.

<http://au.reachout.com>

Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800 is a 24 hour telephone and online counselling service for young people in Australia under 18 years.

www.kidshelpline.com.au

headspace is Australia's National Youth Mental Health Foundation targeting 12–25 year olds with mental health and drug and alcohol problems. Check the website for further information about their services.

www.headspace.org.au

Lifeline 13 11 14 is a 24 hour telephone counselling service. Check out the website for other online information and referral services.

www.lifeline.org.au

Children Youth & Women's Health Service

Parent Helpline 1300 364 100

Youth Healthline 1300 131 719

www.cyh.com

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

(CAMHS) provides a confidential counselling service for children and young people up to 18 years of age and their families.

The Northern CAMHS
(Children Youth & Women's Health Service)
Metropolitan Services Phone (08) 8161 7389

Northern CAMHS
Country Service Phone 1800 819 089

The Southern CAMHS
(Southern Adelaide Health Service)
Metropolitan Services Phone (08) 8204 5412

Southern CAMHS
Country Service Phone (08) 8204 5412

ASCEND Phone (08) 8241 7022

Suicide Intervention Program
Centacare Support
Training and Intervention Services
PO Box 52 Hindmarsh SA 5007

Sample documentation outline

Background:

Name, gender, year level, DOB of student

Identified concerns:

- raised by
- managed by
- managed how/when
- communicated to

Information relating to attempted or completed suicide:

- date
- how school notified
- involvement of other students pre-event/immediately post event

Actions:

Students	Parents	Staff	Other Agencies
friends	bereaved/affected	counsellors	SAPOL
general peers	general	year level teachers	mental health
other campus	governing council	general	other school sectors
other schools	targeted groups	other campus	media
		other sites	sector office
managed—by whom, when and how communicated—to whom			

Documents to collect:

circulars, letters, notices, minutes, personal notes, emails, reports, critical incident review notes and recommendations

Critical incident review reflection guide

Note your thoughts and any ideas for improvement on the following topics:

1. Identification and support of students at risk of suicide
2. Staff and student understanding about what to do when they have concerns about young people's safety
3. Communication within the school
4. Communication with parents
5. Support for staff
6. Communication with and support from sector office(s) and mental health agencies

Note any additional concerns or ideas that have not been covered in your comments above and identify which takes priority.