

To: Public School District Administrators, Private School Administrators, Interested Parties  
From: Carolyn Stanford Taylor, Assistant State Superintendent  
Division for Learning Support  
Re: Notification of Youth Suicide Prevention Resources  
Date: January 2018

Attached please find the Model Notice of Suicide Prevention Resources for 2018. Wisconsin Statute sec. 115.365 requires that, "Each school board and the governing body of each private school annually shall inform their professional staff of the resources available from the department and other sources regarding suicide prevention." It also requires the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to create a model notice for schools. This notice is attached and available for download, along with many other resources, on our suicide prevention website found here: <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/youth-suicide-prevention>.

Data from the 2017 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) present mixed results when it comes to youth suicide in our state. When compared to 2007 YRBS data, there has not been a statistically significant increase in the percentage of students who report seriously considering suicide. However, multiple indicators suggest work remains to be done to reduce youth suicide. From 2007 to 2017 there has been an increase in the percentage of high school students reporting themselves as clinically depressed (22% in 2007 and 27% 2017). Across those same ten years, there has also been a significant increase in the percentage of students who report that they have made a plan for ending their lives (10% in 2007 to 15% in 2017). Finally, while the overall percentage of high school students reporting they attempted suicide is statistically the same as 2007, the 2017 percentage of female students who report attempting suicide is 1 ½ times that of males (9% for females and 6% for males).

Obviously, work remains; and we are making strides to combat this problem. DPI is taking a deep dive into the statewide 2017 YRBS data to identify potential prevention and intervention points. In fact, a detailed suicide-specific report will be included with YRBS reports on other topics related to student success. When completed, the report will be found here: <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/yrbs>. I encourage you to stay updated with this information, other DPI suicide prevention resources and/or to participate in our highly-rated suicide prevention workshop. The workshop has been very popular and well-received, and it will take an ongoing commitment to deal with this serious problem.

Please share this model notice with all of your staff members; anyone who works with students must be able to recognize suicide warning signs and know how to quickly respond. Since this model notice is not covered by copyright, you can easily customize it by including resources from your school, local mental health providers, county mental health services, crisis services, or local chapters of Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA). You may also put the notice on your district letterhead, make copies, or forward at will.

Please join me in continuing our important work in youth suicide prevention.

CST:gcc

Attachment



# 2018 Required Notice of Youth Suicide Prevention Resources

More youth suicide prevention resources are available at: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/youth-suicide-prevention>

## Youth Suicide Prevention Resources Are Available

To get updated information on suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention resources, visit [DPI's website](#). There are downloadable documents on suicide prevention requirements in state law, a fact sheet on youth suicide, and updated suicide prevention curriculum. It also includes a variety of resources for gatekeeper training for all staff and DPI's updated one-day training flyer, description, and calendar. Other resources include strategies on suicide interventions, memorial suggestions, and other topics.

### Know the Signs

Suicide doesn't usually happen out of the blue—most often there are warning signs for others to see or hear. Get the *FACTs* and know the signs of suicidal thinking in your students, friends, and family members.

#### Feelings

- ◆ Hopelessness
- ◆ Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- ◆ Feeling trapped – like there's no way out
- ◆ No sense of purpose in life

#### Actions

- ◆ Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities
- ◆ Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- ◆ Increased alcohol or drug use
- ◆ Giving away prized possessions

#### Changes

- ◆ Decline in quality of school work
- ◆ Dramatic mood changes
- ◆ Anxiety, agitation, change of eating/sleeping habits

#### Threats

- ◆ Threatening/talking about hurting self

*From American Association of Suicidology*

Suicide Prevention: Warning Signs

### Suicide Is a Complex Problem

Multiple factors are involved when someone dies by suicide. Oversimplifying the reasons someone takes their own life is not helpful. For instance, saying bullying "caused" someone to end their life is not accurate. Not all bullying victims kill themselves. Research suggests many factors contribute to suicide. These include: biological factors, precipitating factors, and triggering events. Examples of biological factors include mental illness or losing a family member to suicide. Precipitating factors include poor grades, attending an unsafe school, victimization, or family rejection. Crisis/triggering events include experiencing a major loss, humiliation or bullying, and having access to lethal means. Suicide is a complex problem that is often misunderstood when oversimplified.

*From: American Association of Suicidology (AAS) webinar January 2011.*

#### Identifying mental illness or alcohol/other drug abuse problem is significant.

- The most common mental illness leading to suicide is depression. It is also the most treatable!
- In the 2017 YRBS, over one-in-four high school students experienced persistent sadness or hopelessness. About six percent of high school students attempted suicide. This shows that depression is somewhat common, but suicide is not.
- Binge drinking is highly correlated with suicide attempts. 90 percent of people who died by suicide had some form of mental illness and/or an alcohol/other drug abuse problem.

#### Reducing access to lethal means can be very worthwhile. (see [www.meansmatter.com](http://www.meansmatter.com))

- Limiting access to the means for suicide provides the most significant reduction in suicide rates. Most often, youth who attempt suicide use a gun or drugs kept in the home.
- Do not allow youth to have unsupervised access to firearms and certain medications. Encourage safe/secure storage of all lethal means is a critical prevention strategy.

*When youth are facing what they believe is a crisis and exhibit warning signs of suicide, be sure they are not left alone or sent home without supervision.*

HOPELINE – text “HOPELINE” to 741741 or visit  
[www.centerforsuicideawareness.org](http://www.centerforsuicideawareness.org)

WI Safe and Healthy Schools Training Center  
[www.wishschools.org](http://www.wishschools.org)

Prevent Suicide Wisconsin  
[www.preventsuicidewi.org](http://www.preventsuicidewi.org)

Suicide Prevention Resource Center  
[www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org)

American Association of Suicidology  
[www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

## Important Resources



### What can you do if you are concerned about a student?

Teachers and other school staff are well-positioned to observe student behavior and to **ACT** if there is a suspicion that a student may consider self-harm. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem; but for kids, their problems can seem endless at this stage. If we get them through the crisis, there is a 90 percent chance that they will never attempt suicide. **ACT** stands for **Acknowledge, Care, and Tell**.

# A

**Acknowledge** feelings rather than minimizing them. Telling a student to “*get over it*” or “*move on*” is not a realistic outcome when dealing with a person with depression.

- ♦ “*I’m sorry to hear about this. It sounds really hard.*”

# C

**Show Care and Concern** for the student by taking the next step.

- ♦ “*I’m worried about you. I don’t want anything bad to happen to you or for you to be hurt.*”

# T

**Tell** a member of your crisis team. They know how to work with students who have concerns like these.

- ♦ “*Let’s go talk with someone in the counseling office.*”

These steps (Acknowledge-Care-Tell) are central components of the “Signs of Suicide” program (SOS), an evidence-based schoolwide intervention program. SOS kits for middle school and high school are available through your local CESA. The law mandates schools to educate students on suicide prevention; see the laws handout on the DPI website for further details on curriculum.

## Common Concerns

### What if I make a mistake? Can I be sued?

State law insulates all public and private school district employees and volunteers from civil liability for their acts and omissions when trying to intervene in a student’s possible suicide. Lawmakers found it so important that adults take action when a student is suicidal that they protected those adults from any civil liability for their intervention efforts.

### Does asking about suicide cause a student to attempt it?

No. This issue has been thoroughly studied. By asking a student about suicidal intent, you are offering to help them. Please do your best to reach out to students.

### Seeing Urgent Warning Signs? Here’s What to Avoid

All children and adolescents can experience moodiness and will take time to ask life’s big questions. Since they lack the perspective of time, they can become overwhelmed. The best roles for teachers are to support students, and if you see the suicide warning signs, use **ACT**. Some of the statements below might make perfect sense for students who aren’t suicidal; but when kids are in crisis, these things can make it worse.

Here are some actions and words to avoid when you see the urgent warning signs:

#### Don’t Shame

- “*You’ve got to get over this. It’s not a big deal.*”
- “*Why are you so worried? Move on!*”
- “*You’re too sensitive. Grow up!*”

#### Don’t Delay

- When you see urgent warning signs, get help right away, don’t wait.

#### Don’t Blame

- “*If you wanted a better grade, you would have worked harder.*”
- “*You’ve got no one to blame but yourself.*”
- “*Maybe you should change your attitude if you want friends.*”

#### Don’t Give Up

- Suicide is **NOT** a destiny—when people make it through the suicidal crisis, they usually go on to live healthy, productive lives!

#### Don’t Do It Alone

- Consult other pupil services staff or administration to help.