

## YSU Postvention plan

### **BACKGROUND:**

Ohio House Bill 28, designed to increase suicide prevention programs at state institutions of higher education, was passed and became effective October 15, 2015.

The bill reads as follows:

Sec. 3345.37. (A) Not later than one year after the effective date of this section, each state institution of higher education, as defined in section 3345.011 of the Revised Code, shall develop and implement a policy to advise students and staff on suicide prevention programs available on and off campus that includes all of the following:

- (1) Crisis intervention access, which shall include information for national, state, and local suicide prevention hotlines;
- (2) Mental health program access, which shall provide information on the availability of local mental health clinics, student health services, and counseling services;
- (3) Multimedia application access, which shall include crisis hotline contact information, suicide warning signs, resources offered, and free-of-cost applications;
- (4) Student communication plans, which shall consist of creating outreach plans regarding educational and outreach activities on suicide prevention;
- (5) Postvention plans, which shall consist of creating a strategic plan to communicate effectively with students, staff, and parents after a loss of a person to suicide.

(B) Each state institution of higher education shall provide all incoming students with information about mental health topics, including depression and suicide prevention resources available to students. The information provided to students shall include available mental health services and other support services, including student-run organizations for individuals at risk of or affected by suicide.

(C) The information prescribed by divisions (A) (1), (2), (3), and (4) of this section shall be posted on the web site of each state institution of higher education.

Any applicable free-of-cost prevention materials or programs shall be posted on the web sites of the board of regents and the department of mental health and addiction services. The materials or programs shall be reviewed on an annual basis by the department of mental health and addiction services.

The following is the Postvention plan for Youngstown State University, specified in section (A) (5), above.

### **GOALS:**

Goals of the Postvention plan are to:

- Help those impacted by the death deal with current trauma and reduce the intensity of the emotional, physical and behavioral reactions
- Stabilize the campus community, restore order and routine and help community return to pre-crisis functioning
- Prevent and/limit further suicides

- Help community process what has happened, effectively express difficult emotions, and understand the impact of the event
- Avoid institutionalizing grief
- Allow for learning from current Postvention efforts to improve future prevention and Postvention response efforts

The Postvention plan can be broken down into three phases, with tasks belonging to each phase listed below.

1. Immediate – Acute phase
2. Short-term
3. Long-term

**Immediate: acute phase:**

**Appropriate administrators, staff and faculty (BIT team plus others) are brought together to coordinate**

- **Flow and content of information;**
- **identify and reach affected individuals and groups; and**
- **Gather and assign personnel needed to respond.**
- **(Bringing together could mean physically meeting together in a room, or virtually via phone and/or email.)**
- Coordinate – One person should be designated to coordinate information, actions and follow up.
- Notify – Official notification of student death usually occurs from governmental/law enforcement (i.e. coroner’s office, police department) to next of kin. However, with social media others are likely to get information and misinformation quickly. Therefore it is very important for the university to convey accurate information in a timely manner to affected others. To stop misinformation, to help stabilize the emotional climate of affected others, to promote healthy grieving and to prevent suicide contagion. Counseling Center staff and other University affiliated Counselors under the direction of the Student Counseling Services director may help by providing psychoeducational group sessions about healthy grieving and self-care.
  - Protect and respect the privacy right of the deceased and their loved ones during death notification
- Communicate – consistent and accurate information should be shared in a timely manner in a way to reduce potential for contagion and promote healing in the community.
- Support – most people after a loss or tragic event will not require professional mental health services. Support from family, friends and the institution will be enough for most to survive and thrive. However a small percentage of people who experience a loss or trauma will be so impacted as to need more than basic support. Part of the Postvention plan is to help identify these “at risk” individuals and groups and to appropriately refer them to professional services.

- Offer practical assistance – missing class, talking with professors, making up missed work, taking an incomplete, and returning to classes and school.

### **Short-term: Recovery phase**

- Link
  - Identify and link impacted community to additional support resources and refer those most affect to professional mental health services. This is the work of the natural and trained “gatekeepers” of the community. Psychological first aid is an appropriate intervention for gatekeepers.
- Comfort
  - Support, comfort and promote healthy grieving of community who have been impacted by the loss
- Restore – get back to normal business as quickly as possible. Provide structure.
  - Restore equilibrium and optimal function in the academic community
- Lead – be visible, united, involved. Be aware of individuals who are not functioning well and provide referrals to mental health services.
  - Build and sustain trust and confidence in organizational leadership

### **Long-term: Reconstructing phases**

- Honor
  - Prepare for anniversary reactions and other milestone dates
  - Advise student groups about appropriate ways to honor the loss
- Sustain
  - Transition from Postvention to suicide prevention
    - Use loss to help propel action into preventive efforts, such as helping student groups by providing bystander education training
    - Encourage others to appropriately talk about suicide and mental health issues

## **PROTOCOL FOR CAMPUS NOTIFICATION IN THE EVENT OF A STUDENT DEATH (including suicide)**

### **POLICY**

When the death of any Youngstown State University student occurs, whether on or off campus, it is incumbent upon the designated YSU officials and administrative offices to provide swift, caring, and professional assistance to the family, survivors, and eligible beneficiaries of any death benefits administered by or through YSU. The Office of the Associate Vice President for University Relations (AVP UR) coordinates the notification of

appropriate YSU officials and, within the parameters of this protocol, assists those officials, the student's family and the campus community, as requested. In its role as the central point of contact in all matters relating to the death of a YSU student, the AVP for University Relations is committed to handling this responsibility in a discreet, sensitive, professional and timely manner.

## **VERIFICATION AND NOTIFICATION**

The Mahoning County Coroner's Office is the governmental agency responsible for verifying the death and identity of the deceased. It is also the responsibility of the Medical Examiners/Coroner's Office to provide the official notification to the family, next of kin, or person identified on the student's registration form for such notice. The YSU Police Department will offer to assist the Medical Examiner/Coroner when requested. The YSU Police Department will also notify AVP University Relations in the event it learns of a student death.

## **NOTIFICATION OF APPROPRIATE YSU OFFICIALS AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES**

AVP University Relations (AVP UR) is responsible for coordinating all aspects related to the protocol for notification of appropriate YSU officials and administrative offices in the event of a student death. The nature of the death is confidential and should not be included in the administrative notification.

AVP UR should implement the following procedures in the event of a notification of a student death.

- Unless the notice of death was provided by YSU Police Department, AVP UR will confirm the student's death with the YSU Police Department or Examiner's/Coroner's Office of the county in which the death occurred, including the nature of the death, and document the name, phone number and title of the person verifying the information.
- As soon as possible following receipt of the notice of death, AVP UR notify the Dean of Students of the college or professional school or academic program where the student was enrolled or had been accepted for enrollment; the Director of Psychological and Counseling Services, if the nature of the death was determined to be by suicide or homicide; and the Director, Environment, Health & Safety, if the cause of death was work-related.
- AVP UR will notify the President's office of the student's death and prepare a condolence letter for the President's signature to be sent to the parents, surviving family member or next of kin of the student.
- AVP UR will send a copy of the notice of the student's death to the appropriate campus officials/offices, see list below. This memo will serve as notice to the campus of the student's date of death and to enable them to appropriately amend the student's records, close pending accounts and ensure that only appropriate correspondence is sent to the family of the student:
  - President

- Provost
- AVP Student Experience (student health, student activities, housing, etc.)
- AVP Student Success (student employment, counseling, etc.)
- Public Information Officer
- Registrar's Office (Coordinator, Administrative Records)
- Chair of Board of Trustees
- University General Counsel
- Chair, Academic Department of Undergraduate Student's Major
- Director, Environment, Health & Safety/Risk Management
- Director, Financial Aid Office
- Director, Housing and Dining Services
- Director, Student Health

### **ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION IN RESPONSE TO NOTIFICATION**

YSU officials or administrative offices will take the actions indicated below:

- Close the student's email account consistent with policy.
- Remove student's name from active correspondence list and cease any direct solicitations (Alumni Relations, University Foundation, etc).
- Notify student's employing department to initiate appropriate payroll actions.
- University Counsel – provide general notification as needed.
- Campus Recreation – withhold billing, close out account and update records accordingly.
- President – sign letter to parent or next of kin
- Chair, Academic Department of undergraduate student's major – update student's records in the department, withhold mailings and seal student's paper records folder or electronic files.
- Help family arrange for return of student's possessions, help inform student's friends and roommates and provide avenues of support for grieving students, faculty and staff.
- Financial Aid Office – close out financial aid files and inform financial institutions as necessary.
- Housing and Dining Services – secure personal effects, withhold billing, close out account, and update records accordingly.
- Intercollegiate Athletics – update records relating to the student and facilitate counseling and crisis intervention as needed for other members of teams for which the deceased student played.
- Parking Office – coordinate reimbursement of paid parking fees.
- Psychological and Counseling Services – assist in organizing campus support for grieving students, faculty and staff.
- Registrar/Admissions (Coordinator, Academic Records) – update student's records, withhold mailings and seal student's paper records folder.

- Environment, Health & Safety/Risk Management – assess and respond to liability concerns if death was work-related or connected to a University activity or event, e.g., accidental or non-natural deaths.
- Withhold all billing and provide documentation on student's University status.
- Student Health Services – place the medical record in the deceased student's file and provide relevant health information following HIPAA guidelines.
- YSU Library Access Services – change the student's status in the Library database and follow up on any outstanding items.
- University Communications – respond to press inquiries.

## **APPENDICES:**

### Appendix A

#### **Response to Death of Faculty/Staff/Student from the academic perspective**

In our protocol, the AVP University Relations is notified of the death of a University affiliated person. Because of the repercussions on students and the overall learning environment it is important to quickly identify potentially affected groups and individuals and provide appropriate intervention.

The steps to be taken in the event of a death of someone connect to YSU are illustrated in the example below of the death of a faculty member. The same steps would be used in the death of a student, with the addition of the steps possibly replicated for each impacted group (i.e. residence hall, club, organization, or class to which the student belonged).

- The AVP UR contacts the College or Departmental representative, typically the Chair or a designate.
- An attempt is made to identify the populations most impacted by the death. This may include colleagues, research and graduate assistants, doctoral students, students in classes being taught, support staff, etc.
- An outline of services is provided to help the academic department make decisions regarding a number of issues, including notification of those impacted, cancellation of classes, communication with next of kin, and potential response to media.
- Generally, the Director of Student Counseling Services initiates the counseling intervention component. The counselor coordinating this intervention makes an outreach to the college or departmental contact person. A meeting is scheduled to discuss how to address the issues outlined above and the implications of special circumstances in the death e.g., suicide or other violence. The counselor assesses for how to best assist the faculty in notifying and supporting others. Examples of what counselors and departments may do include:
  - Counselors may accompany faculty to classes taught by the deceased and participate in the notification, provide support for and information on the

process of grief and disseminate information on campus resources. The faculty representative may wish to take the lead in the notification or leave that to the counselor. Information is usually provided on plans for the continuation of the class, dates, if known, of memorial activities, ways that students can contribute to the remembrance, and what specific information can be appropriately provided regarding the nature of the death.

- Counselors often meet with the following groups to process their experience and provide information
  - faculty and other colleagues
  - graduate students, research assistants and doctoral students
  - support staff
  - students or student organizations
- Counselors can prepare administrators for the possibility of family coming to the area to discuss the deceased, pack up personal belongings and see their loved one's work areas. It is not unusual for counselors to be present when family come and accompany the administrator through this process. They also help prepare colleagues for the visitation experience
- Counseling Center clinicians (with the help of selected other professionals) will discuss ongoing services for all the affected populations. Additionally, they may make suggestions as to how academic units and classes may wish to remember the person through some form of a ritual of remembrance (e.g., brief service, dedication of a plaque, scholarship, planting of a tree, etc.). The Counseling Center may consult and provide support in developing and implementing this helpful ritual.
- The Counseling Center Director may also consult with the academic unit to develop a coordinated response to inquiries, in conjunction with the university information and public relations office and consistent with policies regarding access to the setting.

## Appendix B

Suicide Postvention talking points for use by Counseling Center Clinical staff during group interventions.

Example opening statement:

"I'm Dr. Ann Jaronski from the university's Student Counseling Services Center, and I'm here to talk with you about "Josh." As you all know, last Tuesday was the last time anybody heard from him and we have all been very concerned. We have been in close communication with his family and although we have still not received final confirmation, they have reason to believe that he may have died, and that he may have taken his own life. I'm here to help you talk about this and to provide you with resources that might be helpful to you in the days to come."

## THINGS TO DO

•Detail the range of normal response to tragedy. “How individuals respond to tragedy and loss will vary widely. Some of you may feel comfortable openly expressing emotions, others may be reluctant to talk at all, and still others may react out of anxiety and use humor. Others may experience physical symptoms, including “butterflies” in your stomach, shortness of breath, and fatigue. Others may feel guilty about having fun or thinking about other things—you may feel that you somehow need permission to engage in activities that will help you feel better and take you mind off the tragedy. Remember that that this wide range of response is normal and expected, and that it’s important that we respect each other’s different ways of responding during this difficult time. Our community is important and we can be a resource for one another. ...Among the things you might experience as you work through this are...

- Shock, disbelief
- Sadness
- Irritability
- Anger—towards person who committed suicide
- Anger—towards others deemed responsible
- Guilt
- Loss of interest in school, work
- Loss of pleasure
- Disruptions in eating, sleeping
- Helplessness
- Isolation, loneliness
- Stress
- Physical illness
- Intrusive thoughts, images
- Rumination
- Numbness”

•Acknowledge other recent tragedies, including other student deaths by suicide (if this is relevant). “This recent distressing event comes after other student deaths earlier this semester. The best way to honor the friend(s) you have lost is by taking care of yourselves and of each other and to seek help if you need it.”

•Emphasize the importance of community. “Especially as we work through a series of events like these it’s important that we pull together, offer one another support, and look out for one another.”

•Rumors. “It is natural to want to know more details about what may have happened. We may not be able to figure out exactly all that happened and why. It is important not to contribute to rumors and spreading stories that may or may not be true. Know that you can rely on university officials to provide you with the information you need to know.”

•Address possibility of suicidal ideation and morbid thinking. “It isn’t unusual for someone already struggling with distress or depression to experience thoughts of death or suicide after hearing of someone dying or committing suicide. For example, someone might wonder whether things would be easier if he or she died, or might wonder how others would react if they died, or might even begin thinking about ways of committing suicide. If you are having thoughts like these it’s essential to talk with a counselor and get some help. Similarly, if you know of someone else who is having these thoughts it’s essential that you encourage them to seek help, and that you alert someone in a position of responsibility—a counselor, university minister, another university staff member—about your concern.”

•Make a positive statement about counseling outcome. “Please know that most people who try counseling report benefiting from it. Even if you’ve had a mixed experience with counseling in the past, it’s well worth trying again. Talking with a professional about your concerns can be extremely helpful—you can get support, you can better understand things you’re going through, and you can get help in developing a plan to improve your situation. Counselors can also help you decide whether and how to contact faculty members about requesting flexibility in finishing up your school work, and other similar concerns.”

•Provide information about positive coping strategies

- talking
- Praying
- Exercise
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Journaling
- Eating and sleeping right
- Tending to usual school and work responsibilities
- Providing support to others
- Checking in with others
- Make a list future goals
- Make a list of supports

•Provide information about problematic coping

- Substance abuse
- Focusing too much on the tragedy—letting it “take over everything”

•Provide information about Counseling Center services, walk-in hours, community 24/7 crisis lines.

•Provide information about other resources for help

- University or community Ministry
- Trusted family member, mentor, faculty, other university staff, friend

•Provide information about suicide hotlines.

•Provide any information regarding upcoming events related to death—time and date of memorial service.

•Offer to return and meet with group again.

•Offer to remain after group meeting to answer individual questions, concerns.

## THINGS TO AVOID

- Providing or confirming details about a suicide. “I understand your curiosity about that, but I’m not going to get into those details—in part because I question whether that’s helpful, but also out of respect for the privacy of the student and his family.”
- Providing or confirming details about prior treatment or other confidential information.
- Contributing to glorification or vilification of the student. “Those of you who were close to Josh remember many of his positive qualities. But I think we can all agree that we wish he hadn’t taken his own life—for all of the problems he may have had, he also had a lot to live for. Also, I can tell you that people who are clinically depressed sometimes have difficulty recognizing the impact their actions can have on others, and have difficulty recognizing how things can get better, and this may have been the case for Josh.”

## Appendix C

### **After Action Review (AAR)**

AVP UR calls an after action review meeting for all parties involved in responding to a YSU related death (requiring intervention).

Things to consider in AAR include:

Incident background, response factors (e.g. communication, equipment, containment), and any other aspects considered relevant.

- Outcomes. Both expected and unexpected.
- Lessons Learned. Strengths and weaknesses, and areas requiring attention.
- Recommended Actions. Proposed actions for improving service delivery.
  - Any analysis must always ask – what, where, when, why, how and who. The reasons are that;
    - people see things differently;
    - staff directly involved in the incident can usually identify problems best;
    - the benefit of hindsight may have led to different response decisions;
    - a statement of a positive outcome will generally NOT require follow-up actions.
      - a statement of a negative outcome will ALWAYS require follow-up
- Revisit Suicide prevention plan on campus
  - Is this adequate?
  - What improvements could be made?
  - Who should be involved?