

Mental Health Wellness and Suicide Prevention Training Opportunities for Higher Education

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training

ASIST is a workshop designed for members of all caregiving groups. Participants learn to use a suicide intervention model to identify persons with thoughts of suicide, seek a shared understanding of reasons for dying and living, develop a safe plan based upon a review of risk, connect to appropriate resources, and become involved in suicide-safer community networks.

<https://www.livingworks.net/asist>

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

Mental Health First Aid teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training provides the skills needed to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis.

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/population-focused-modules/adults/>

MHFA – Higher Education

Mental Health First Aid for Higher Education teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. This training – which focuses on the unique experiences and needs of college students – provides the skills needed to reach out and provide initial support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem and help connect them to the appropriate care.

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/population-focused-modules/higher-education/>

MHFA – Public Safety

Mental Health First Aid for Public Safety teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. This training focuses on the unique experiences and needs of public safety personnel and is a valuable resource that can make a difference in their lives, their coworkers’ and families’ lives, and the communities they serve.

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/population-focused-modules/public-safety/>

SafeTALK (Suicide Alertness for Everyone)

Participants in safeTALK will learn to notice and respond to situations where suicide thoughts may be present, recognize that invitations for help are often over looked, become aware of community resources and how to connect someone with thoughts of suicide for further support.

<https://www.livingworks.net/safetalk/>

Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences and Building Self-Help Healing Communities

This training can be tailored for your audience and ranges from 30 minutes to a 6-hour comprehensive workshop that explains the effects of adverse childhood experiences on brain development and the long-term effects on adult health and wellness. Participants learn what they can do to help create and support change in the community.

All trainings listed above are provided by DCIS and DBHDS.

Additional Resources and Learning Opportunities

The Campus Suicide Prevention Center of Virginia

The Campus Suicide Prevention Center of Virginia supports the individuals and teams on each campus as they work to build the infrastructure necessary to promote wellness and safety for all students, identify and support those in distress, and effectively respond to individuals who are at risk for suicide.

<http://www.campussuicidepreventionva.org/>

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Online eLearning Models

The virtual learning opportunities found within this series were selected to support school leaders and school-based mental health practitioners as they prepare to respond to the mental health needs of their students.

<https://vastudentservices.org/learning-modules/mental-health-in-schools/>

Crisis Response Training

The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) manages and trains the state Crisis Response Team members who provide trauma mitigation and education following a critical incident. Additionally, the team is able to provide short-term Individual Crisis Counseling, along with short and long-term Group Crisis Intervention.

<https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/victims-services>

Victim Assistance Emergency Response

DCJS, as a member of the Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST), is responsible for identifying and coordinating the availability of trained, experienced victim advocates to provide crisis intervention, grief counseling, and other services to primary and secondary victims following a criminal mass casualty event.

Technical Assistance

DCJS offers case management consultation services to campuses to assist with specific threat assessments which may involve students threatening to harm self and/or others. They also tailor training opportunities upon requests for campus personnel on relevant topics of safety and security.

[Suicide Prevention Resource Center](https://www.sprc.org/settings/colleges-universities)

<https://www.sprc.org/settings/colleges-universities>

[Virginia Association of Community Service Boards](https://vacsb.org/csb-bha-directory/)

<https://vacsb.org/csb-bha-directory/>

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment>

[Mental Health America of Virginia](https://mhav.org/)

<https://mhav.org/>

Postvention Resources

Postvention is an organized response in the aftermath of a suicide to accomplish any one or more of the following:

- To facilitate the healing of individuals from the grief and distress of suicide loss
- To mitigate other negative effects of exposure to suicide
- To prevent suicide among people who are at high risk after exposure to suicide

[Postvention: A Guide for Response to Suicide on College Campuses](https://sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/Hemha-postvention-guide.pdf), created by the Higher Education Mental Health Alliance (HEMHA), provides guidance for colleges and universities for responding to a suicide on campus. The Guide is meant to be both a training tool (to be used in preparing a campus response) and a resource when responding to a current suicide. The Guide provides advice on managing communication, clinical response, coordination among stakeholders, and the process of moving the campus back to normal function.

<https://sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/Hemha-postvention-guide.pdf>

[National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention Survivors of Suicide Loss Task Force. Responding to Grief, Trauma, and Distress after a Suicide: U.S. National Guidelines:](http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/sites/actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/files/NationalGuidelines.pdf)

These guidelines provide a blueprint for the development of suicide postvention at all levels of U.S. society. The overarching goal is to reduce the negative effects of exposure to suicide and facilitate the process of healing from a suicide loss. The guidelines call for an integrated and compassionate community response.

<http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/sites/actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/files/NationalGuidelines.pdf>

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Lifeline Online Postvention Manual:](http://www.sprc.org/library/LifelineOnlinePostventionManual.pdf)

This manual discusses the role of the Internet in postvention and how postvention initiatives can target online communities when there is a suicide death. The recommendations cover how to safely memorialize someone who has died by suicide. These messaging guidelines can also be applied to online memorials and messages about people who have died.

<http://www.sprc.org/library/LifelineOnlinePostventionManual.pdf>

[SPRC. After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools:](http://www.sprc.org/library/aftersuicide.pdf)

This toolkit is designed to assist schools in the aftermath of a suicide (or other death) in a school community. It can help schools determine what to do, and when and how to do it. The toolkit reflects consensus recommendations developed in consultation with a diverse group of national experts. It incorporates examples of useful tools, research findings, references, templates, and links to additional information and assistance.

<http://www.sprc.org/library/aftersuicide.pdf>

Opportunities to Enhance Current Suicide Prevention Infrastructure

Below please find recommendations for Executive Leadership's consideration to further build infrastructure in this area and enhance Virginia's Suicide Prevention efforts.

1. Press Release from the Governor's Office

A press release from the Governor highlighting the importance of Mental Health Wellness and Suicide prevention for all Institutes of Higher Learning brings high visibility that could encourage more immediate action to create suicide-safer campuses across the Commonwealth. Messaging would include promotion of trainings and resources, as well as opportunities for collaborative efforts across organizations.

2. Suicide Prevention Public Service Announcement Campaign (PSA)

Expansion of DCJS current Youth Suicide Prevention Campaign to focus more specifically on college and university age students. The goal is to promote suicide prevention among teens and young adults in Virginia. There is a call to action, offering young people who are suffering from depressions and/or experiencing suicidal thoughts the information they need to self-identify and provide avenues of support when they are in crisis. The campaign runs on various media outlets. Geographic targeting focuses on high risk areas that include most of Virginia's public and many of the private colleges and universities.

3. Participation in the Suicide Prevention Interagency Advisory Group

The Suicide Prevention Interagency Advisory Group (SPIAG) encourages the participation of higher education stakeholders. The SPIAG works to share information on suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention initiatives as well as other topics related to suicide prevention and mental health wellness across state agencies and other partnering organizations. Through bi-monthly meetings the participants and invited guests share information relevant to creating suicide-safer communities in Virginia, including recent research, state and local initiatives, training and other educational opportunities, and ideas for future work.

4. Potential Relocation the Campus Suicide Prevention Center

The current Campus Suicide Prevention Center, located at James Madison University, could be relocated and placed within a state government agency **if this will help to create an ongoing source of funding**. They are currently funded primarily through the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) – Garrett Lee Smith Grant that will end September 30, 2022. Additionally, VDH provides \$125,000 ongoing funding annually.

Relocating the Campus Suicide Prevention Center to a state agency with legislative responsibilities to serve all colleges and universities could further expand their reach, provide additional resources to campuses, integrate with threat assessment team training

efforts, and assist in establishing and providing model policies and guidance around suicide and crisis response to all institutions.

5. Offer Model Policies and Guidance for all Colleges and Universities

The Commonwealth could direct a state agency to create model policies and guidance for campuses. VDOE provides guidance for K-12 schools through Suicide Prevention Guidelines that intersect with threat assessment processes. Additionally, pursuant to § 23.1-802 governing boards of each public institution of higher education shall develop and implement policies related to addressing student needs related to suicidal behavior and providing training, and also shall establish written memorandums of understanding with local providers to expand the scope of services available to students seeking treatment. Model policies and best practice guides would assist colleges and universities in their prevention, intervention, and postvention initiatives relative to these statutes and create consistency across the Commonwealth. This guide, along with training, would help strengthen campus suicide awareness and prevention efforts, and support access for students seeking help.

6. Strongly Encourage Participation in The Healthy Minds Study – Student Survey

According to the [Healthy Minds](http://HealthyMinds.org) website, the Healthy Minds Network’s (HMN) annual web-based survey study examines mental health, service utilization, and related issues among undergraduate and graduate students. Since its national launch in 2007, the Healthy Minds Survey has been fielded at about 400 colleges and universities, with over 550,000 survey respondents. Using validated measures, HMN’s survey research provides a detailed look at the prevalence of mental health outcomes, knowledge and attitudes about mental health and service utilization. HMS emphasizes understanding help-seeking behavior, examining stigma, knowledge, and other potential barriers to mental health service utilization. <https://healthymindsnetwork.org/hms/>

7. Mandate Threat Assessment Data Reporting for Colleges and Universities

A recommendation would be to add legislation to require threat assessment teams established at public institutions of higher education (IHEs) to collect and report quantitative data on their activities to the DCJS Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS). The proposed legislation would ensure that the VCSCS receives quantitative data from threat assessment teams established by public institutions of higher education in the same manner that the VCSCS receives quantitative data from threat assessment teams established by local school boards in accordance with *Va. Code* § 22.1-79.4(E). The collection of data from IHEs assists in the formulation of policy, guides training efforts, and evaluates the effectiveness of the law in providing services to support students in colleges and universities.

8. Support the Expansion of State General Funds for Mental Health First Aid and Suicide Prevention

In 2002, VDH was designated as the lead agency for youth suicide prevention in the Commonwealth (§ 32.1-73.7).

In 2004, the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) was designated as the lead agency for suicide prevention across the lifespan (§ 37.2-312.1).

Governor McDonnell signed into law the FY 2014 budget, which included a \$1,100,000 ongoing appropriation to DBHDS to expand and support Suicide Prevention and Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) initiatives across the Commonwealth of Virginia. The funding is under the purview of the Office of Behavioral Health Wellness; \$600,000 to expand MHFA and \$500,000 to develop and implement a comprehensive statewide suicide prevention program.

Expanding the current funding would create opportunities to enhance and expand our ability to promote suicide awareness, increase mental health resources, address social determinants of health that result in increased risk, and reduce the incidence of suicide. Statewide, there exists a shared responsibility to identify at-risk individuals and ensure that they receive essential services relating to mental health wellness.