

Schools may appoint an individual staff member on their postvention committee to monitor comments on the deceased's social media profiles for content indicating that friends are in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. If you are the appointee, here is guidance based on Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) best practices, with updates and additions from SPIAG and Connect:

STEP #1

Consider Circumstances to Plan Appropriate Online Response

- Enter first and last name of deceased in your browser. Browse search results for social media profiles and any discussions about the deceased. This may include Instagram accounts, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and others. Your access to profiles may be blocked if the deceased was a minor.
- Don't plan to post anything about death by suicide if parents or guardians don't want people to know that fact. Also, the cause may not be determined yet, but only implied. Be cautious!
- Confirm any information you do plan to share before disclosing anything.

STEP #2

Working with Family During Online Response

- If possible, and if acceptable to the family, post resources in comments or on profile. Suicide and Crisis Lifeline 988 (text or call), other national teen sources/hotlines, and local and school-based resources are helpful.
- In many cases, parents will have access to their child's passwords and become the new administrators of their child's social media profile(s). If they are interested in online guidance, you, on behalf of your school, may share information on how to safely post and monitor the messages.

STEP #3

Guiding School Community

- If family and friends ask for guidance, discourage posting of suicide notes or indications of why the death occurred. Do not disclose the method, circumstances, or location. Evidence suggests certain messages (e.g., those that glamorize the suicide) and certain information (e.g., details about the method) may contribute to suicide contagion.
- When informing other school staff and families about the death, recommend that parents and guardians monitor their child's internet use during this time to make sure they have the emotional support they need if they are struggling.

When a youth dies by suicide, the social media profiles of the deceased often become hubs for conversation about the suicide on a significant scale. Therefore, online postvention is an essential component of the school community healing plan.

One of the most difficult circumstances for a school to manage can be when a suicide happens over a weekend. Understandably, messages can be charged with shock, pain, speculation, blame, while spreading rapidly. Emotional turmoil can impair decision-making. (See more from Connect.) The challenge becomes how to approach the beginning of the school week using the school's postvention plan while mitigating any potential damage from the weekend. Helpful tips include:

The first 72 hours are the most tumultuous for all involved. Begin your postvention work using proactive protocols as soon as possible. Online, this includes posting acknowledgment and condolences, emergency resources, and assurance that the school will implement a postvention plan at the start of the next school day.

Encourage self-care and help-seeking behavior as soon as possible and reiterate this when school reconvenes.