

Dear Provider,

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) funded the creation of a comprehensive toolkit, entitled, *Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools*. I am pleased to send this excellent resource to you. While suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States, it is the 3rd leading cause for high school students. According to the Center for Disease Control, eight percent of all high school students will attempt suicide. Over the past several years, we have seen and worked with many school districts who have struggled to respond to the crisis of suicide. The attached Toolkit and other resources I will mention below can help you make your schools safer and more effective in preventing suicide attempts and deaths.

According to SAMHSA, *Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools aims to help high schools, school districts, and their partners design and implement strategies to prevent suicide and promote behavioral health among their students. The information and tools will help schools and their partners:*

- ✚ *Assess their ability to prevent suicide among students and respond to suicides that may occur*
- ✚ *Understand strategies that can help students who are at risk for suicide*
- ✚ *Understand how to respond to the suicide of a student or other member of the school community*
- ✚ *Identify suicide prevention programs and activities that are effective for individual schools and respond to the needs and cultures of each school's students*
- ✚ *Integrate suicide prevention into activities that fulfill other aspects of the school's mission, such as preventing the abuse of alcohol and other drugs*

The SAMHSA Toolkit is a wonderful tool to include in a suicide prevention arsenal. In addition to this excellent federal resource, I would like to make you aware of some NYS resources that may help you with suicide prevention and safety measures. The New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) has been leading a major suicide prevention initiative for many years. We know that schools are frequently vulnerable to some of the most devastating effects of suicide attempts and deaths by members of the school community. And, we are especially concerned about the potential for contagion in schools following a suicide. As such, we and our partners offer carefully designed training and expertise to help schools develop effective prevention strategies and to respond decisively should they encounter the tragedy of a suicide event. Let me take a moment to describe a few below.

First, we have developed a one-day workshop for schools in New York State, *Creating Suicide Safety in Schools*. This workshop, designed for school planning teams, provides salient information and direction on how to create a school environment that is safer from suicide. It catalyzes school planning teams to begin the process of assessing school strengths and areas where safety measures must be strengthened, and leaves teams with an itinerary to work in the district environment to fully plan and actualize a

suicide safe school district. *Creating Suicide Safety in Schools* aligns fully with the SAMHSA Toolkit and provides an interactive process that allows schools to implement many of the SAMHSA recommendations. Specifically, it offers a process to:

- ✦ Evaluate existing suicide prevention, intervention and postvention readiness
- ✦ Receive evidence-based and best-practice guidance
- ✦ Develop comprehensive suicide prevention and response plans
- ✦ Learn about resources to enhance safety and health of their school environment that are subsidized or available at no cost or low cost through our initiative

The SAMHSA Toolkit contains a very useful matrix of specific tools and training programs that can assist schools with designing and implementing suicide prevention. The programs listed are considered to be either evidence-based practices or best practices. As part of the OMH Suicide Prevention Initiative, we have created a statewide network of trainers who are trained to deliver many of the suicide prevention programs listed in that Matrix. Should you decide that you want staff to be trained, we can assist you with determining the most appropriate training for your school, and help you with finding trainers and organizing it to maximize effectiveness. In addition, there are additional programs, including online training that are not found in the matrix. These programs are also included in the National Best Practices registry, and we can offer those to you as well, if they meet your needs.

OMH and its partners have other resources as well, including four regional youth suicide prevention training centers. We can link you to these centers, as well as to research experts and other vital resources that may help you.

We know that educating students in a safe environment is an immensely daunting challenge. We believe that by making schools suicide safe, schools will also improve their capacity to educate children.

Thank you for your leadership in educating and preparing our children for productive and happy adulthood. If we can be of help with making your schools safer, please call on us.

Sincerely,

Melanie Puerto Conte

Melanie Puerto-Conte,
Director, Suicide Prevention Initiative

Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools can be located at:
<http://store.samhsa.gov/product/SMA12-4669>