

VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES FOR SUICIDE AWARENESS EVENTS

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Preface

Note that these guidelines are designed as a voluntary guide for organisations and groups wanting to hold suicide awareness events (as distinct from suicide prevention training) in their community.

This document acknowledges that while it is important that we have a broader and more open discussion about suicide in our communities, and that for the vast majority of those who attend such events, the discussion will be useful, educational and ideally, empowering to make a difference. However research has shown that it can increase the risk of an attempt for some people who are already vulnerable. These voluntary guidelines are designed for the protection of those who may be vulnerable.

These guidelines have been developed in consultation with a number of Southern agencies and individuals supporting suicide prevention activity in their community who work in suicide prevention and postvention.

Reducing the Risk for the Vulnerable

We know that asking vulnerable people if they are thinking about suicide does not raise the risk of their attempting suicide. If the person responds “yes, they have been thinking about suicide”, suicide prevention best practice indicates that the most effective response is to then maintain connection and conversation with that person until that person connects with someone who has specific skills in working through the vulnerable person’s concerns and thoughts of suicide

Consequently we can assume that a vulnerable person attending a suicide awareness raising event will not increase their risk, providing the event has:

- good supports to ensure vulnerable people in the audience are able to be identified,
- information on local community support services
- Where possible when people stand up at a public meeting and raise their personal issues with indications of distress and/or anger, that organisers undertake to follow-up with the person after the meeting and ideally in a few day’s time to check in on their wellbeing.
- One on one counselling available for anyone who may need that initial support, before being referred to more sustainable local community supports.
- Ensure as far as possible that the information delivered verbally at the meeting by presenters or speakers from the floor is accurate- or failing that, that there is opportunity for others to provide correction.

- Most importantly, that in the presentation or presentations to the public, solutions are offered to both keep vulnerable people safe, and how someone can keep a vulnerable person safe-e.g. the use of safety plans, where to go for help (the various triaged risk levels) , the value of suicide prevention gatekeeper training, and the wide range of support services available (not just mental health services or one particular organisation) . A solutions based approach to delivery about suicide issues is essential to keeping vulnerable people safe.
- Encouraging the public to view suicide prevention as a whole of community issue e.g not simply a mental health issue or some other agency's sole responsibility.

INFORMATION ON LOCAL COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

It is recommended that the agency initiating a suicide awareness raising event, make early contact in the planning stages with their local suicide pre and postvention groups and also the Southern DHB suicide prevention coordinator. The Coordinator may also be able assist in advising who to contact in that community.

The event organiser needs to be aware of any specific local suicide risk issues (eg a recent spike in suicide attempts or deaths in that community) and a discussion with local support agencies or postvention group as to whether proceeding with the event is consequently advisable if there are community risk issues identified or alternatively, what additional supports need to be put in place to ensure safety as much as possible.

If the decision is made to proceed, the event organiser will then:

- Advise all local schools and educational institutions of the event so they can be prepared to support students should this be required.
- Ensure that both relevant local community support agencies and government agencies (eg mental health DHB services) provide pamphlets and contact details about their services at the event, and ideally a representative of that agency is present at the meeting to answer any questions about their services.
- Ensure that an opportunity is given at the event to verbally introduce those agencies present
- Provide, where possible, an opportunity to talk one on one after the event over a coffee or tea and snacks (but no alcohol).
- Ensure that generic pamphlets on suicide prevention and after a suicide are available at the event for people to take home. Resources are also available from Public Health South as per the contact details below:

Dunedin		
Main Block, Level 2, Wakari Hospital, Taieri Road, Dunedin	Private Bag 1921, Dunedin 9054	Phone: 03 476 9870 Fax: 03 476 9858 Email: judy.sibbe@southerndhb.govt.nz
Invercargill		
23 Forth St, Invercargill 9810	PO Box 1601 Invercargill 9840	Phone: 03 211 8500 Fax: 03 211 0899
Queenstown		
Suite 2, Level 3, Building 7 Hawthorne Drive Remarkables Park, Town Centre, Queenstown 9349	PO Box 2180 Frankton Queenstown 9349	Phone: 03 450 9156 Fax: 03 450 9169

Resources can also be obtained directly from agencies such as www.mentalhealth.org.nz and www.skylight.org.nz

ONE ON ONE COUNSELLING

- Ensure that a person with relevant skills (eg counsellor, psychiatric nurse, psychologist etc) is present at the meeting for those vulnerable people at the event who may wish to talk to someone immediately. This role is not to provide ongoing support, but to ensure that any vulnerable person who needs to talk at the event has that opportunity, and is referred to longer-term local community support services as appropriate by that counsellor.



For a list of counsellors and support agencies ring
0800 FOR CAB 0800 367 222
 or search at www.cab.org.nz

Contact Emergency Mental Health Services
0800 467 846
 Press 1 for Southland Services and 2 for Otago Services

Talk to your GP

GET HELP PICK UP THE PHONE

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT Free Text/Phone 1737	FAMILY VIOLENCE www.areyouok.org.nz 0800 456 450 Emergency Call 111
DEPRESSION www.depression.org.nz 0800 111 757 (24 hours) Text 4202	ALCOHOL DRUG HELPLINE 0800 OUTLINE 0800 787 797 www.womensrefuge.org.nz
SUICIDE CRISIS HELPLINE 0508 TAUTOKO 0508 828 865	SEXUALITY ISSUES 0800 OUTLINE 0800 688 5463
YOUTHLINE 0800 376 633 Free Text 234 talk@youthline.co.nz	THE LOWDOWN www.thelowdown.co.nz team@thelowdown.co.nz Free text 5626
HEALTHLINE 0800 611 116	
WOMEN'S REFUGE 0800 733 843	

APPENDIX 1

Contact details in the Southern District: (Otago and Southland)

Southern Suicide Prevention Coordinator: WellSouth

Paul Martin, Phone 03 260 7709 or email paul.martin@wellsouth.org.nz