

Core Principles of Connect:

-Suicide is generally preventable. It is essential for people to understand and believe that suicide is preventable. However, Connect intentionally uses the term “generally preventable” for two reasons. First, even the best circumstances do not guarantee a positive outcome. Second, it is important not to (indirectly) impart blame for past or future suicides. Recent national and statewide efforts in suicide prevention reflect a changed knowledge base about suicide, as well as an important shift in how we approach the issue of suicide as a society.

Research demonstrates that many individuals who attempt suicide are ambivalent about death (and life) which leaves wide open the possibility of successful intervention efforts. In addition, mental illness and/or substance use disorders are present in 90% of individuals who die by suicide (National Institute on Mental Health) and research shows that both mental illness and substance abuse can be treated effectively. These illnesses may be diagnosed or undiagnosed, treated or untreated. Improved screening and recognition of these disorders, as well as access to treatment, are keys to successful suicide prevention efforts. Talking about suicide is the first step to preventing suicide.

- Suicide is a public health problem. With over 36,000 suicides in the United States each year and estimated suicide attempts minimally 10 times that, suicide impacts all aspects of our society. Suicide is a complex issue, and preventing suicide takes a coordinated effort between faith leaders, family, friends, law enforcement, mental health providers, neighbors, schools, social service agencies, etc. *Connect* addresses all aspects of suicide including:

Prevention - education about early recognition of risk factors and warning signs

Intervention - skills for responding to suicidal behaviors or attempts

Postvention - appropriate response to promote healing and reduce risk for individuals, families, and communities after a suicide (Postvention becomes Prevention)

Preventing suicide is the responsibility of the whole community. Everyone plays a part in suicide prevention. It is important that this concept be reinforced throughout the project.

-We are all “gatekeepers”. Gatekeepers are family, friends, relatives, neighbors, coaches, librarians, hairdressers, bartenders, employers, etc., as well as key service providers. Having gatekeepers trained to recognize warning signs of suicide and how to connect with the individual and connect the individual with appropriate resources is the foundation on which Connect is built. All Connect protocols and training share gatekeeper concepts and language. Key service providers have protocols and training that is specific to their role. However, while key stakeholders may be trained in their profession, we are gatekeepers at all times.

-Wide applicability of the Connect approach. Most of the protocols and information is easily applied across the lifespan. Connect’s intent is to promote early recognition of any risk

factors (mental illness, substance use, child abuse, domestic violence, etc.) that can lead to suicide incidents. To that end, Connect collaborates with other community partners addressing these issues.

-Importance of cultural effectiveness. We are a diverse society. Diversity can include race, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic, rural/urban, and cultural characteristics of groups across the lifespan. Furthermore, cultural norms influence approaches to help-seeking and individuals at risk, including risk and resilience factors and access to health care. When implementing Connect, it is important to be mindful of cultural considerations.

-Youth play an important role in suicide prevention. Despite the support systems and safety nets that adults provide for teens and young adults, the first line of defense in successful prevention efforts of youth suicide are youth themselves. Teens and young adults frequently bypass the adult world support systems and instead turn to their friends for help and understanding. Thus, it is imperative that youth be involved in recognizing signs of depression or increased risk for suicide and know how to turn to a trusted adult for help. Youth can also play an important role in suicide prevention across the lifespan by identifying adults in their lives who are at risk. The best research to date demonstrates that it is critical to first have a community of trained adults prepared to support and respond to youth.

-Evaluation is a critical component to an effective project. Having a formal evaluation process in which outcomes are identified and measured is essential to understand the benefits of Connect. Evaluation results can strengthen Connect's training by providing local feedback which may help tailor the curriculum for maximum local effectiveness. Careful monitoring and evaluation of the Connect process will also help improve implementation, sustainability, and replication of it in other communities.

-Protocols will improve communication and collaboration between providers.

Disseminating profession-specific protocols will help increase understanding about what the roles and limitations of different disciplines/systems are in responding to suicide incidents. The discussions and the trainings on the protocols are intended to facilitate improved communication and a consistent response among different providers and stakeholders.