

# Youth Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention in Montana: The Role of Schools

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# Dr. Poland Opening Thoughts

- ▶ I am a survivor of my father's suicide and the author or co-author of six books on suicide prevention and school crises and several state prevention guides or toolkits
- ▶ Schools have a great opportunity to partner with county and state agencies and organizations to make a difference in suicide prevention
- ▶ Montana can not accept the state continuing to have among the highest suicide rate in the nations



# Opening Thoughts

*A youth suicide is most often the result of untreated or undertreated mental illness often in combination with adverse childhood experiences.*

*Most youth suicides can be prevented, and all youth need a go-to adult at school and in the community.*



# Opening Thoughts

*Schools have a great opportunity to prevent youth suicide. It is my hope that the next generation of adults know how to prevent suicide as they learned how in schools.*

*The suicide of a student has a ripple effect that is greater than ever before. Contagion is a concern after a youth suicide.*



# Opening Thoughts

*Increasing numbers of elementary age students are making suicidal statements and schools need to take it seriously every time.*

*Let's look at the Youth Risk Behavior Survey for Montana secondary students.*

## Montana YRBS H.S. Survey 2021 in the last 12 months

- 41.4% felt sad or hopeless
- 21.7% seriously considered suicide
- 18.0% made a plan
- 10.2% made one or more attempts
- Surveys of middle schoolers in a few states found similar responses.
- Middle schoolers were asked the questions over their lifetime.

<u>7&amp;8th</u>
36.1
20.8
18.3
13.5



## World Health Organization: What Works to Prevent Youth Suicide?

- Reduce lethal means available to suicidal youth
- Interrupt the development of suicidal behaviors as a result of adverse childhood experiences
- Increase education about the warning signs of suicide especially for educators, physicians and parents



# Youth Most At-Risk For Suicide

- LGBTQ youth
- American Indian
- Youth involved in bullying
- Youth in Foster Care
- Youth that are homeless
- Youth with disabilities
- Youth with substance abuse problems
- Youth engaging in NSSI
- Youth exposed to suicide



## *World Health Organization: What Protects Youth from Suicide*

- ▶ Family cohesion and stability
- ▶ Good relations with peers
- ▶ School success
- ▶ Coping and problem-solving skills
- ▶ Access to mental health services
- ▶ Knowing when to seek adult help
- ▶ Religious involvement
- ▶ Lack of access to lethal weapons



# Montana Crisis Action School Toolkit on Suicide CAST-S


by Scott and Donna Poland

- ▶ Sponsored by NAMI Montana and Big Sky Psychiatry Council and sent to every school principal
- ▶ Developed after years of experience and with valuable input from OPI, SAM and the Montana DPHHS and many individuals
- ▶ Divided into three sections: prevention, intervention and postvention
- ▶ CAST-S has many tools and reusable forms
- ▶ Montana CAST-S available at: [www.namimt.org](http://www.namimt.org) and [www.opi.mt.gov](http://www.opi.mt.gov) [www.dphhs.mt.gov](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov)



## Comprehensive Suicide Prevention in K-12 Schools

- **Mandated** annual training on the warning signs of suicide for all staff who interact with students (CAST-S Tools 1-5)
- Suicide prevention policies developed and in place that include how to work as a school team (CAST-S Tools 6-8)
- Extensive suicide screening training for school mental health personnel that includes role play and practice on suicide screening (CAST-S Tools 14A-14B)
- Documentation of all steps taken for student safety (CAST-S Tools 16-18)
- School mental health personnel ensure that a written safety plan is developed with students at-risk for suicide (CAST-S Tool 17)



## Comprehensive Suicide Prevention in K-12 Schools

- Parent notification procedures regardless of student age when students are at-risk for suicide (only exception if parental abuse is suspected then protective services are called (CAST-S Tools 18-19)
- Schools identify community based mental health professionals and facilities to refer students to that are competent in youth suicide risk assessment and management (CAST-S Tool 28)
- Suicide prevention information and crisis resources posted and easily found on the school district website (CAST-S Tool 29)



# Comprehensive Suicide Prevention in K-12 Schools

- ▶ Information is regularly provided to parents on the warning signs of depression and suicide and the importance of increasing supervision, removing lethal means and getting help if their child is depressed and or suicidal (CAST-S Tool 13)
- ▶ Careful monitoring and support for the at-risk student at school (CAST-S Tools 15A-15B)
- ▶ School personnel coordinate support for the student with community based mental health providers and hold re-entry meetings when a student is returning from hospitalization for suicide risk (CAST-S Tool 20)
- ▶ Implement best practice curriculum information for students on suicide prevention (utilize programs **recommended by MT. DPHHS**)

# Depression is Treatable Suicide is Preventable

If you are in crisis  
and want help,  
call the

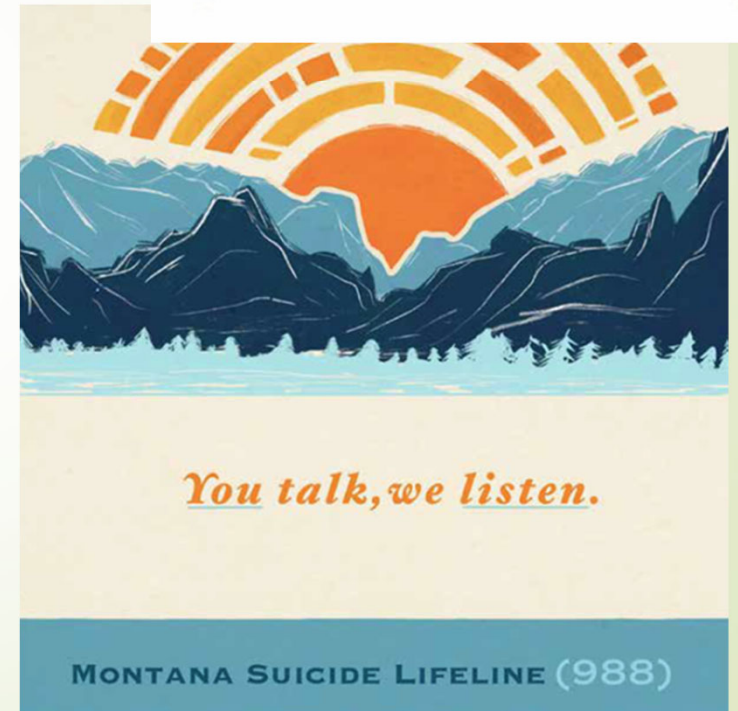
Montana Suicide  
Prevention Lifeline,

24/7, at

1-800-273-8255 (TALK)

(988 starting in July, 2022)

or text "**MT**" to 741 741



[www.dphhs.mt.gov/suicideprevention](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/suicideprevention)