

Postvention Community Working Group (PCWG) Guidelines for the Twelve Month Anniversary of a Suicide

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The 12-month anniversary of a suicide, a suicide cluster or an episode of suicide contagion can be a time of increased risk for a community. Anniversary dates are typically associated with dates of death, but they may also be associated with other significant dates like birthdays or other community events.

At anniversaries there may be:

- A renewed focus on the death of loved ones by suicide and the associated grief.
- Memorial services (including Te Kura Kōhatu or any unveiling of the headstone).
- An increased focus on suicide as a possible 'solution' to perceived problems or issues like relationship conflict, gambling and legal problems and other threats to ego.

This renewed focus on previous suicide deaths in a community and inevitably on suicide as a possible "solution" to perceived insoluble problems, may contribute to the risk of an "echo suicide cluster" or renewed suicide contagion, at or around the 12-month anniversary.

The risk is likely to be highest for:

- Those who were on the initial Vulnerable Persons Register, those most impacted by the initial deaths, or those who continue to be vulnerable, or have been displaying signs of unresolved complicated grief or suicidal behaviour.
- Those in the same community who have current vulnerability due to, for example, mental illness or previous suicidal behaviour.
- Those who would naturally have associated with the deceased or those who perceive themselves as in some way like the deceased or who identify with the deceased.

Managing risk at 12-month anniversaries

The Postvention Community Working Group (PCWG) will start planning for the 12-month anniversary(s) some months prior to the first significant date, to raise awareness that this can be a time of increased risk in a community. The PCWG considers how best to:

- Disseminate information about possible increased risks in the community at this time to health providers (e.g. GP/PHO) and mental health providers (DHB & NGO), requesting lowered thresholds for assessment and entry to services and promoting awareness of suicide warning signs.
- Identify those bereaved by the original suicide(s) (review PCWG minutes and the Vulnerable Persons Register) and ensure that they have appropriate and adequate support at this difficult time. For example, the PCWG family liaison person might visit with bereaved families and ask what support they need for the anniversary.

- Renew screening processes as carried out during the initial acute postvention stage; focus on those who may be vulnerable around the time of the anniversary and screen and refer to appropriate services as necessary.
- Follow up, where possible, those individuals identified at the time of the deaths and recorded on the original Vulnerable Persons Register, rescreening them for suicide risk and referring them to services and supports as necessary.
- Liaise with whanau and friendship groups who may be holding memorials to advise around possible risks and ensure appropriate supports are in place. In particular, ensure any memorials focused on young people:
 - are monitored by adults,
 - have local community supports and services available and disseminate promotional material,
 - are limited in drug and alcohol use, and
 - are held with parental support and involvement.
- Increase the frequency of social media monitoring and consider posting positive messages which celebrate recovery and resilience as well as promoting service availability and help-seeking behaviours.

Different cultural groups may acknowledge the 12-month anniversary in different ways:

- Ask if there will be a *Te Kura Kōhatu*, an unveiling of the headstone at this time. This is a culturally important event for Maori which brings whanau and friends together to unveil the gravestone and to remember and celebrate the life of the deceased.
- Ensure key Māori providers link back in with the whānau, provide the culturally appropriate support as required before and after this important ritual, and provide guidelines around safe memorials.

Other CPRS resources which may also be of use:

- CPRS Identifying Suicidal Concerns in Children and Adolescents
- CPRS Risk Factors and Triggers for Suicidal Behaviour
- CPRS Memorials and Remembrance Activities for those who have died by suicide

References

- Coleman L. (2004). *The copycat effect: how the media and popular culture trigger the mayhem in tomorrow's headlines*. Simon and Schuster.
- Cox GR, Robinson J, Williamson M, Lockley A, Cheung YTD and Pirkis J. (2012). Suicide clusters in young people: Evidence for effectiveness of postvention strategies. *Crisis*, 34(4):208-214.
- Dafoe B and Monk L. (2005). *Suicide Postvention is Prevention. A proactive planning workbook for communities affected by Youth Suicide*. BC Council for Families.
- Ihimaera L and MacDonald P. (2009). *Te Whakauruora. Restoration of health: Maori suicide prevention resource*. Wellington: Ministry of Health, New Zealand.