School Counseling Suicide Prevention Curriculum:

Statement of Purpose

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The loss of a person to suicide is a serious and overwhelming topic, it is often misunderstood and ignored because of its unpleasant and uncomfortable nature and the stigma attached to it (Gostelow,1990). It is more common than most people realize, as suicide is the third leading cause of death in people aged 10-25 with about 4,600 young people dying each year (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Not being prepared for the tragedy of the suicide of a student would be irresponsible on the part of the school counselor. As the consequences and impact a suicide can have are much farther reaching than the loved one's immediate friends and family, active prevention is needed to make the school a safe place and the response to suicide attempts quick and effective.

A comprehensive curriculum involves three levels of planning: prevention, intervention, and postvention (Gostelow, 1990). It is impossible to anticipate every possible scenario for intervention and postvention, but having a firm groundwork is imperative to have an effective response. Each level informs the other and may be altered to better suit the needs of the student body if a tragedy occurs and the system in place is not sufficient. Clearly it is easier to plan and evaluate the prevention portion of suicide prevention, so this project will focus mainly on this piece. However, the other two levels will be included to show a comprehensive view of the curriculum.

School systems need to be prepared for such a tragedy and have a curriculum in place that will actively work to provide information and healthy socio-emotional outlets for students and teachers. Parents, teachers, and students all need to receive information about warning signs, risk factors, community resources, and other related topics so that we can all prevent suicides of our students (Capuzzi & Gross, 2014). Professional school counselors are trained to be able to disseminate this information in an efficacious and tactful way, and have some training on how to respond to suicide and suicide threats. As such, it is important for them to spearhead the effort to create this curriculum. School counselors need to collaborate with faculty about a plan for a possible suicide or suicide attempt, and faculty need to be aware of the steps that will be taken if this event will occur. This is especially important given that there may be copy-cat attempts following a successful suicide, or the presence of suicide pacts (Brigham, 2003). Both copy cats and pacts can be devastating, and they are much more common than one may think (Brigham, 2003). Knowing the warning signs, the resources available, and the proper steps to take for a friend or loved one in this kind of emotional pain is imperative to reducing the likelihood of a suicide occurring within the student body.

Resources

Brigham, J. (2003, October 20). Proceedings from ISCA and ISCAC conference: *School*

*counselor's role in preventing suicide.* West Des Moines.

Capuzzi, D., Gross, D.R., (2014). *Youth at risk: A prevention resource for counselors, teachers,*

*and parents* (Google eBook)*.* Retrieved from google.com

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2014, January 9) *Suicide prevention: Youth Suicide.*

Retrieved from: http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/youth\_suicide.html

Gostelow, C. (1990). Youth suicide prevention: A school personnel training approach. In

*Australian Institute of Criminology Conference, Melbourne*.