

# SUICIDE PREVENTION POLICY AND INTERVENTION PROTOCOL

## I. SUBJECT

Suicide Prevention Policy and Intervention Protocol for all Departments and Offices of Maine State Government

## II. RATIONALE

Based on information gathered by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 2008 to 2012, suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in Maine overall. It is the fourth leading cause of death for adults ages 35-54, accounting for 45% of all suicides during these years. In Maine, a person is seven times more likely to die by suicide as they are from homicide. Suicide and suicidal behaviors affect thousands of Maine citizens of working age each year. Exposure to another's suicide has a profound and lasting impact on an individual.

Suicide is often preventable, especially in situations where agencies support intervention and provide the knowledge which allows an individual to intervene with a person at risk. The State of Maine will ensure that employees are aware of the resources available to appropriately respond when concerned about the suicide risk of oneself or a co-worker and that those experiencing suicidal behaviors understand that seeking help is encouraged and that help is available. It is essential that State of Maine Government establish a culture of seeking and obtaining help for suicidal behaviors among employees.

This policy and intervention protocol aligns with the Maine Suicide Prevention Program's Strategic Plan goal of reducing one of the biggest public health issues facing Maine citizens – suicide. Achieving this goal requires a statewide comprehensive, collaborative approach to suicide prevention. No single agency or individual can do this work alone. You are now joining hundreds of others throughout Maine, including primary and behavioral health professionals, school personnel, private businesses, community organizations, and the public and private sectors, to take action to prevent the tragedy of suicide from impacting not only state employees, but Maine families and communities as well.

## III. POLICY STATEMENT

The State of Maine is committed to promoting the health and safety of its employees. Consequently, this suicide prevention policy is intended to raise awareness and provide guidance to employees, supervisors, and managers in carrying out an appropriate response to suicidal behavior in the workplace. State of Maine employees, interns, contract employees, and temporary workers are covered by this policy and shall endeavor to adhere to the procedures set forth in this policy.

## IV. DEFINITIONS

**Human Resources Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper:** An individual who has completed suicide prevention training to enhance his/her knowledge of resources and who can guide a person who may consider intervening with a colleague in distress.

**Imminent:** Impending; menacingly close at hand; immediate threat.

**In the Work Place:** When a State of Maine employee is on duty, is in a State of Maine owned or leased work space, is using the facilities or services of the State of Maine, is using a vehicle owned or leased by the State of Maine, or is traveling on behalf of the State of Maine, the employee is considered "in the work place."

**Suicide:** Self-inflicted death with evidence (implicit or explicit) of the intent to die.

**Suicide attempt:** A self-injurious behavior for which there is evidence that the person intended to kill him/herself.

**Suicidal behavior:** A spectrum of activities related to thoughts and behaviors that include suicidal thinking, making a suicide plan, suicide attempts, and death by suicide.

**Suicide ideation:** Thinking about, considering, or planning suicide.

**Suicide survivor:** Family member, significant other, or acquaintance who has experienced the loss of a loved one due to suicide.

**Unattended Death:** A death that occurs with no one else present.

**Warning Sign(s):** The earliest observable signs that indicate the risk of suicide for an individual.

## V. INTERVENTION PROTOCOL

The State of Maine seeks to offer support and guidance should an employee express suicide ideation, show suicidal behavior, or encounters a co-worker expressing suicide ideation or showing suicidal behavior. While it is impossible to anticipate every scenario, it is the State's intent to strongly encourage fellow employees to act in their best interest, and the best interest of their fellow workers. The following actions are guides to that end:

### If you are considering suicide:

Thoughts of suicide are very frightening for both you and your family. If you have thoughts of suicide, please seek help from experts or colleagues.

<p><b>Immediate warning signs (for example):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinking or talking about wanting to harm yourself.</li><li>• Looking for ways to commit suicide.</li><li>• Talking or writing about death.</li><li>• Feeling overwhelming emotions like rage, anger, or shame.</li><li>• Experiencing a serious triggering event like a death or other life-altering issue.</li></ul>	<p><b>Seek immediate help:</b> <i>(if calling from a state-owned landline phone, always dial "9" for an outside line)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Go to the emergency room.</li><li>• Call 9-911.</li><li>• Call 9-1-888-568-1112 (Maine Crisis Hotline-available 24 hours a day staffed by people trained to assess suicide risk; crisis workers are mobile and can go to any site that is safe).</li><li>• Call the Employee Assistance Program (24/7) 1-844-207-5465</li></ul>
<p><b>Other warning signs (for example):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acting recklessly or taking risks.</li><li>• Increasing your alcohol or drug use.</li><li>• Seeing no reason to live.</li><li>• Feeling hopeless or trapped.</li><li>• Having dramatic mood changes.</li><li>• Withdrawing from family, friends, and others.</li><li>• Feeling anxious or agitated.</li><li>• Retreating to bed to sleep most of the time.</li></ul>	<p><b>You should consider:</b> <i>(if calling from a state-owned landline phone, always dial "9" for an outside line)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Confiding in someone you trust (i.e., doctor, clergy, counselor, colleague).</li><li>• Calling 9- 1-888-568-1112 (Maine Crisis Hotline-available 24 hours a day by people trained to assess suicide risk; crisis workers are mobile and can go to any site that is safe).</li><li>• Calling 9-211 (Can help find resources in Maine) Calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 9-1-800-273-TALK (8255).</li><li>• Call the Employee Assistance Program (24/7) 1-844-207-5465</li></ul>

## Helping a co-worker who may be suicidal:

As a co-worker, you spend a great deal of time at work and have day-to-day contact with those around you. You observe changes in their behavior and may see them at critical times in their life. Co-workers are often the first to notice that a fellow employee is experiencing a crisis, suicidal behavior and/or suicide ideation.

If an employee has reason to believe a co-worker is *in danger of suicide*, take him/her seriously until it is determined that there is no danger.

**When approaching a person who you think may be at *imminent* risk for suicide, speak to him/her directly and compassionately. Show you care. Depending on your relationship with him or her, you might say:**

- You seem to be in great pain; I know where we can get some help.
- I'm frightened/concerned about you based on...(state what you saw or heard).
- Are you considering harming yourself...killing yourself...? Are you thinking about suicide?
- What can I do for you; I want to get you the help you need.
- I want to help; you mean a lot to me.
- You are not alone!

<p><b>Take immediate and prompt action if the person is (for example):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expressing a desire to harm him/herself.</li><li>• Talking or writing about death or suicide.</li><li>• Looking for ways to commit suicide.</li><li>• Seeing no reason to live.</li><li>• Feeling hopeless.</li><li>• Displaying unusual anger, anxiety or agitation.</li><li>• Complaining about not sleeping or sleeping all the time.</li></ul>	<p><b>Seek immediate help:</b> <i>(if calling from a state-owned landline phone, always dial "9" for an outside line)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Call 9-911 (if co-worker has the means at hand to do self-harm or is out of control).</li><li>• Bring your concern to the attention of his/her supervisor or manager.</li><li>• Contact a person at the next level of responsibility.</li><li>• Stay with the person (or make sure the person is in a private, secure place with another caring person) until you can get further help.</li><li>• <b><i>Upon receiving a report of possible suicidal behavior, the manager or supervisor may contact the Human Resources Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper who will offer guidance and support.</i></b></li></ul>
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**If you are concerned about the recent alarming behavior changes listed in the left box below, it is appropriate to have a private conversation with him/her. Again, depending on your relationship with this person, you might say:**

- There seems to be something weighing you down; I'm willing to talk about it with you.
- You haven't been yourself lately; do you want to talk about it?
- I'm worried; you seem anxious/desperate/detached recently.
- Is there anything wrong that talking with a professional might help?

<p><b><i>If you observe that a co-worker may be (for example):</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling hopeless.</li> <li>• Acting recklessly or taking risks.</li> <li>• Increasing his/her alcohol or drug use.</li> <li>• Having dramatic mood changes.</li> <li>• Withdrawing from family, friends, and others.</li> <li>• Expressing rage or uncontrolled anger.</li> <li>• Stating he/she feels like a burden to others or feels trapped.</li> <li>• Displaying unusual anxiety or agitation.</li> <li>• Complaining about not sleeping or sleeping all the time.</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Encourage the co-worker to:</i></b> <i>(if calling from a state-owned landline phone, always dial "9" for an outside line)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confide in a person of trust (i.e., doctor, clergy, counselor) or mental health professional.</li> <li>• Call 9-1-888-568-1112 (Maine Crisis Hotline- available 24 hours a day by people trained to assess suicide risk; crisis workers are mobile and can go to any site that is safe).</li> <li>• Contact the Human Resource Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper.</li> <li>• Call 9-211 (provides assistance in finding resources in Maine).</li> <li>• Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 9-1-800-273-TALK (8255).</li> <li>• Call the Employee Assistance Program (24/7 1-844-207-5465</li> </ul>
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**Do's and Don'ts of Suicide Prevention**

There are certain “do” and “don’t” behaviors that experts recommend using when either approaching someone who appears imminently suicidal or someone who may be considering suicide, or is in a crisis. These “do” and “don’t” actions include:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>DO's</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take him/her seriously and offer your full attention</li> <li>• Stay calm and in control of your own emotions, fears, or anger</li> <li>• Listen, Listen, Listen</li> <li>• Show compassion and concern</li> <li>• Speak carefully and slowly</li> <li>• Be direct</li> <li>• Be positive and reassuring</li> <li>• Remove the means of committing suicide (pills, knife, gun) if safe to do so</li> <li>• Build Hope</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Don'ts</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not judge</li> <li>• Don't offer advice</li> <li>• Don't say you know how they feel</li> <li>• Don't interrupt</li> <li>• Don't agree to keep a secret</li> </ul>
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***If a suicide attempt has been made or a person possesses the means to cause harm (gun, knife, medications, etc):***

- Clear the area
- Call 9-911 (if calling from a state owned landline phone; always dial “9” for an outside line)
- Do not leave the person alone, unless there is a threat of harm to others.

## VI. Survivors of Suicide

For those who have lost a loved one or co-worker to suicide getting back into a normal work routine can be a positive experience. Depending on the relationship with the deceased and the personality/vulnerability of the co-worker, the person's workspace may also be a constant reminder. Some co-workers may feel a sense of responsibility or question if they could have/should have been able to intervene. The EAP is available for state employees to work out these emotional responses to suicide. If a suicide occurs in the workplace addressing the grief that follows is important. Often people will feel confused about how they can find support for themselves or provide support to a co-worker who is touched by suicide. If several staff members are affected, consider a debriefing guided by an EAP counselor or consider encouraging individuals to seek personal help through the EAP.

Call the Employee Assistance Program (24/7) 1-844-207-5465

*If an unattended death is discovered in the workplace (even if suicide is suspected), an employee should call 9-911 immediately and:*

- A. Contact supervisor and Human Resource Office.
- B. Supervisor must ensure that:
  - 1. The body or the area is not disturbed under any circumstances.
  - 2. 9-911 is called or other appropriate contact is made with law enforcement.
  - 3. The area is cleared of all personnel.
  - 4. Arrangements are made through the Employee Assistance Program and/or other sources of counseling for debriefing of employees impacted by the death.

*(Note: Unattended deaths require law enforcement's immediate involvement. The cause of death must be determined according to legal procedures.)*

## VII. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

This policy and intervention protocol will be distributed to all persons covered by this policy each September. Information on this policy and suicide awareness and intervention services will be part of the State of Maine New Employee Orientation and included in the new employee orientation package.

All employees are expected to become familiar with this policy.

***Remember: There is help for State Employees whose feelings seem to be getting out of hand. A difficult life situation can make these feelings difficult to cope with.***

- You can help prevent suicide.
- Have the courage to get involved.
- Call: Maine Crisis Hotline @ 9-1-888-568-1112 or 911.

***Suicide prevention...it's up to all of us.***