



A School-Based Suicide Prevention & Response Program

What is *Lifelines*?

The Lifelines Trilogy is comprehensive school community suicide prevention program that includes information to address youth suicide prevention, intervention and postvention. *Lifelines* was developed by a social worker, Maureen Underwood, and a community psychologist, John Kalafat, who understood that a systems approach to youth suicide prevention would be the most effective strategy for getting both personal and organizational buy-in to a suicide prevention initiative. Having provided a variety of suicide prevention services to schools and communities for over 35 years, the authors understood that unless suicide prevention was perceived as a shared responsibility that could be accomplished with measurable action steps, any initiative would be hard to sustain.

Kalafat and Underwood designed a suicide prevention program for administrators, faculty and staff, students, and parents that provides suicide prevention information appropriate to each role in the school. The presentations provide a simple and consistent message to everyone in the school: “we care about youth suicide prevention and we know how and what to do if a member of the school community is in need of help”. Kalafat and Underwood also knew that an effective program needed to be broader in focus than simply prevention, so they enlisted colleagues to create models for school-based intervention and assessment of suicide risk for the school mental health professionals. Postvention, a school-based response in the aftermath of a traumatic death, including discussion of policies, procedures and crisis team development, was the final component of the Trilogy.

Lifelines Prevention, Intervention & Postvention are published by Hazelden Publications, Center City, MN and appear on both the National Registry of Evidence – based Programs and Practices (NREPP) and the Best Practices Registry (BRP) of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. If you would like information about the program please email info@munderwoodassociates.org.

Here is a brief description of each of the *Lifelines* components:

Lifelines: A Suicide Prevention Program

Designed for implementation in middle schools and high schools, *Lifelines Prevention* targets the whole school community by providing suicide awareness resources for administrators, faculty and staff, parents, and students. The 4 class evidence-based student curriculum fits easily into health class programming and lesson plans. *Lifelines Prevention* educates students on the facts about suicide and students’ role in suicide prevention. It provides information on where to find suicide prevention resources in the school and community. Training materials are included for faculty and staff that provide accurate and practical information on identifying and referring students who might be at risk for suicide. *Lifelines Prevention* also includes a presentation for parents that answers questions about youth suicide and prevention, and involves them in the school’s suicide prevention activities.

Lifelines Intervention: Helping Students At Risk for Suicide

Intervention is based on a three-tiered approach. The first addresses early identification and assessment of at-risk students; the second addresses referrals to community resources for additional services; and the final tier enhances the protective factors that increase student resilience and provide buffers from stress. *Lifelines* firmly believes that schools are not mental health centers; they simply take the first step in helping direct students to the care they need at community mental health resources. Targeting school resource staff, the **Intervention** manual reviews a protocol for an assessment interview, outlines and demonstrates specific strategies for engaging students and parents in the assessment process, and calls attention to special categories of students who might be at elevated suicide risk. It also provides direction for the establishment of programs that enhance student resilience.

Lifelines Postvention: Responding to Suicide and Other Traumatic Death

Lifelines Postvention: Responding to Suicide and Other Traumatic Death is a comprehensive, whole-school best-practices manual specifically designed for primary and secondary school communities. This unique program educates everyone in the school community on how to successfully address and respond to not only suicide, but any type of traumatic death that profoundly affects the school population. With in-depth references and detailed plans, this resource outlines a response strategy (i.e. policies, procedures and development of a school crisis team) that reflects the challenges schools face in dealing with a death within the school community. Also included are references and support materials that allow school leaders to recognize and reduce the risk of suicide contagion (or “copycat”) behavior within the school.

How Is *Lifelines* different from other suicide prevention programs?

Like most school-based programs, *Lifelines* is a universal program which means it's directed at the entire population of a school or a grade level. Besides being strongly research based, it is unique even in the field of universal programs in several ways:

- It is a *comprehensive* universal program, with specific, detailed content for all school community components. Many other programs target only one or two community components.
- Program content is devoid of clinical or mental health jargon and presents information in language that is accurate and easily understandable. Even the curriculum, in its consistency with school mandates and culture, is not designed with a primary focus on mental health. Unlike some other programs, it does not aim to screen students for suicide risk or address suicidal feelings or behaviors. Instead, classes emphasize help-seeking behaviors and are aimed at students who come in contact with at-risk peers.
- Student classes, which are 45 minutes long, fit easily into class periods and content is correlated with national curriculum standards.
- *Lifelines* is designed to strengthen internal school resources by training teachers to present the student curriculum instead of using outside resources.
- It provides a consistent message about suicide prevention that is reinforced throughout the prevention, intervention, and postvention components.

- *Lifelines* is designed to be sustainable in a school through the development of policies and protocols and the integration of the prevention component into the student curriculum. There are no hidden expenses involved either in program implementation or continuation.

How has *Lifelines* been evaluated?

The *Lifelines Prevention* curriculum was studied in two suburban, middle-class schools in the Northeast with the following outcomes:

- *Lifelines* students demonstrated significantly greater knowledge about suicide when compared with control group students. *Lifelines* students also demonstrated increased positive attitudes toward suicide prevention, especially attitudes related to help-seeking behavior. They also responded more appropriately to how they would help a possible suicidal peer. Students also rated the *Lifelines* curriculum more favorably than their regular health class curriculum.

A recent evaluation in Delaware, where the prevention curriculum was provided to all middle school students, there was a 45.5% drop on a national survey in the number of middle school students who admitted to thinking about suicide after taking the curriculum compared to before the curriculum was administered. There was also a 50% decline in the number of students who reported trying to seriously hurt or kill themselves. Additional evaluation is currently underway to determine if the results were sustained for additional academic years.

In addition, a separate evaluation of *Lifelines Postvention* program, presented at several national conferences, demonstrated an increased capacity of a school to respond effectively to the needs of the school community in the aftermath of a student suicide as compared to its response to a similar death prior to the *Lifelines* training.

If you would like information about *Lifelines Prevention, Intervention & Postvention* please email: info@munderwoodassociates.org.