

**Fairfax County
Youth Suicide Review Team**

Protocol

Adopted February 2015

Goals

The Fairfax County Youth Suicide Review Team (YSRT) has two primary goals:

- To identify systems, policy, and practice changes to inform suicide prevention efforts.
- To identify trends in suicide and common risk factors for youth suicide in Fairfax County that can inform and improve efforts related to suicide prevention.

Authority

Code of Virginia §32.1-283.2 provides for the establishment of local and regional child fatality review teams upon the initiative of local officials. Teams “may be established for the purpose of conducting contemporaneous reviews of local child deaths in order to develop interventions and strategies for prevention specific to the locality or region.” Agencies are permitted to share information regarding cases. Such information is to be held confidential; violations are punishable as a Class 3 misdemeanor.

Guiding Principles

- There is no single cause of a suicide, nor is there a single change that absolutely would have prevented a suicide.
- The YSRT is not intended to identify a “cause” of a suicide.
- The purpose of the YSRT is to gain a better understanding of youth suicide and, in doing so, identify opportunities to implement strategies to prevent future suicides.
- Issues, circumstances, and events preceding a suicide are important, as is understanding the vulnerability of youth and others following the suicide of a teen and the need for postvention.

Membership

The following agencies shall each appoint one representative to serve on the team:

- Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board (CSB);
- Fairfax County Department of Family Services, Child Protective Services (DFS);
- Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department (FRD);
- Fairfax County Health Department (HD);
- Virginia Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME); and
- Fairfax County Police Department (PD).

Additional members shall include:

- A representative of Fairfax County Public Schools;
- A representative of Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, Court Services Unit;
- A representative of the faith community, to be appointed or recommended by the Faith Communities in Action Children and Youth Task Force;
- A private behavioral health professional, to be appointed or recommended by NOVACO; and
- A representative of CrisisLink, the locally-operated suicide prevention hotline.

Per the Code of Virginia, a team chairperson shall be elected from among the representatives from the CSB, DFS, FRD, HD, OCME, and PD. The full team will elect the chairperson at the first meeting of each year; each member will have one vote. (The team will operate on a school year calendar, so the first meeting of the year will occur in September.) The first chairperson, elected at the February 2015 meeting, will serve in that capacity through August 2016.

The team is coordinated by the Prevention Manager in the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services. Additional staff support is provided by the Office of the County Attorney, the HD, and other agencies as needed.

While the YSRT recognizes that individual members may occasionally miss a meeting due to a scheduling conflict, all team members are strongly encouraged to notify the team chair and the Prevention Manager at least three days in advance of a meeting to be missed and to send an alternate representative from their respective agency to participate in team review. The alternate representative is expected to fully brief the agency's team member on issues discussed at the review and to abide by the confidentiality policies that are signed by each member of the team.

If a team member misses more than three meetings in a year, the team chair may revisit that person's membership to determine whether he/she may need to resign from the team.

Member Responsibilities

To realize the YSRT goals and assist with the case review process, members will:

- Provide confidential case information from their own or their agency's records (as their legal and ethical obligations permit);
- Participate in the case review discussion and analysis in a fair, thoughtful, and meaningful way;
- Serve as a liaison to their professional counterparts, bringing back recommendations and lessons learned at team meetings to their professional community;
- Provide definitions and explanations of their profession's terminology and practices;
- Interpret the procedures and policies of their agency and/or profession; and
- Explain the legal or ethical responsibilities or limitations of their profession as they relate to the team's process.

Meetings

The YSRT shall meet monthly, except for July, August, and December. The team shall review two cases at each meeting.

Case Reviews

The YSRT shall strive to review all suicides of Fairfax County residents under the age of 18 each year, time permitting. A review cannot begin prior to the completion of any police investigations connected with the death. At least every three months, the Prevention Manager shall obtain from the Fairfax County Police Department the names of individuals under 18 years of age who died by suicide within the past six months; the OCME will be asked to verify that they have attributed the manner of death to suicide. New incidences will be added to the list of cases for review.

Once cases are identified, the Prevention Manager determines which agencies or systems the decedent had contact with prior to the death. The Prevention Manager then contacts each of those agencies to complete case review forms and obtain all pertinent reports and case information that can be shared.

The Prevention Manager also researches all available media reports or other relevant information sources (e.g., websites) regarding the death or prior incidents.

The Prevention Manager compiles this information and enters it into the team's case review form as completely as possible, developing a case summary/narrative to be presented to the team.

The following are the types of information (although they do not comprise an exhaustive list) that could be collected by the Prevention Manager for use in case investigation and compilation:

- Law enforcement reports, including crime scene investigations and detective's investigative reports;
- Media reports;
- School records, including disciplinary records;
- Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court records;
- Criminal histories;
- DFS Child Protective Services records;
- OCME autopsy report;
- Medical reports and hospital emergency room information;
- Behavioral health care reports and treatment information; and
- Information regarding weapons confiscation, purchase, and background checks.

Depending on the fatality to be reviewed, agencies and organizations not represented on the team may have information related to the case. Such organizations could include, but are not limited to, private schools, private health care or other service providers, and Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court. These organizations may be asked to provide case information, talk with the team, or present to the team. All information would be held to the same privacy and confidentiality standards as other collected information.

Meeting Process. When necessary, as described above, the Prevention Manager invites to the meetings representatives from those agencies or systems that had contact with the decedent or the decedent's family prior to or following the death in order to provide the team with additional information not available in the written records. These representatives, and other staff present at meetings, are also bound by the confidentiality clauses described below.

During YSRT meetings, the Prevention Manager distributes the Case Review Form, case summary, and other relevant documents to the team. One person (not a team member) will be assigned as a recorder to take notes during meetings. Meetings proceed as follows:

1. Team members review the information given to them, with the narrative read out loud, and ask questions to clarify issues or obtain additional information about the case.
2. After reading and discussing the facts of the death, YSRT members will begin a thorough review of the death and the factors associated with the death. In particular, team members look for:
 - Precipitating factors;
 - Risk and protective factors for the decedent prior to the death;
 - Warning signs;
 - Interventions, including postvention;
 - Any gaps in services;
 - System failures or weaknesses associated with the death; and

- Recommendations for policy or systems improvement, including prevention strategies.
3. Each team member is responsible for participating in the case review discussions and for writing down findings and recommendations on the Team Member Feedback Form. Members can take additional notes in team-provided notebooks that will be collected after each meeting and securely stored by the Prevention Manager. The team relies on the professional experience of each of its members. Therefore, it is important for team members to analyze each case according to their profession and contribute ideas and suggestions for inclusion in the team's recommendations based upon their expertise and experience in their field.
 4. At the end of each YSRT meeting, the Prevention Manager will assure that all case-related materials that were distributed are left in the room to be shredded or returned to the provider of those materials. After each review, the Prevention Manager summarizes the findings and recommendations identified in the review and maintains case statistics for aggregate reporting.

Confidentiality

All information and records obtained or created during a review "shall be confidential and shall be excluded from the Virginia Freedom of Information Act." Agency records will not be shared at meetings; but staff will discuss and summarize them. Team members and others who participate in the reviews will make no statement as to what transpired during the review or what information was collected during the review. Upon conclusion of the fatality review, all information and records concerning the victim and the family shall be returned to the originating agency or destroyed. Meetings are closed and members and individuals who attend meetings to present or hear information must sign a sworn statement to honor confidentiality; violations are punishable as a Class 3 misdemeanor. New confidentiality agreements will be signed prior to the review of each case.

Except in the case of gross negligence or willful misconduct, members and organizations "shall be immune from civil liability for any act or omission made in connection with participation in a...review."

Team members, including alternates, staff, and others present at the meetings, are not permitted to discuss any information related to the review with other individuals, including colleagues and supervisors in their respective agencies.

All materials, handouts, and team notes, including individual members' written notes (to be maintained in YSRT notebooks as described above), will be securely kept by the Prevention Coordinator between meetings.

Summaries and reports on the team's findings and recommendations are presented only in aggregate form to show patterns and trends in youth suicide.

Recommendations and Reports

Team recommendations are collected throughout the year and are not attributed to any one specific case. At the end of the year, team members review all recommendations to determine any trends or patterns. The team's final recommendations, to be included in the YSRT's annual report, will be selected based on the consensus of the team. Recommendations can include the identification of new points of intervention; a focus on specific risk or protective factors; changes in policy, legislation, or training; or other systemic changes.

The YSRT's annual report will include updated data on the prevalence of youth suicide and detail progress of reviews, patterns and trends in youth suicides, and policy recommendations in order to strengthen Fairfax County's community-wide work to prevent youth suicide. Additional reports (e.g., recommendations that may need immediate attention) may be issued as necessary. Working with team members and their agencies and organizations, the Prevention Manager will distribute team reports to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, the Fairfax County School Board, and other boards, commissions, and stakeholder organizations identified by the team.

All reports will be posted on the YSRT page on the Fairfax County website, as will information about the team, including this protocol document and contact information.

The YSRT encourages team members' efforts to educate stakeholders about youth suicide in Fairfax County. Team members are asked to coordinate with the YSRT chair and the Prevention Manager when making presentations about the work of the team.