By next year, school districts across Iowa must begin to provide at least an hour of annual training on suicide prevention and “postvention” — the coordinated school response following a student’s suicide — for all licensed personnel who have regular contact with students.

Several states have adopted similar policies. Here are examples of other policies among states in the Midwest:

- Illinois mandates training in intervention techniques for teachers, guidance counselors, social workers and others who work with students in grades seven through 12;
- Indiana requires two hours of suicide awareness and prevention training every three years for teachers, principals, librarians, nurses, psychologists and social workers in schools covering grades five through 12;
- In Ohio, suicide awareness and prevention training is part of the in-service training for teachers, counselors, nurses, psychologists, administrators and other “appropriate” personnel every five years.
- South Dakota requires at least an hour of training for educational professional certification (for both initial certification and renewal).

Teachers, guidance counselors and others who work closely with students are well placed to spot the signs of a student in distress and steer them toward treatment, if they know what to look for — prevention training aims to give them those skills, a report from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention notes.

Postvention training, meanwhile, can help an entire school (both students and adults) cope in the aftermath of a suicide and avert copycat incidents.

“Postvention can become prevention [when dealing with adolescents],” says Deborah Major, department director at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, who oversees Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide, a non-denominational program that counsels individuals who have lost a loved one to suicide.

Cindy Waderlow, a licensed clinical social worker who works with children and teens through that outreach program, agrees: “From what I’ve experienced, students really need to grieve, and communication can be pretty intense with social media when a peer commits suicide. Bring it out into the open and find a way for that discussion to take place.”

By:
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