



## Postvention as Prevention

### THE GOAL

It has been estimated that each suicide death affects approximately 115 individuals. Exposure to a suicide death can increase the suicide risk in others. It is important to provide a safety net around those exposed and impacted.

The goal of postvention is two-fold for survivors of a suicide loss:

- (1) to promote healing
- (2) to reduce suicide risk

When *postvention* effectively achieves this two-fold goal, it can prove to be a powerful strategy for suicide *prevention*.

### THE RISK

Statistically, people who know someone who has died by suicide are at higher risk for suicide themselves, and the impact can extend to individuals far beyond the immediate family and last for an extended period of time.

The manner in which a person is memorialized can sometimes lead to suicide contagion. While it's important for families and units to memorialize the service member in a way that is respectful, it's also important not to romanticize or glamorize the manner of death.

Media reports on suicide can also contribute to contagion if they glamorize or romanticize suicide, repeatedly report on the suicide, or provide graphic details of the suicide.

### KEY ASPECTS OF EFFECTIVE POSTVENTION

*Be Prepared:* Leaders sometimes don't believe that suicide will ever happen in their unit, and they may find themselves unprepared for an effective postvention response. It's important to have postvention policies and procedures in place *before* a suicide ever takes place. Tools for effective postvention, including a Post Suicide Checklist, are available at <https://www.resilience.af.mil>.

*Media Cooperation:* The way the media reports a suicide death can help reduce risk for survivors. Leaders should work with public affairs and mental health advisors in advance so that they understand the importance of adhering to reporting guidelines.

*Resources and Support:* Those who have a responsibility to respond to a suicide death and care for survivors should have access to appropriate resources. Visit <https://www.resilience.af.mil> for the Standard Operating Procedure for Postvention and other helpful resources. In addition to these resources, it's imperative to ensure that these individuals have the support they need.