

# Youth Suicide Prevention and Intervention Symposium

## Thursday, November 4, 2021

### Virtual

### 8:00 AM – 3:30 PM

#### 8:00 AM – 8:15 AM WELCOME

Christine Harms, M.S., Director  
Colorado School Safety Resource Center, Colorado Department of Public Safety

#### 8:15 AM – 9:45 AM PLENARY: Responding to a Student Suicide: Postvention Best Practices

John Ackerman, Ph.D., Suicide Prevention Coordinator for the Center for Suicide Prevention and Research (CSPR)  
Nationwide Children's Hospital (NCH)

Introduction by Lena Heilmann, Ph.D., Suicide Prevention Strategies Manager  
Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

The death of a student for any reason is tragic and emotionally difficult for a school community. Students and staff vary greatly in how they process and grieve an unexpected loss. When a student dies by suicide there is an emotional toll and a need to grieve but also an increased possibility of suicide contagion and misinformation that adds to shame and stigma among those impacted by the loss. Schools are in a difficult position to both support a healthy grieving process as well as helping students return to a safe, healthy learning environment often with little time to prepare for such an unexpected change. This talk will focus on key elements of effective “postvention” and highlight strategies for how school staff can take a compassionate and consistent approach in response to a student suicide. Postvention when done well should serve as an effective suicide prevention tool and enhance a school’s capacity to respond to other mental health crises.

#### 9:45 AM – 10:00 AM BREAK

#### 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM PLENARY: Addressing Mental Health for Black, Indigenous & Students of Color

Brandon J. Johnson, MHS, MCHES, Public Health Advisor  
Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Introduction by Lena Heilmann, Ph.D., Suicide Prevention Strategies Manager  
Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

Data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has shown that young Black children have the highest rate of youth suicides between the ages of 5-12. This rate has been increasing over the last 15 years while the suicide rate of white children in this age range has been decreasing. This data complements data found in the most recent Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS). “The prevalence of having attempted suicide was higher among Black (9.8%) than white (6.1%) students and higher among black female (12.5%) than white female (7.3%) students.” In 2020, the Congressional Black Caucus created an Emergency Task Force on Black Youth Suicide, which developed a comprehensive report on the issue. The HHS Report then followed that report to Congress on African American Youth Suicide. This workshop will discuss the emerging data, the CBC and HHS reports, and its implications for suicide prevention strategies, culturally specific risk and protective factors, and ways to increase identification and strengthen community supports.

#### 11:30 AM – 12:00 PM LUNCH BREAK

#### 12:00 PM – 1:30 PM PLENARY: Suicide Strategies in Schools

CSSRC Mental Health Team

Ron Lee, Psy.D, School Outreach Consultant, Colorado School Safety Resource Center

Kati Garner, M.A., Northwest Regional Training Consultant, Colorado School Safety Resource Center

Utilizing best practices as outlined by the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) the team will cover the essential features of a suicide strategy in a school or district. The team will address a number of important considerations for schools including legal issues, training needs and handling memorials and the media. This will be an excellent overview for administrators and mental health professionals.

#### 1:30 PM – 1:45 PM BREAK

**1:45 PM – 3:30PM      WORKSHOP: Using the CSSRC Suicide Assessment & Intervention Toolkit**

**CSSRC Mental Health Team**

**Ron Lee, Psy.D, School Outreach Consultant, Colorado School Safety Resource Center.**

**Kati Garner, M.A., Northwest Regional Training Consultant, Colorado School Safety Resource Center**

Knowing that there is no evidence-based suicide assessment tool available for schools, the CSSRC went in search of a best practice tool. Utilizing the work of three national suicide researchers and with their permission, the Center has created the CSSRC Suicide Assessment & Intervention Toolkit. Mental health providers will receive a copy of the Toolkit and the team will instruct the group in how best to utilize the components. These include a screen, assessment, monitoring tool and re-entry meeting guidelines. The Center only shares the Toolkit with trained mental health professionals so please join us for this workshop.

**3:30 PM      Evaluations/Certificates and Adjournment**

## Presenters in Alphabetical Order

### **John Ackerman, Ph.D.**

John Ackerman, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and the Suicide Prevention Coordinator for the Center for Suicide Prevention and Research (CSPR) at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. The CSPR helps school, healthcare, and community organizations implement evidence-based suicide prevention programs. The CSPR has provided trainings in 175 middle and high schools in 22 counties using an enhanced Signs of Suicide model to promote effective and sustainable suicide prevention in the classroom. The CSPR also provides postvention support and consultation to schools after a student has died by suicide. Dr. Ackerman serves on the faculty of the Zero Suicide Institute with an aim of reducing gaps in suicide care, particularly in children's hospitals. Dr. Ackerman's research focuses on neurocognitive risk factors for youth suicidal behavior and the effects of media on youth suicide.

### **Kati Garner, M.A.**

Kati Garner attended the University of Wyoming and obtained a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education Social Studies. She taught high school history for three years in Southwest Kansas before obtaining her Masters of Education in School Counseling and Licensed Professional Counseling from Southwestern Oklahoma State University. After working as a School Counselor in Southwest Kansas for six years, Ms. Garner returned to Colorado in 2016 and joined the counseling staff at Grand Junction High School. She most recently worked as the Mental Health and Crisis Coordinator for Mesa County Valley School District 51 in Grand Junction where she oversaw threat assessments, bullying, suicide risk assessments, and crisis response and acted as the district's Safe2Tell representative. She is a National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) PREPaRE Certified Trainer and a Mental Health First Aid Certified Trainer. As the Northwest Regional Training Consultant for the Colorado School Safety Resource Center, Ms. Garner provides services across the western half of the state.

### **Lena Heilmann, Ph.D**

Lena Heilmann (she/hers) is the Suicide Prevention Strategies Manager with the Colorado Office of Suicide Prevention at CDPHE where she coordinates youth suicide prevention work, leads postvention efforts, and serves as the Suicide Prevention Commission's Co-Chair. Lena is also a sibling suicide loss survivor -- she lost her sister Danielle to suicide in 2012. In recognition of her work supporting loss survivors, Lena is the recipient of this year's American Association of Suicidology's Loss Survivor of the Year Award.

### **Brandon J. Johnson, MHS, MCHES**

A tireless advocate for positive mental health and suicide prevention services for youth and adults across the country. Brandon earned a Bachelor of Science Degree from Morgan State University and a Master of Health Science Degree from Johns Hopkins University. Currently, he serves as a Public Health Advisor at the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in the Suicide Prevention Branch at the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS). In this role, Brandon serves as a Government Project Officer (GPO) for various suicide prevention grant programs that respectively target youth, adults, and health care systems. Brandon is the Program Lead of the Garrett Lee Smith State/Tribal Suicide Prevention Program, which provides grants for states, tribes, and territories to reduce suicides among 10-24 year olds. In his current role as the Co-Lead of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention's Faith Communities Task Force, he works with faith communities all over the nation to equip them with tools and resources to combat the often-stigmatized issue of suicide. Brandon serves as the subject matter expert in suicide among Black people and has led numerous projects to develop resources and materials specifically to prevent suicide among African-American youth.

### **Ron Lee, Psy.D**

Dr. Lee has worked as a school psychologist and school administrator in Colorado public schools for 28 years. As a school psychologist, he was primarily responsible for direct mental health service support for students, families, and staff in a high school setting. These services included suicide risk assessment, threat assessment, crisis response & recovery, and special education. As a school administrator, he held various district-level positions; including director of mental health services, coordinator of school safety, district truancy officer, assistant director of special education, racial equity trainer, manifestation determination facilitator, and district security coordinator. In his current role as School Outreach Consultant for the CSSRC, he provides training and support for K-12 schools and higher education in regards to various concerns involving psychological safety. He earned his doctorate degree in clinical psychology from the University of Denver, and his Bachelor of Science degree in education and psychology from Tufts University. He is licensed in the state of Colorado as a clinical psychologist, school psychologist, and K-12 school administrator.