

Western Teen Suicide Center: An Overview

Background:

In 1986, a bi-partisan Pennsylvania General Assembly subcommittee founded the Western Teen Suicide Center at the University of Pittsburgh.

You may know us as STAR-Center, or Services for Teens At Risk.

Dr. David Brent, internationally recognized for his research in suicide prevention and treatment, directs the Center. Dr. Mary Margaret Kerr directs our outreach and training services.

Mission:

The Center develops and disseminates new knowledge and strategies for preventing and treating suicidal behaviors, depression, and interpersonal violence.

As part of this mission, we teach educators, mental health professionals, and the public how to recognize and respond to signs of suicidal behavior.

Through our federally funded research programs at the University of Pittsburgh, our clinicians have developed and published new treatment strategies for the following conditions: teen depression, bipolar disorder, cognitive therapy treatment, and emotion regulation for families, educators, and mental health professionals.

Clinical Services:

Since our inception, we have successfully assessed and treated 7,667 children and adolescents at risk for suicide. Since last March, we have seen 285 patients, and have distributed approximately 200 copies of our manuals to families during monthly parent groups and/or during initial family sessions with therapists.

In July of 2007, the Center opened an Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) for depressed and anxious teens ages 13-18. In an effort to avoid hospitalization, we enroll at-risk teens in this intensive outpatient program. Teens in the IOP attend three group sessions per week where they learn new cognitive strategies, emotion regulation, problem solving and effective communication to alleviate their distress. While attending the IOP group, teens also see an individual therapist and psychiatrist weekly, for a total of nine hours/week for four to six weeks. Since this program began, 133 adolescents have been served.

Crisis Response Services:

We have a contingent of crisis response specialists on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Our crisis services are available to any district or agency. For assistance, simply call us at 412-864-3346.

When a suicide or tragedy occurs in a school district, we consult with educators and help them form a response strategy. In addition, we can provide comprehensive district-level reviews to aid schools in preventing mental health crises and identifying students at risk.

Over the course of the year, 72 copies of our crisis response handbook were distributed to school districts statewide. To make this resource more accessible, individuals now may download our manuals from our website.

Sharing Our Expertise:

In the past 15 years, we have provided technical assistance, training, and resource materials to over 77,478 individuals or groups in Pennsylvania. In the past year alone, we served over 2,227 individuals and reached 41 counties across the state through our specialized presentations, conferences, and direct requests for assistance or resources.

Last year, our two conferences in the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh areas attracted over 470 attendees. In addition, STAR-Center staff has provided training on reducing mental health crises on college campuses, in the wake of the Virginia Tech tragedy.

Our staff is deeply involved in planning and implementing Pennsylvania's Garrett Lee Smith federal grant, which will bring over \$1,345,000 into the Commonwealth for suicide prevention efforts.

A new training tool is a web cast available through our web site: "Suicide Risk: Comprehensive Assessment and Clinical Management" presented by David A. Brent, M.D., Center Director. This program is free of charge, and individuals may receive continuing education credits for a minimal fee.

All Center materials are available on our website, www.starcenter.pitt.edu. Over the past four years, traffic and hits on the site have increased by nearly 100%. Our redesign of the Center web site last year has resulted in 720,574 hits with an average of 2,370 hits per day.

Our email list currently reaches 2,212 subscribers, representing a 29% increase over previous years.

Approximately 16,000 Pennsylvanians subscribe to our print mailing list.

Survivors of Suicide:

We have been aiding friends and family of suicide victims since 1987 with our Survivors of Suicide (SOS) community support group, which has garnered national acclaim and recognition.

SOS's mission is to provide a supportive environment for survivors to voice the painful feelings caused by the suicide of a loved one.

Our SOS group leader has written a handbook for others who want to provide this critical support in their communities. During the past year, we distributed 123 copies to professionals and to participants attending the SOS support groups run through the Center.