Follow Best Practices for Programs and Trainings

A program or training will more likely have an impact if it incorporates best practices and has been shown by research to be effective for preventing suicide. You can ask a program or training developer for formal evaluations to see the outcomes. Some programs are also listed in SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP), where you may be able to find evidence of effectiveness.

The following best practices are adapted from *Applying the Principles of Prevention* (2005) and *Framework for Successful Messaging* (2015).

Comprehensive Approach – A program or training is more likely to have an impact when it is part of a comprehensive approach. Here are some considerations:
- Effective programs address multiple areas of a person's life, such as health, education, social connections, and social conditions, by providing services in a variety of relevant settings.
- Effective programs offer a wide variety of activities to address the target problem, which usually has multiple risk factors. These activities may include several components, such as curriculum-based interventions, media campaigns, systems change, and environmental strategies, that can affect economic-social conditions.

Teaching Methods – A program or training is more likely to have an impact when it incorporates various teaching methods. Here are some considerations:
- Effective programs focus on the development of skills that enable the participants to avoid problem behaviors. Skills that have been associated with effective prevention include helping participants develop their cognitive (thinking) skills, their ability to communicate assertively, and their ability to resist the problem behavior.
- Effective programs provide hands-on experiences for participants. Rather than only depending on sharing information and discussion, effective programs facilitate activities (e.g., role plays, verbal and written practice) that allow participants to develop and practice their new skills.

Sufficient dosage – A program or training is more likely to have an impact when its participants are exposed to a sufficient dosage of it. Here are some considerations:
- The amount of dosage needed to produce positive outcomes is contingent on the participant's level of risk and/or the amount deficits (i.e., the greater the risk factors of the participants, the greater the dosage necessary).
- Effective prevention programs provide some type of follow-up or booster sessions to help sustain the effects of the original intervention. The effects of most strategies diminish over time. Booster sessions support the continued use of information and skills learned in the original activity.

Theory-Driven – A program or training is more likely to have an impact when it is based on a scientific behavior change theory. Here are some considerations:
- Effective prevention programs are able to describe a theory of how or why the strategy is likely to change behavior. By describing a theory, the strategy model can be refined to maximize its chances of producing positive outcomes. A logic model is a theory of action and can be used to map out what your program intends to achieve.
- Effective prevention strategies use reverse engineering to prevent behavior problems and promote positive behaviors. They start with the goal or outcome in mind (after identifying the problem or need) and work backwards to develop a strategy that will produce the desired outcome.

Positive Relationships – A program or training is more likely to have an impact when it includes opportunities for youth to strengthen relationships with peers and other adults (not including professional service providers). Here are some considerations:

- Effective programs support the development of positive relationships, such as training in decision making, communication, and conflict resolution skills.
- In the absence of good relationships, effective programs provide an opportunity for participants to establish a strong relationship with at least one person who is invested in their well-being.

Safe Messaging –A program or training is more likely to have an impact when its messages are positive, safe, effective, and make use of relevant suicide prevention guidelines. Here are some considerations:

- Certain types of messages about suicide can increase the likelihood that at-risk individuals will consider or attempt suicide themselves. Effective programs do not include content that is potentially harmful or undermines prevention. Instead they promote positive messages such as *prevention works*, and *resiliency and recovery are possible*.
- Effective programs include messages that emphasize help is available and effective services exist and that there are actions individuals can take to prevent suicide.

You can assess whether your programs and trainings follow these best practices. If a program or training doesn't follow most of these practices, you may want to consider an alternative strategy to meet your goal.

My Program/Training Follows Best Practices	Yes/No
Comprehensive approach *Is your program/training part of a comprehensive approach and does it include multiple components and affect multiple settings?*	☐ Yes ☐ No
Varied teaching methods *Does your program/training incorporate various teaching methods (e.g., role-playing, hands-on learning, etc.)?*	☐ Yes ☐ No
Sufficient dosage *Is your program/training long enough to present the content, or does it include follow-up?*	☐ Yes ☐ No
Theory driven *Does your program/training articulate a theory about how it will produce a change in behavior?*	☐ Yes ☐ No
Positive relationships *Does your program/training include opportunities for students to strengthen relationships with others?*	☐ Yes ☐ No
Safe messaging *Does your program/training and materials follow safe messaging guidelines for suicide?*	☐ Yes ☐ No