Selecting and Implementing a Gatekeeper Training

What Is a Gatekeeper Training?

A *gatekeeper training* is a type of training that teaches people to recognize and respond to people who are at risk for suicide.

Gatekeeper trainings provide knowledge and skills in the following:
- Recognizing individuals who show warning signs of suicide and may be at immediate risk
- Recognizing individuals who may be at long-term risk for suicide
- Responding appropriately to both types of risk, including by connecting individuals to support and help

All gatekeeper trainings teach the same concepts, but they often differ in their complexity, length, format, target audience, and evidence of effectiveness. You can use the questions in this information sheet to guide you through *preparing for, selecting,* and *implementing* the best gatekeeper training for your setting and/or community.

Questions to Guide You through *Preparing for* a Gatekeeper Training

Before you assess the readiness of your setting and community to implement a gatekeeper training, be sure to identify each clearly. For example, the setting could be a specific school, workplace, or other organization. A community could be a town, city, tribe, or county. **The community or setting you want to train is your "target audience."**

1. Is my community ready?
Assess a community's readiness regarding the following factors:

- **Is the community ready to discuss mental health and suicide prevention?** If a community is not ready, work to raise awareness before offering gatekeeper trainings. Consider strategies for effective messaging.
- **Does the community have adequate access to mental health services?** After attending a gatekeeper training, participants usually refer an increased number of at-risk individuals to mental health services. If your community does not have enough available services, increase access before implementing a training.

2. Does the setting have protocols, policies, or procedures for helping people at risk for suicide?
When people in a setting are given gatekeeper training, they need protocols, policies, and/or procedures specific to their setting that provide them with steps for responding to a person who is suicidal. These protocols should include how to keep the person at immediate risk safe until further help is available and where to refer the person for mental health services. Consider this example for youth-serving organizations.

If your community or setting is not ready, address these areas before offering gatekeeper trainings.

3. How does this gatekeeper training fit within my community's suicide prevention plan?
It is most effective to implement a gatekeeper training as one suicide prevention strategy in conjunction with a variety of other strategies that are used for effective suicide prevention. You can learn more about different suicide prevention strategies in the section about a comprehensive approach on the SPRC website.

Strategic Planning
Engaging in strategic planning can help you choose a gatekeeper training that aligns with your community's demographics, culture, risk and protective factors, and other suicide prevention strategies. Create your strategic plan *before* selecting and implementing a gatekeeper training. Check out the steps in a strategic planning approach.

Partners
Involving partners in community assessments and strategic planning is crucial. Examples of partners include the following:
- Leaders who can provide resources for your trainings or who have access to the people you want to train
- Mental health service organizations that can provide key insights for the development of protocols or procedures shared during the trainings
- Representatives of the people who attend your trainings who can help you understand how to recruit participants and the cultural issues that may affect their willingness to be trained
- Representatives of the population in which you want to prevent suicide who can provide critical insights into their peers' culture, beliefs, and attitudes toward mental health and suicide

Questions to Guide You in *Selecting* a Gatekeeper Training

1. What Factors Influence Gatekeeper Training Selection?
There are many gatekeeper trainings available, and they vary on several factors. Use the following sections to help you make an informed decision about what gatekeeper training is best for your community.

Goal Alignment
It is important to pick a training that aligns with the suicide prevention goals and strategies you identified during the strategic planning process.

Audience
Many gatekeeper trainings have been developed to train specific target audiences (e.g., teachers, students, first responders, faith leaders) so that they can help the people they serve and their peers. For example, some gatekeeper trainings have been designed for teachers who can use what they learn to help students who may be at risk for suicide. When comparing gatekeeper trainings, look at the following:

- The audience(s) they were intended to train
- What evaluations show regarding their effectiveness in training them
- How similar the audiences and the people they serve are to the population you are trying to reach

Implementation

To maximize the effectiveness of a gatekeeper training, determine the implementation fit for your specific community and setting. Considerations include the following:

- **Length of the training:** Gatekeeper trainings vary from one hour to multiple days. It is important to consider how much time your target audience is able to invest.
- **Depth of the content:** When considering the depth of the content, refer to your goals for the training. For example, does the training only need to cover the essentials of how to recognize suicide warning signs and how to intervene appropriately, or should it include additional information on mental health and risk and protective factors?
- **Format of the training:** Gatekeeper trainings vary greatly from fully online to a mixture of online and in-person to fully in-person. They also vary in the technology and materials needed. Consider what format will work best to reach your target audience.
- **Gatekeeper instructor investment:** Most gatekeeper trainings require instructors to become certified by completing a training course. Consider who you want to facilitate gatekeeper trainings, their capacity to participate in instructor courses, and the activities required to maintain certification over time.
- **Cost:** Potential costs to consider include certifying instructors, maintaining certification over time, training materials, facilities, equipment, and supplies. For longer trainings, you may also need to budget for refreshments.

Adaptability for Different Audiences

You may need to adapt a gatekeeper training to work with the setting, occupation, role, or culture of your target audience. The developers of existing gatekeeper trainings vary in the amount of adaptability they allow. Determine the number and types of adaptations you will need to make. *Before* selecting a gatekeeper training, find out whether these adaptations are allowable with the organization that maintains the rights to the training.

For strategies and recommendations on effectively adapting existing gatekeeper trainings for different cultures, see *Guidance for Culturally Adapting Gatekeeper Trainings*.

2. How can I compare existing gatekeeper trainings?

Look through the SPRC tool *Choosing a Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training Program – A Comparison Table*. This tool provides a summary of information about gatekeeper training programs, including training length, target audience(s), formats, objectives, and links to training websites.

Questions to Guide You through *Implementing* a Gatekeeper Training

The following questions can help you to lay out your gatekeeper training implementation plan:

1. How, when, and where do I offer the gatekeeper training?

Keep the following information in mind to help you determine the best way(s) to reach your target audience:

- **Communication channels for training outreach:** Consider how your target audience normally communicates about events. This may include social media, newspaper, radio or television stations, community meetings, or word of mouth.

- **Preferred dates and times for the trainings:** Communities may only have time to attend trainings during specific days or times. Communicate with your target audience to identify any schedules, events, holidays, or religious observances that may impact participant availability.
- **Preferred locations for trainings:** Locations of in-person trainings can influence attendance. Keep in mind travel limitations that your target audience may have and where they already meet for other events. Hosting a training at a familiar location with easy access can increase attendance.
- **How often to host the trainings:** You may have a large audience to reach. If so, consider how many attendees are recommended for each training. For example, if training capacity is 30 individuals, you may need to offer multiple trainings across the same or different days.

Ultimately, your budget will also influence your decisions on how, when, and where to host gatekeeper trainings. For strategies to identify and raise funds for your trainings, visit the *Community Tool Box*.

2. Who should be involved in gatekeeper training implementation?
Provide individuals with clear roles as training instructors and/or planners to help ensure your trainings will be implemented effectively. Continue to partner with target audience representatives during implementation. Partner roles can include (a) serving as instructors, (b) helping to market or plan the trainings, and (c) providing a facility for the trainings. Leaders of organizations or workplaces can encourage or require attendance at trainings. Any active support from your target audience will increase the effectiveness of the trainings.

3. How do I monitor/evaluate the impact of my gatekeeper training?
There are two important types of evaluation for gatekeeper trainings:

- **Process evaluation:** A process evaluation helps determine if your gatekeeper training has been implemented as intended. It looks at how factors such as time, length, location, and messaging influence the training experience. Process evaluations can include formal evaluation tools as well as informal evaluation, such as discussions with the target audience. This type of evaluation can enable you to improve the methods by which your gatekeeper training is provided.
- **Outcome evaluation:** Outcome evaluation usually requires providing formal evaluation tools (i.e., surveys) to participants that allow you to measure and compare their knowledge and skills before and after the training. Most gatekeeper trainings have existing surveys you can use. Long-term follow-up that measures knowledge retained and actual behavior change can also be valuable, but they are often more difficult to assess and require additional planning.

For more information on process and outcome evaluations, look at Step 6: Implement, Evaluate, and Improve in SPRC's strategic planning approach.

4. How can I make my gatekeeper training sustainable?
There are two considerations in sustaining gatekeeper trainings:

- How to plan for sustainability of the trainings
- How to sustain the knowledge and skills gained from the trainings

Sustainability of Trainings

Key factors that influence the sustainability of gatekeeper trainings include:

- **Maintaining instructors:** This factor includes planning for how current instructors will maintain certification and how new instructors will be added. It should also include accurate budgeting for the costs of instructor certification and recertification activities over time.
- **Maintaining training materials and supplies:** This factor includes budgeting for the required training items (e.g., manuals) and general supplies needed to host trainings (e.g., paper, laptops).
- **Partnerships:** This factor includes investment in the training for your target audience. It may require regular meetings with your target audience, campaigns to promote trainings, and the creation of policies or events that build gatekeeper trainings into your audience's work (e.g., making gatekeeper training part of annual in-service sessions).

Sustainability of Learned Content

Research is mixed on how long content knowledge and skills gained from gatekeeper trainings last. It is important to include a plan to sustain gatekeepers' knowledge and skills. Strategies to sustain learning from gatekeeper trainings can include the following:

- **Related refresher exercises:** You can revisit content from gatekeeper trainings with short presentations. For example, provide reminders of suicide warning signs during staff meetings or ask teachers to role-play intervention techniques during in-service sessions.
- **Discussions about the use of the content:** You can provide opportunities for participants to discuss how they have applied the training content in the real world or how the training has influenced the way they interpret situations. You can integrate these discussions into already existing meetings or those hosted online.
- **Printed refreshers:** Send and/or post printed reminders. You can use these reminders to reinforce key training messages, such as reviewing warning signs, risk factors, and steps in making referrals.

Follow-Up Training

You may want to offer participants the same gatekeeper training periodically or even a different training. Research does not yet provide an optimal time to repeat gatekeeper training. When deciding whether to offer trainings again, consider both research showing decreases in gatekeeper knowledge over time and the feasibility of repeating trainings periodically.

Additional Resources

The following literature reviews and studies provide additional information on the long-term impact of gatekeeper trainings and sustaining participant knowledge:

Burnette, C., Ramchand, R., & Ayer, L. (2015). Gatekeeper training for suicide prevention: A theoretical model and review of the empirical literature. *Rand Health Quarterly*, *5*(1),16. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5158249/

Mo, P., Ko, T. T., & Xin, M. Q. (2018). School-based gatekeeper training programmes in enhancing gatekeepers' cognitions and behaviours for adolescent suicide prevention: A systematic review. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, *12*, 29. doi:10.1186/s13034-018-0233-4. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5992649/

Walrath, C., Garraza, L. G., Reid, H., Goldston, D. B., & McKeon, R. (2015). Impact of the Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Program on suicide mortality. *American Journal of Public Health 105*(5), 986–993. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4386522/