

Template for Agency Postvention Activities (TAPA)

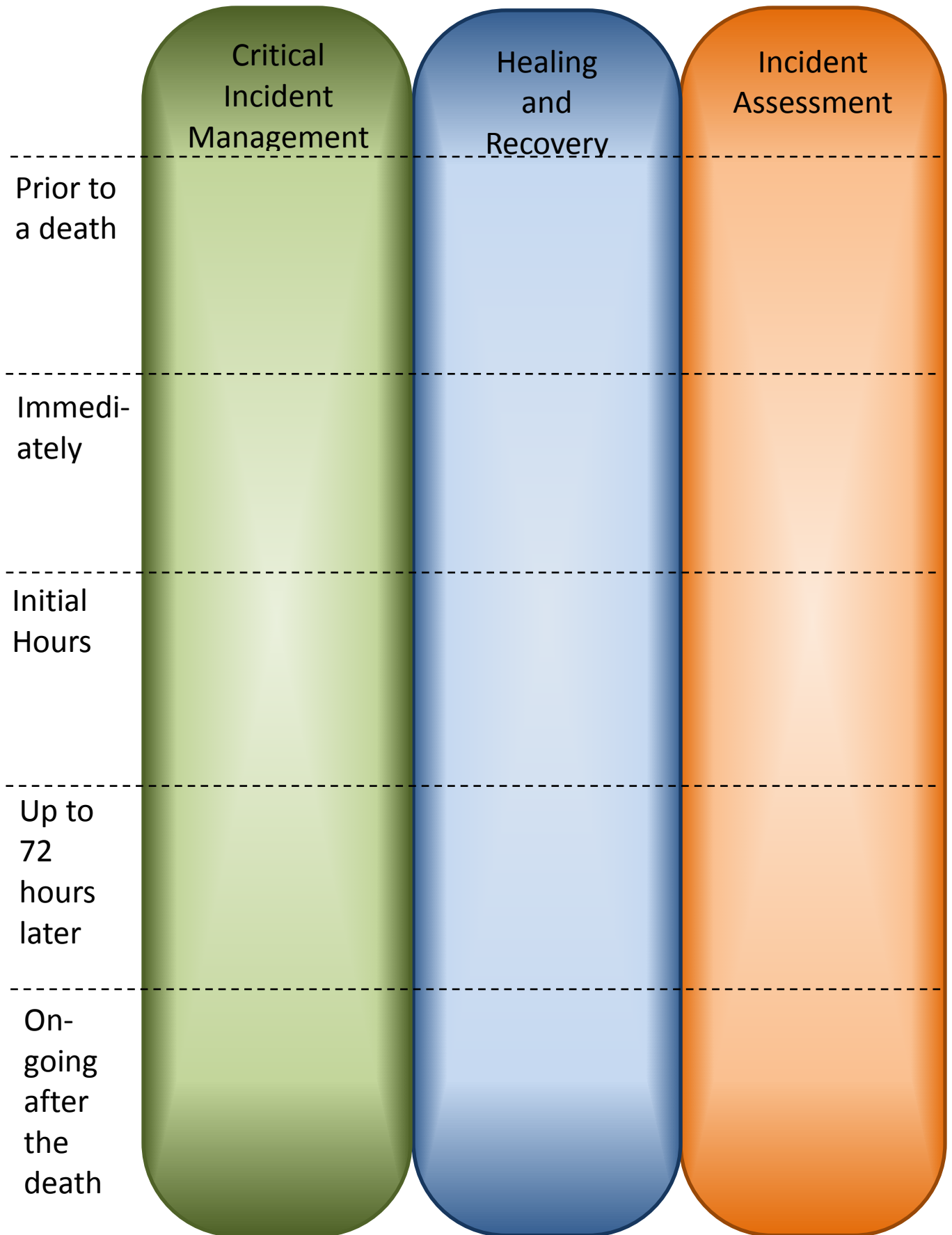


Author: Tony Hess, MPA

Table of Contents

<u>Layer I</u> : Timeframes and Domains of the Template Model	4
Explanation of the Timeframes and Domains of the Template Model	5
<u>Layer II</u> : Themes of the Template Model	6
<u>Layer III</u> : Action Steps of the Template Model	7
IIIa Action Steps Matrix	7
IIIb Action Steps Details	9
Permission and Utilization of the Template for Agency Postvention Activities	15

Layer I: Timeframes and Domains of the Template Model



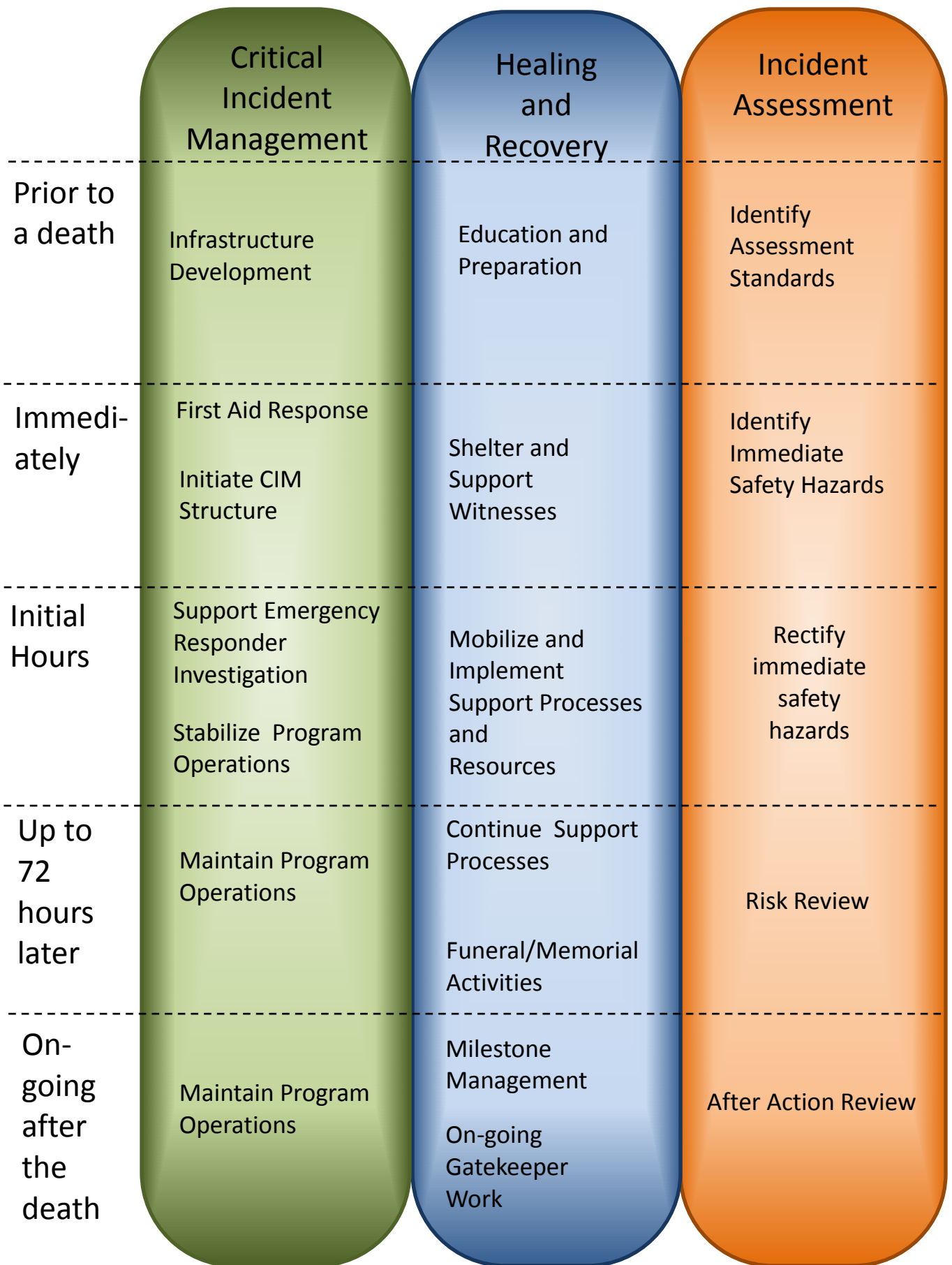
Explanation of the Timeframes and Domains of the Template Model

Domain 1: Critical Incident Management (CIM) – The Federal Emergency Management Agency, a component of the Department of Homeland Security of the US Federal Government, established protocols for easier coordination between emergency responders and organizations in response to an adverse event. A suicide death would qualify as an adverse event, and thus would trigger use of Critical Incident Management Procedures. However, prior to the development of the Hillside Family of Agencies Postvention Plan in 2013, Critical Incident Management Practices and Postvention best practices have not been joined. This domain of the Template for Agency Postvention Activities continues to join the two aspects of response to a suicide death.

Domain 2: Healing and Recovery – This domain focuses on the purposes of a postvention response, which are to promote healthy grieving and healing among those impacted by a suicide death, addressing suicidal ideation/behavior uncovered among individuals exposed to the suicide death, and prevention of contagion of suicide deaths. This domain is where traditional postvention responses have focused. This model continues the tradition of promoting healing and recovery, while expanding the scope of activity to coordinate agency and community responses, and addressing environmental management and incident review processes.

Domain 3: Incident Assessment – This domain focuses on prevention of subsequent suicide events. Efforts range from addressing environmental means restriction, as well as learning from this event, in order to prevent future events.

Layer II: Timeframes and Domains of the Template Model



LAYER IIIa – Action Steps Matrix

Timing	Domain I- Critical Incident Management Response to the Incident			Domain II – Healing and Recovery	Domain III – Incident Assessment
	Domain IA – The Scene of the Death	Domain IB – Program Operations	Domain IC - Communications		
Prior to the event	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning and Pre-emptive Education 2. Implement Suicide Prevention Measures 3. Transvention Activity 4. Prepare Employee Response Procedures 				
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Establish Critical Incident Management Procedures 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Establish Crisis Management Plan 7. Identify Crisis Response Resources 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Establish Communication Procedures and Templates 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Establish Emotional Support Procedures 10. Educate the Workforce 11. Prepare Media Template Materials 12. Establish Memorial Guidelines 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Establish Investigation Processes
Immediately	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Determine if Rescue is Possible 15. Activate Emergency Responses 16. Activate Critical Incident Management Procedures 17. Secure/Preserve the Scene 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Manage Crisis in the Location 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Gather the Facts 20. Make Initial Notifications 21. Follow Communication Guidelines 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 22. Shelter and Support Witnesses/Bereaved 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 23. Scan the Scene for Imminent Threats to Others/Secure Unsafe Conditions 24. Notify All Departments That Need to be Informed

Timing	Domain I- Critical Incident Management Response to the Incident			Domain II – Healing and Recovery	Domain III – Incident Assessment
	Domain IA – The Scene of the Death	Domain IB – Program Operations	Domain IC - Communications		
Initial Hours of the Event	25. Support Investigation Procedures 26. Coordinate with Community Postvention Systems	27. Assure On-going Program Operation 28. Attend to Participant Communications		29. Mobilize Support Resources 30. Identify Family Wishes	31. Perform a File Review for the individual receiving Services Who Died
Within 24 – 72 Hours	32. Sanitize the Environment	33. Assure On-going Program Operation	34. Prepare for Funeral Services/Commemoration Events	35. Facilitate Supports for the Bereaved 36. Prepare for Funeral Ceremonies/Commemoration Events 37. Monitor for Distress 38. Facilitator Bereaved Re-integration	39. Initiate Safety/Hazard Review of the Scene to Prevent Repeat Use of Safety Hazards in Another Suicide Attempt- Replicate Response Measures Across All Venues
On-going After the Event	40. Normalize Use of the Venue			41. Monitor Existing Memorial Locations 42. Address Memorial Requests and Impromptu or Spontaneous Memorials 43. Facilitate Bereaved Reintegration 44. Promote Self-Care and Self-awareness 45. Monitor the Bereaved 46. Prepare to manage milestones 47. Treatment for negative impacts from the event with the bereaved	48. Perform an After-Action Review

Layer IIIb: Action Steps Details

1. **Planning and pre-emptive education.** This action step sets the stage for effective postvention efforts, through solid planning and universal education of all employees of the agency.
 - a. **Planning** entails the development, distribution, and practice of each of the action steps of this postvention plan, created to be in line with the structure, resources, and culture of the agency.
 - b. **Education** entails creating agency-wide capacity to use best practice skills to: identify suicidal ideation/behavior, provide suicide first aid, perform risk assessment, and partner to develop safety plans.
2. **Implement Suicide Prevention Measures.** This action step is larger than postvention-specific work, and references work aligned with prevention efforts designed to prevent suicidal ideation/behavior from arising. Comprehensive efforts across all aspects of general suicide prevention activity (Prevention/Intervention/Postvention/Transvention efforts) are recommended to improve outcomes.
3. **Transvention Activity.** This action step is larger than postvention-specific work, and references work designed to restrict means, decrease stigma, and increase the use of neutral language. Comprehensive efforts across all aspects of general suicide prevention activity (Prevention/Intervention/Postvention/Transvention efforts) are recommended to improve outcomes.
4. **Prepare Employee Response Procedures.** The Agency should understand in advance how to provide support to an individual experiencing suicidal thoughts. Care pathways for both individuals receiving service and employees increases effective action. Employees should understand their role in these care pathways.
5. **Establish Critical Incident Management (CIM) Procedures.** Federal Critical Incident Management procedures are designed to provide a scalable and adaptable structure which allows an agency to interface with emergency responders in the event of adverse agency events. CIM Procedures provide the structure for implementing the agency's plans for adverse events.
6. **Establish Crisis Management Plan.** This action step prepares the agency to continue operation in the wake of various crises. This step is not specific to postvention activity, or Critical Incident Management. The agency should develop the procedures needed to maintain program operation, despite a variety of different adverse events.
7. **Identify Crisis Response Resources.** This step is designed to create partnerships with other community organizations to identify resources to mobilize in the event of a suicide death. Leveraging professionals skilled in emergency response to emotional distress is important, as professionals with this role in the agency may be impacted by the death, and unable to support others.

This step is also intended to create ready-to-go kits for comfort stations. Materials may include: tissues, trash bags, paper/markers, tape for creating and posting signage, blankets, etc. Having kits that can be quickly utilized can decrease chaos in the wake of an adverse event.

8. **Establish Communication Procedures and Templates.** Agency leadership should know in advance with whom they need to communicate, and how they want to frame these messages. Keeping communication aligned with safe messaging principles and providing a formal message from the agency can help defuse rumor and combat inaccurate information. Having templates for messages increases the speed by which the agency responds, and thus helps to minimize error in communication and increase the timeliness of communication in a time-sensitive situation.
9. **Establish Emotional Support Procedures.** While other action steps assure for relationships and resources for professionals to use, this step establishes what actions a provider will take to support

individuals impacted by the suicide death. These actions may be different due to role (employee versus individuals receiving services, etc.). This may be the Care Pathway used to support individuals receiving services and employees of the agency.

10. Educate the Workforce. All employees should be aware of the agency's postvention plan, how to access, activate, and utilize the plan, and the employee's role in the plan - should it be needed.
11. Prepare Media Template Materials. In many instances, the media will seek information once a suicide death has occurred. The agency will want to be prepared in advance for how to communicate with the media, and be sure that their message is aligned with safe messaging principles.
12. Prepare Memorial Guidelines. Standards for how to approve memorials, and how to approve or deny requests for memorials should be prepared in advance of being needed. Having a committee for request review and general standards to encourage the types of memorials that promote recovery and safety can be outlined as acceptable measures to reduce risk-creating memorials.
13. Establish Investigation Processes. While law enforcement will conduct an investigation, and many agency funding sources will also require a separate and parallel investigation into the death, the agency should be clear on whether they need to conduct their own investigation. If so, having procedures in place in advance is critical to timely, thorough, and complete investigation.
14. Determine if Rescue is Possible. This is the first action step in the wake of a possible suicide event. A helper would identify that a person is in physical distress or is unresponsive, and attempts CPR/first aid to help the person remain alive.
15. Activate Emergency Responses. If the actions above are successful, emergency responders will be needed to take over care of the person. If the individual is deceased, emergency responders must be notified of the death.
16. Activate Critical Incident Management Procedures. The employee attempting to help the person who is in physical distress/unresponsive should take charge, and designate another person present to activate the agency's critical incident management team and the agency's emergency response procedures.
17. Secure/Preserve the Scene. In the event of a death, law enforcement officials will need to perform an investigation. Employees or others present should prevent all efforts to "clean up" or otherwise tamper with the scene. Move bystanders away and secure the environment against anyone entering.
18. Manage Crisis in the Location. If the death has been witnessed, or people have come across the scene of the death, this is likely to cause a distress and crisis. People will be upset and may have any number of reactions. Employees will need to work to manage any crisis that arises.
19. Gather the Facts. A member of the agency's team should work to assemble accurate information on the event to communicate as warranted. As time passes and more information comes to light, this additional information is incorporated and communicated as needed.
20. Make Initial Notifications. This step mobilizes initial resources. An employee will need to follow established procedures for whom to contact both internally and externally. Consideration should be taken regarding communication with family of the deceased. This initial family notification may need to be performed by law enforcement, so partnership with emergency responders is essential. The notification process may roll into subsequent timeframes.

21. Follow Communication Guidelines. The employee in charge of communications (as one component of critical incident response) will manage all out-going communication and be a central hub of communications for the agency throughout the postvention response. This step will continue through subsequent timeframes, as new communication needs evolve throughout the postvention response. This step spans internal agency notifications, media relations, communication with external partners, and community relations.
22. Shelter and Support Witnesses/Bereaved. While the law enforcement investigation is occurring in the undisturbed scene of the death, individuals impacted by the event should be supported. This may be employees, individuals receiving services, visitors, or even passers-by. Identify a safe location away from the scene of the event where employees can sit with those impacted. Law enforcement may require separation of individuals who witnessed the event, and could ask that there be no conversation with the witnesses, in order to prevent contamination of the witnesses observations and recollection of the event. This will vary by event and law enforcement organization.
23. Scan the Scene for Imminent Threats to Others/Secure Unsafe Conditions. A member of the Critical Incident Management Team should be tasked with assessing for any imminent physical plant risks in the wake of the death that has occurred. Any identified risks should be addressed immediately. Preventing access to the scene may accomplish this step if the hazard is only located within the scene of the death. No changes can be made in the scene of the event. Other locations in the same building or in other buildings may pose a similar risk, and should be mitigated immediately.
24. Notify All Departments that need to be informed. Per the previously identified communication procedures, a member of the critical incident management team should be tasked with making all necessary notifications, per the plan.
25. Support Investigation Procedures. Per previously identified emergency response procedures, a member of the critical incident management team should be tasked with supporting law enforcement investigation efforts and act as a liaison between the agency and emergency responders.
26. Coordinate with Community Postvention Systems. Any death that impacts the agency will also impact the community in which the agency exists. It is important to coordinate responses with the larger community, and their implementation of a community postvention response.
27. Assure On-going Program Operation. Per previously identified emergency response procedures, a member of the critical incident management team should be tasked with implementing procedures needed to maintain program operation, despite this adverse event.
28. Attend to Participant Communications. This step mobilizes a member of the CIM team to focus on communications among individuals receiving services, in order to monitor and be able to respond to any indications of distress or suicidal ideation/behavior.
29. Mobilize Support Resources. Per previously identified emergency response procedures, a member of the critical incident management team should be tasked with communicating with previously agreed upon professional supports, identifying areas for comfort stations, and distributing ready-to-go comfort station kits.
30. Identify Family Wishes. A member of the Critical Incident Management Team should identify the best person immediately available to connect with the family of the deceased. Culture, relationship, and role all influence who this identified person should be. Families may want support, or may choose to break all contact with the agency - or anything in between. The liaison with the family should be prepared to acknowledge the family's wishes, communicate those wishes, and be a conduit between the agency and the family for future communication.

31. Perform a File Review for the individual Receiving Services Who Died. A member of the critical incident response team should perform a review of the file to determine if there were identifiable risks prior to the event. This will help the designated liaison(s) to perform two essential tasks:
- A. Communicate and partner with emergency responders and external investigators
 - B. Inform internal agency actions to prevent further suicide deaths

32. Sanitize the Environment. Once law enforcement has completed their investigation, an identified team can then sanitize the environment, and return the space where the death occurred to working order. Depending on agency resources, leadership may choose to have an arrangement with an external organization to perform this task. It is important to not assume that housekeeping/environmental services is equipped or emotionally prepared to perform this task.

33. Assure On-going Program Operation. A member of the critical incident response team should work with employees to assure that the program can continue to operate with as little disruption as possible. While it might seem counterintuitive, creating consistency in operations can create stability for employees and individuals receiving services. Because operations may be disrupted due to the need to secure the scene, support investigation processes, and restoring the scene to functional operation, some changes may be needed temporarily. This activity will continue into subsequent timeframes.

34. Prepare for Funeral Services/Commemoration Events. A member of the critical incident response team should reach out to family to determine their wishes regarding employee participation in any funeral or memorial services for the deceased. It is important to respect the wishes of the family.

It is also important that any memorial activity within the organization be managed. Some impromptu memorials may be created by employees or individuals receiving services. Having a plan for what types of memorial activity are permitted and align with safe memorial practices should be encouraged, but managed. Some types of memorial activity can promote suicidal thoughts/behavior in others impacted by the death, and should be safely prevented, or discontinued. Note that Action Step 12 prepares guidelines for memorial events within the agency.

35. Facilitate Supports for the Bereaved. There may be an outpouring of support for the family of the deceased. To help simplify communication and contact, and stay aligned with family requests, the agency leadership team should designate an employee to act as the liaison between the agency and the family. This person should coordinate donations, offerings, meals, etc. that may be offered by others. This can minimize the risk of overwhelming the family with contacts and items offered.

Depending on the choices of the organization and the family, if the agency is offering supports to help the family manage funeral/memorial activities, this liaison can also fulfill this role.

36. Prepare for Funeral Ceremonies/Commemoration Events. Agency leadership should manage employee participation in funeral and memorial activities that is in line with family wishes. As this may impact program operations, staffing and program needs must be taken into consideration. Because of the multitude of people involved, and the array of responses possible, it is important to actively communicate with all people involved, and share why decisions are made in the way they are, and be open to negotiation that balances program and employee needs around mourning.

37. Monitor for Distress. Employees and support personnel brought into the agency for postvention activity should be alert to all people (employees, individuals receiving services, others) who may be impacted by the suicide death. If distress is identified, then gatekeeper responses or other responses should be used.

38. Facilitate Bereaved Re-integration. It is important to consider how employees and individuals receiving services are re-integrated into program operations if they have been out of routine due to grief responses. Planning in advance for how to support an individual receiving services, should they become dysregulated due to continued grief responses, can positively impact the supports in the moment if they are needed. In addition, having back-up plans for how to manage employee coverage, should they be unable to continue their role is equally important to a successful continuation of program operation.
39. Initiate Safety/Hazard Review of the Scene to Prevent Repeat Use of Safety Hazards in Another Suicide Attempt- Replicate Response Measures across all venues. Once emergency responders release the site to agency control, a more thorough review (see Action step 23) of the physical plant should be performed in order to identify and restrict any means identified that could be used for a suicide attempt.
40. Normalize Use of the Venue. After emergency responders release the site back to agency control, and after the agency's employee tasked with the safety/hazard review of the scene of the death performs their safety review (Action Step 39), and after the scene is sanitized (Action step 32), work will need to be done to reintegrate the space into regular program operations. Factors specific to the death and the means of death may impact what must be done to normalize the venue. At times, a somewhat extensive change in layout in the space or other significant environmental modifications may help to disassociate the scene of the death from the continued use of the space. Employees and leadership should be attentive to signs that someone exposed to the suicide death is being triggered by the location after the venue is returned to use.
41. Monitor Existing Memorial Locations. If a prior suicide memorial site had already been established on agency grounds, the location should be monitored for both new memorial activity, gatherings of the bereaved, or contemplation of suicide by distressed individuals. Physical objects (stones, plaques, trees, sculptures, etc.) are not recommended for memorialization of a person who has died by suicide. This is not a matter of wanting to forget or devalue this person or their means of death. This is simply due to the fact that physical memorials can become the site of future suicide attempts, as a person with suicidal thoughts sees how someone else who died by suicide is remembered.
42. Address Memorial Requests and Impromptu or Spontaneous Memorials. Respond to memorials according to established procedures (Action step 12) and attend to impromptu memorials (leaving flowers, candles, other items, etc.) with established procedures. Memorials should avoid associating a specific location with the death, in order to prevent future gathering locations or scenes for another to act upon suicidal thoughts. Memorabilia from spontaneous memorials should be removed respectfully, and according to regular timing established as a part of memorial guidelines.
43. Facilitate Bereaved Reintegration. If people have been out of the regular flow of program operations due to suicidal distress, have employees support their reintegration into program operation. This may be an employee returning to work duties, or an individual receiving services returning to the program.
44. Promote Self-Care and Self-awareness. Employees should encourage all people in the agency to employ self-care and be alert to their internal signs of distress (and use this as a cue to reach out for help).
45. Monitor the Bereaved. Employees in the agency should remain attentive to individuals who identified as being impacted by the suicide death, and monitor for signs of recurring distress in anyone in the agency.

46. Prepare to Manage Milestones. A member of the critical incident response team should be alert to potential milestones (anniversaries of birthday, date of admission, date of hire, etc.) in the life of the deceased. As time passes and milestones approach, alerting employees to be attuned and attentive to possible distress in people due to the milestone.
47. Treatment for Negative Impacts From the Event With the Bereaved. As with anyone who experiences trauma and/or suicidal ideation/behavior, treatment to help the individual employ new and more effective skills should be provided.
48. Perform an After-Action Review. A member of the critical incident response team should review the conduct of the agency related to the postvention response. This review should focus on identifying what went well, what could be improved, and what was learned from the use of the agency postvention plan. These efforts are intended to improve subsequent use of a revised and improved postvention plan.

Permission and Utilization of the Template for Agency Postvention Activities

If an agency chooses to utilize this template model to develop a postvention plan, the following applies:

1. The author of the Template for Agency Postvention Activities (TAPA) and Hillside Family of Agencies may not be held accountable for the actions of the agency, or the outcomes of the plan they developed.
2. The author respectfully requests that the agency communicate their intention to use the TAPA Model. The author may be contacted as follows:

Tony Hess
Manager, Organization Development and Learning
Hillside Family of Agencies
1 Mustard Street
Rochester, New York 14609
ahess@hillside.com
585-654-1328

3. The agency may be asked for information regarding their use of the plan, including portions of their developed postvention plan, to help inform future revisions to the TAPA Model, or research into the effectiveness of the TAPA Model.