

Talking about suicide in the workplace

A guide for employers

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INTRODUCTION

- Isaksimagit Inuusirmi Katujjiqatigiit Embrace Life Council (IIKELC) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting life and preventing suicide across Nunavut.
- The organization, formed in 2004, works alongside other partners in the Nunavut Suicide Prevention Strategy (RCMP, NTI, GN, and others) to reduce the rates of suicide within the territory.
- IIKELC offers education, cultural programs, promotion of mental wellness and community engagement, and provides Nunavummiut with resources.

WHY WAS THIS RESOURCE DEVELOPED?

- Suicide is a topic that affects people across Nunavut, whether it be in their personal or professional life.
- For this reason, IIKELC has developed this resource to provide an overview of how employers can address suicide within the workplace.
- A list of resources is included at the end of the document. It is recommended that all employees be able to access this list easily and independently at any time.

Suicide risk and protective factors for Inuit in Canada (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2014)

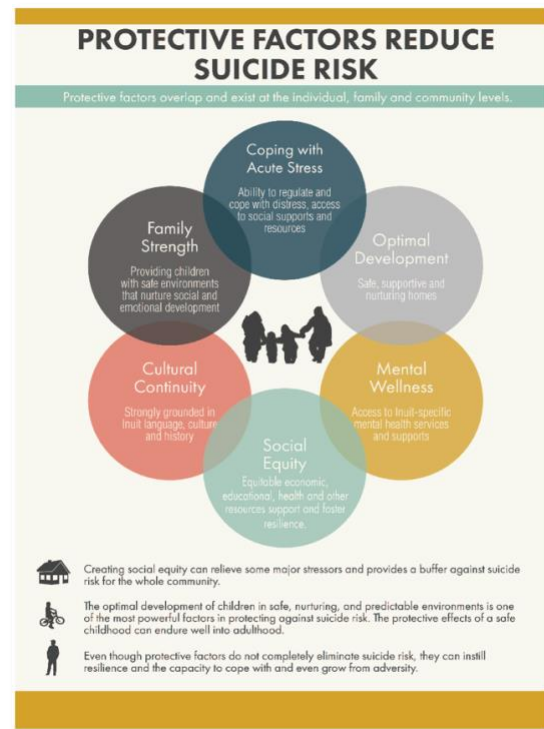


Risk factors:

- Historical trauma – impacts of colonialism, residential schools, relocation, dog slaughter
- Community distress – social inequities including crowded housing, food insecurity, lack of access to services
- Wounded family – intergenerational trauma, family violence, family history of suicide
- Traumatic stress and early adversity – experiencing acute or toxic stress in the womb, witnessing or experiencing physical or sexual abuse
- Mental distress – depression, substance misuse, mental health disorder, self-harm
- Acute stress or loss – recent loss, intoxication, access to means, hopelessness, isolation

Protective factors:

- Cultural continuity – strongly grounded in Inuit language, culture and history
- Social equity – adequate economic, educational, health and other resources support and foster resilience
- Family strength – safe, supportive and nurturing homes
- Healthy development – providing children with safe environments that nurture social and emotional development
- Mental wellness – access to Inuit-specific mental health services and supports
- Coping with acute stress – ability to regulate and cope with distress, access to social supports and resources

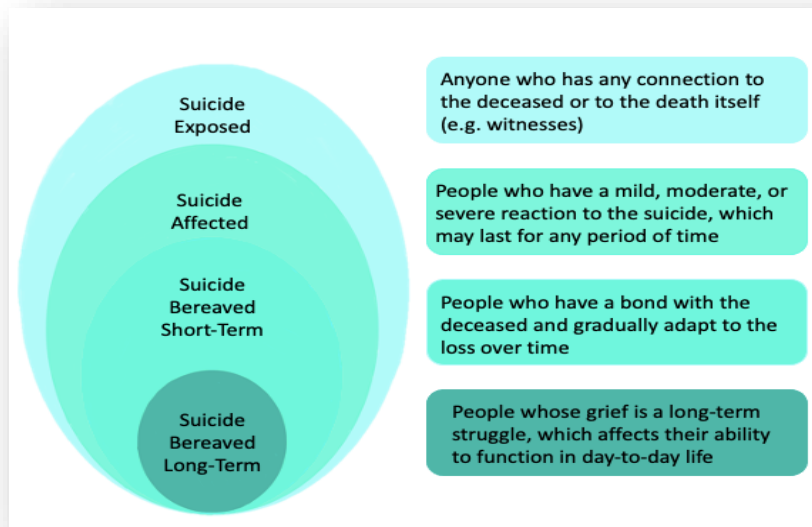


ADDRESSING THE TOPIC OF SUICIDE

- As long-term residents of Nunavut will know, the prevalence of suicide in the territory, especially within such a small population, means that **any death by suicide** has a wide impact.
- This is something that will be important to know for those who are new to the territory, and who may not be prepared for the effects that a suicide can have on their colleagues and the community as a whole.
- Even if a suicide occurs in a different community, it is likely that the person had friends and family across the territory. For this reason, it is important to be **mindful** of how a suicide is discussed.
- It is OK, and **encouraged**, to provide a **safe space at work** where individuals can voice their feelings of grief, sadness, anger, confusion, and helplessness when a suicide occurs.
- **Nobody should feel as though they can't talk about their feelings.**
- While expressing feelings is healthy, discussing things such as **how the suicide occurred, or graphic details about the death, is not appropriate** in a work setting.

- This is because it can be extremely difficult for others to hear, especially **those who have been directly affected** by the suicide, or who have lost somebody in the past.

Social impact of suicide (Each Mind Matters Resource Centre)



Summary

- **Inform.** Make sure that **all new hires**, especially those coming from outside the territory, are aware of the tremendous impact a suicide often has.
- **Support.** Provide a **safe environment** for staff to voice their feelings (if you are able to set up a designated safe room, this is also a great idea.)
- **Manage.** Avoid discussing **specific or graphic** details of a suicide, as this can be extremely triggering for those affected by suicide in the past.

PROVIDING SUPPORT AFTER A SUICIDE

1. Acknowledge.

- When there has been a suicide in the community, **acknowledge it**, without making employees who have been directly affected feel like they have been put on the spot.

2. Seek support for staff.

- It could be helpful to set aside some time to have a **sharing circle guided by an Elder or counsellor**. These can be arranged in person or virtually depending on your community. To find out how to set up a healing circle, contact your **workplace**

government assistance program or regional wellness hub (see last slide for contact details.)

3. Refer to community support network.

- It is also a good idea to reach out to the hamlet to see if a **mobile crisis team** has been requested, as they may be able to support your team while they are in the community.

4. Reassure.

- **Remind staff of the resources** they can make use of if they need assistance, refresh them on what supports they are able to access through the workplace, etc. Having a **printed list of resources** available for people to access in the office can be a big help.

Trauma Informed Management

- **Step 1: Be flexible.** When somebody has been affected by a death by suicide it is natural that they may make use of bereavement leave; however, some people may prefer to come into work to keep up their routine. Work with your employee to find a solution that suits you both.
- **Step 2: Be non-judgemental.** If somebody is not grieving in the way you think they “should” be grieving, try not to pass judgement and instead make sure you are **supporting them however you can in your role as employer** (flexible work hours, reduced workload, redistribution of tasks.)
- **Step 3: Show empathy and compassion.** There is **no timeline for grief and healing**. Be prepared for employees’ mental wellness to fluctuate following a death by suicide, and do not put pressure on them to “get over it” – it may take a very long time.
- **Step 4: Further education.** To learn more about trauma-informed management, consider taking a **trauma-informed practice workshop**. IIKELC offers both in-person and virtual options – for more information, visit www.inuusi.com/training

REFERRING AT-RISK INDIVIDUALS

- If an employee comes to you with **concerns about their mental health**, or if you see signs that they may be in need of assistance, you can direct them to the following services:
 - ✓ Healing by Talking
 - ✓ Employee/Family Assistance, or your workplace’s equivalent program

- ✓ Local community counsellors/health centre
 - ✓ Helplines and web chat services (see “resources”)
 - ✓ Self-identified helpers in the community (Elders, clergy, etc.)
- Remind the person that **mental health struggles are something we all face**, that they are nothing to be ashamed of, and that they do not affect their standing as an employee.
 - For additional information on how to intervene if you suspect somebody is at risk of suicide, **consider participating in an intervention workshop such as Reach Out or ASIST**. Find out more at www.inuusiq.com/training

RESOURCES

- **Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Helpline:** 1-800-265-3333 (24/7, English, Inuktitut upon request)
- **Healing By Talking:** 1-867-975-5367 or healing@gov.nu.ca
- **Nunavut Victim Services:** 1-866-456-5216
- **Suicide Crisis Helpline:** 9-8-8 for calls and texts (24/7, English and French)
- **Residential School Survivors Help Line:** 1-866-925-4419 (24/7, English and Inuktitut)
- **Inuit and First Nations Hope for Wellness:** 1-855-242-3310 (24/7, English and Inuktitut)
- **Kids Help Phone:** 1-800-668-6868 or text TALK to 686868 (24/7, English and French)
- **Government of Canada Employee/Family Assistance:** 1-800-268-7708 option 2
- **Government of Nunavut Employee/Family Assistance:** 1-800-663-1142 option 2
- For community-specific resources, please consult **IIKELC’s Community Resource Cards** at www.inuusiq.com