

Self-care for school staff following exposure to a suicide

The suicide of a student is a particularly challenging experience and will impact people in different ways. In order to appropriately support students, your colleagues and the broader school community, it is essential that you prioritise your own mental health and wellbeing.

Your response will be influenced by a range of factors and may impact your ability to act in your current role. School staff will be called upon to support the school's efforts to implement the Emergency Management Plan (EMP) but, at any point in the response, it is important to recognise that you have the option to opt out in order to preserve your own wellbeing.

Enacting your own self-care strategies and support network will be critical during this time.



Remember

As an employee of the Department you and your immediate family members (18 years and older) can access professional, counselling and mental wellbeing support through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Confidential counselling is delivered virtually, by phone or face-to-face at a time that is convenient for you. To organise support call **1300 361 008 – 24 hours a day 7 days a week**. This service is fully funded by the Department.

Alternatively, speak with your GP to arrange a Medicare-rebated Mental Health Care Plan.

Self-care strategies to maintain and restore wellbeing following exposure to a suicide

- Look out for signs of traumatic stress (including burnout and vicarious trauma).
- Make time for rest as this is critical for your resilience.
- Contact friends and increase time with those whose company you enjoy.
- Schedule pleasant events and maintain a schedule and routine.
- Reduce the intake of stimulants (e.g. coffee, alcohol, energy drinks) to help maintain arousal levels within a manageable range.
- Eat well-balanced regular meals to help you maintain physical and emotional wellbeing, energy and balance. There is increasing evidence linking a good diet to mental health.
- Add some physical exercise into your daily routine.
- Use your support networks at home and at school (including reaching out to personal and professional mentors).
- Use relaxation activities (e.g. meditation or mindfulness).
- Pace yourself. Responding to an incident can be time consuming. It may take weeks, and bring with it an unusually heavy workload. It may be necessary to ask a colleague for help to restore normality and recovery at school.
- Talk through your experiences with someone you trust and use available support mechanisms to avoid being overwhelmed.

Source: *Managing Trauma: A guide to responding to a critical incident*



Supporting resources

[Be You](#) has a range of [wellbeing tools and resources](#) for educators to support their mental health and wellbeing needs.

[5 Ways to wellbeing](#), an initiative of the Royal Melbourne Hospital, has a range of tips and suggestions that promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

Further supports and information can be found at: [Human resources: Employee Health, Safety and Wellbeing Services \(education.vic.gov.au\)](#)

Health and wellbeing services for principals (including assistant and acting) are available. For more information, see: [Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#).