When the suicide of a young person occurs in a school it’s important to be aware of the impact on students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Different cultures and religions may give different meaning to suicide. This consideration may influence schools’ response to managing students following such an event. Observing cultural appropriateness and sensitivity is likely to reduce further distress for the students, family, friends and community of the deceased young person.

Australia is fortunate to have a diverse population that represents a number of different cultures. Almost 24 per cent of Australia’s population are born overseas from more than 230 countries\(^i\). Some schools are likely to have students representing many different parts of the world.

Research suggests that depression and suicidality can increase with the stress associated with migration and the readjustment into new cultures. There are a number of events that have been identified which contribute to this stress including: bereavement due to loss of social supports and cultural identity, and ongoing settlement issues such as inadequate housing, unemployment and family dysfunction\(^i\).

When considering the students in your school with diverse backgrounds, here are some extra considerations following the suicide of a young person:

- Acknowledge that it is common for people to feel shame when someone suicides or seeks help for mental health issues, however a young person’s response to being open to managing this effectively may help to de-stigmatise help seeking and possibly prevent future suicides.

- Whilst respecting the privacy of the family of the deceased young person, it’s important to provide students with some credible information about the suicide of the young person rather than giving students misleading information. Providing incorrect information may complicate students’ reactions and create further distress. Talk with the family of the deceased young person about confidentiality, limits to confidentiality, and what the school is mandated to do in regard to managing the wellbeing of all other school students by discussing the suicide in a respectful and meaningful way.

- Utilise the skills and knowledge of any English as a Second Language (ESL) staff or Multicultural Education Aids if available.

- Respect the cultural practices of the students and families at your school, but in doing so, communicate to them that Australia has seen a considerable cultural shift in speaking about suicide. For a long time it wasn’t spoken about, however it has been shown that talking about suicide will not increase someone’s risk of suicide\(^i\).
Considerations for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People

- You may advise students about relevant CALD community organisations and the support they may offer. Be mindful when making referrals, the young person/family may need assistance accessing services. This may include orienting the family to a new service or receiving the service via an outreach method.
- If your school has a large population of students from a particular CALD background, you may consider seeking culturally appropriate information from the relevant cultural community concerning religious or spiritual beliefs pertaining to suicide. Be open to letting the students or deceased young person’s family educate you about their culture and customs.
- Be mindful of different cultures grieving practices, expressions of grief, meaning of death and more specifically beliefs on suicide. Be aware that there are a variety of beliefs and practices within different tribes from the same cultural group.
- Make appropriate concessions in the school for young people to engage in or to think about ways of self-care during this time. E.g. providing a safe space for students to engage in prayer or worship.
- Some families may want to hold the funeral overseas and send the body of the deceased young person back to their home country. Perhaps discuss considerations for a local memorial or ceremony to help young people from the school mourn. Be mindful that certain religious groups only permit others of the same religion to attend the funeral.

Some considerations for working with CALD families following the suicide of a young person:
- Get access to an interpreter if the family have limited comprehension and/or fluency in English, preferably not a friend or family member. Some mental health services have interpreter services available and some schools have allocated funding for use of a specific interpreter service. An alternative service is the telephone interpreter service (TIS) available 24 hours, 7 days per week. Ph: 131 450. It’s important to consider that the family may be resistant to use an interpreter for fear that they may know the interpreter. This may lead to fear of further shame by their community being informed of the circumstances of the death of the young person.
- Wellbeing staff at the school may be able to provide some practical advice about assistance with financing the funeral and other associated costs.

For more information on suicide or support and assistance visit headspace.org.au/schoolsupport or headspace.org.au


Acknowledgements:
Centre for Multicultural Youth www.cmy.net.au
Life www.livingisforeveryone.com.au

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