

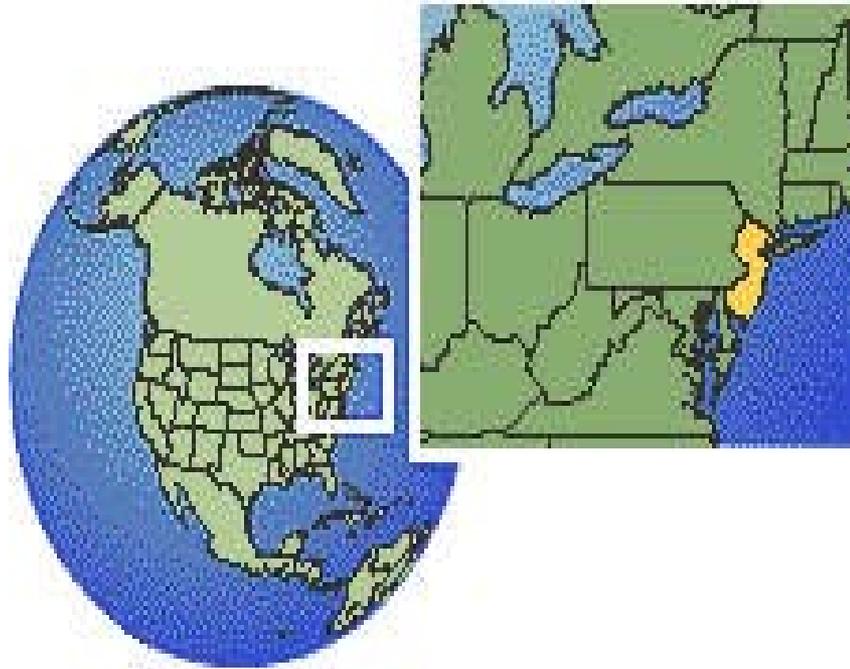
Manasquan High School: Youth Suicide Contagion Containment: A Case History



Manasquan High School

Where in the World...

New Jersey:





Manasquan, New Jersey

- Population 6500
- Regional public high school
- 6 sending district middle schools
 - High School population – 1040
- Student body:
 - ▣ 91.4% white
 - ▣ 6% Hispanic
 - ▣ 2.3 %Black
 - ▣ .3% Asian

Suicide Cluster

- ▶ A group of suicides or attempts or both that occur closer in time and space than would normally be expected in a given community

Suicide Contagion

- ▶ Process in which suicidal behavior is imitated by one or more individuals following the awareness of a recent threat, attempt, or completion ,or a fictional depiction of such behavior

Monmouth County, NJ Cluster

- ▶ RB, 16, January 20, 2008: death related to drug overdose
- ▶ TS, 18, April 26, 2008: death by train
- ▶ AC, 18, June 22, 2008: death by train
- ▶ JC, 20, August 24, 2008: death by train
- ▶ AK, 19, December 28, 2008: death by hanging
- ▶ UK, 17, May 22, 2009: death by train
- ▶ MC, 17, October 28, 2009: death by train
- ▶ KC, 21, May 22, 2010, death by train

Complicating Factors

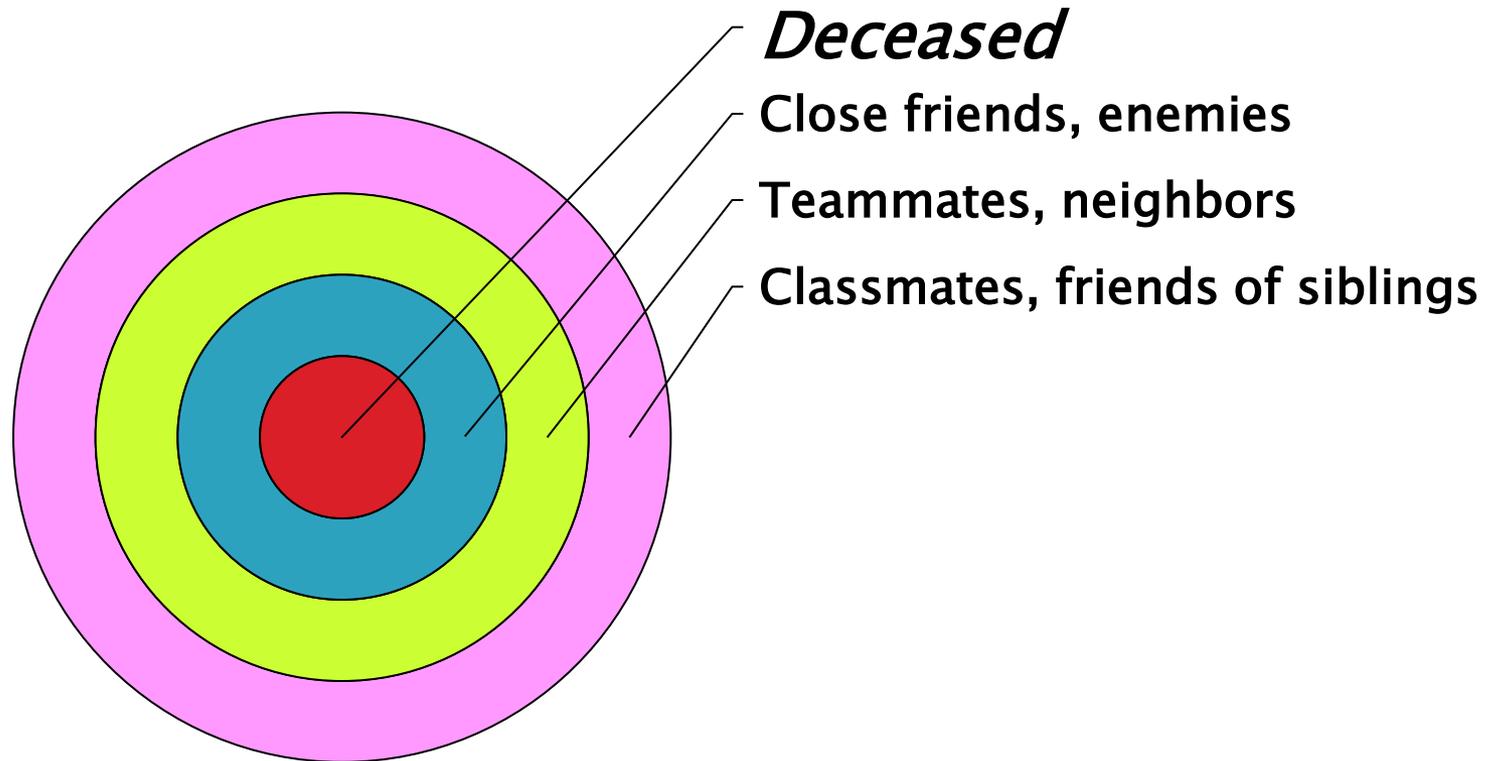
- ▶ Number of involved youth – no recovery time
- ▶ Parochial HS baseball coach convicted (Jan. 2010) of 10 counts of sexual misconduct with students
- ▶ New high school principal & superintendent
- ▶ Multiple community involvement
- ▶ Fragmented community response
- ▶ Initial mental health response perceived by school to be ineffective
- ▶ Leadership vacuum by county leaders

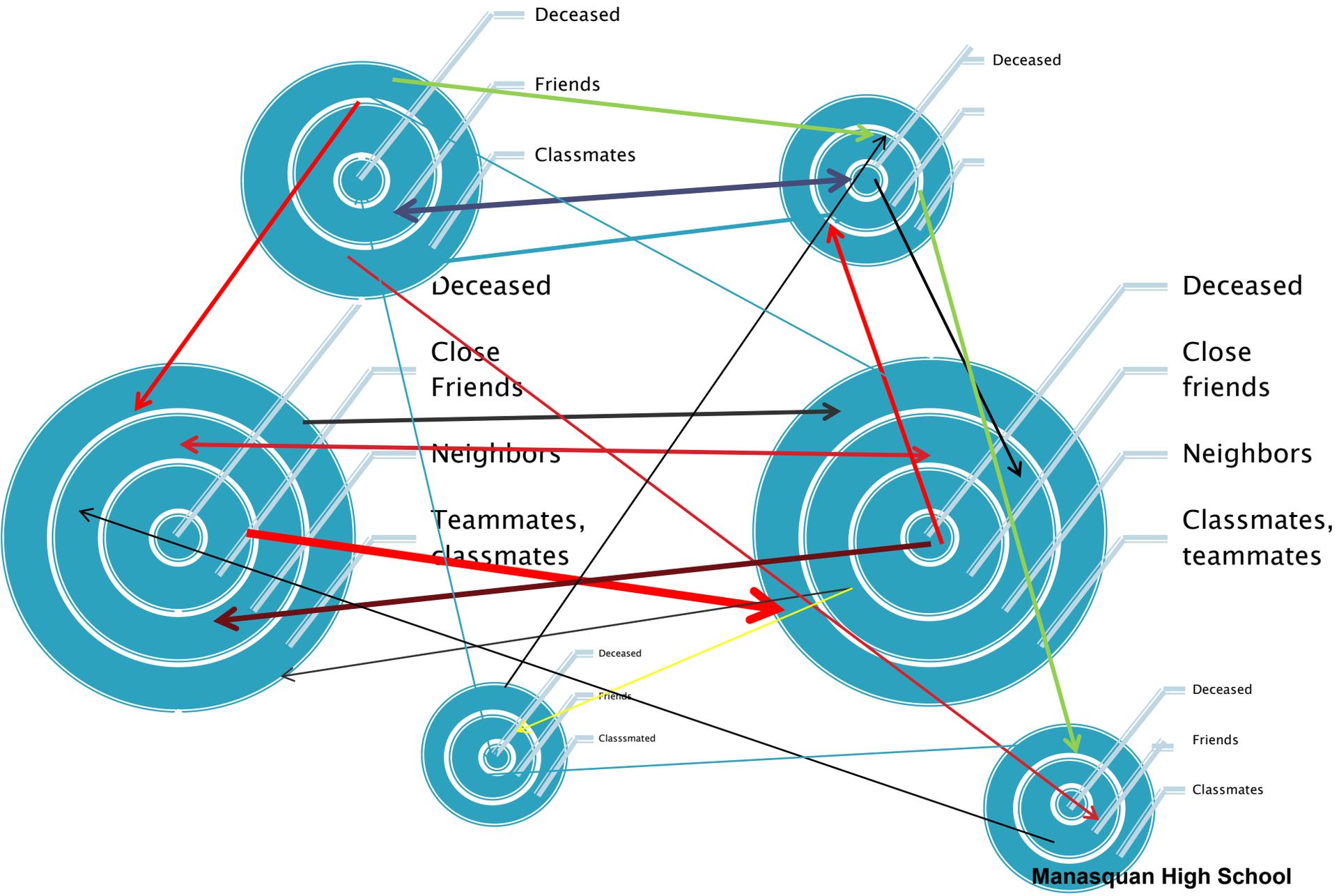
Biggest Challenges

- ▶ Evolving nature of the crisis:
 - additional deaths;
 - anniversary concerns;
 - multiple attempts on train tracks;
 - deaths by suicide of community adults.

- ▶ Natural dynamics of competing domains:
 - personal, organizational & partisan

Initial Challenge: Identifying Vulnerable Youth





Key Aspects of Effective Response

- ▶ Community-centered (school could not be sole response provider)
- ▶ Address crisis response and community empowerment simultaneously
- ▶ Anticipate political minefields & competing needs
- ▶ Grounded in key principles of crisis intervention: provision of control, support & structure

Immediate Response Strategy

Developed partnership with SPTS

1. Consulted with school administrators
2. Developed crisis plan & provided training to school crisis team
3. Developed curriculum for support group for affected siblings
4. Consulted with national experts at SAMSHA, CDC, SPRC, AFSP, Suicide LIFELINE

Immediate Response Strategy, Cont'd.

5. Increased community response capacity by training:
 - Emergency room staff at 4 local hospitals
 - Police from 7 municipalities
 - Clergy
 - Local teen help-line volunteers
 - Private practitioners to whom school referred students
 - Counselors from sending district middle schools
6. Applied for SERV grant

Initial SERV Grant

- ▶ Supported continuing consultation from experts
- ▶ Hired substitute staff as need
- ▶ Reached out to middle school sending districts
- ▶ Provided training in postvention/suicide containment

Project SERV Extension Grant

What it helped us do...

- ▶ School administration: Consultation was provided to administration to assist them in implementation of best practice post-intervention strategies.
- ▶ Crisis Response Team: Training was initiated to increase the skill level and expertise of the school's crisis team to deal with the complex issues related to managing suicide contagion.
- ▶ School Staff: The Society of Prevention of Teen Suicide's (www.sptsnj.org) online course listed on the SPRC best-practice registry was recommended for all staff.

Project SERV: What It Helped Us Do

- ▶ Staff provided with specific information related to the impact of anniversary dates on potentially at-risk students.
- ▶ Curriculum was evaluated by English department for readings on suicide and death.
- ▶ Lifelines curriculum was introduced to the school as well as the parents and the community. Curriculum emphasis is on helping students identify when a friend needs help.

Project SERV: What It Helped Us Do

- ▶ Students – structured psycho educational support group offered for the siblings of these students as a strategy to help manage their grief.
- ▶ Friends Helping Friends – because teens are usually the first to know about the suicidality of a peer this program was developed, (wristbands, posters, teen helpline, website, video, T-shirts, and eventually a teen center).
- ▶ Middle School students – focus groups to assess the impact of the deaths on these students.

The Role of Students in Recovery

- ▶ Habitat for Humanity – Brush with Kindness summer project for high risk youth.
- ▶ Teen Center – summer project involving the community at large.
- ▶ Identification of high-risk students – Triage is responsive, deliberate and thorough. Over 130 students identified.
- ▶ Resiliency scales research project offered to students.

Parents and Community

- ▶ Numerous educational parent meetings were held in the community (Monthly).
- ▶ Speakers and authors on the topic were brought in, for example David Shaffer, Columbia University; Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide.
- ▶ Consultation and training with police, clergy, local therapists.
- ▶ “Parent Sense” column started in the local newspaper.
- ▶ Collaboration with Mental Health Association of Monmouth County and Monmouth University.
- ▶ The Samaritan Center at the Jersey Shore established by local church to foster hope and well being through professional faith-based counseling.

Lessons Learned

- ▶ Mobilize immediately—engage community stakeholders.
- ▶ Gather data—regarding the deceased and their connection to other vulnerable youth.
- ▶ When working with students immediately after a crisis, keep the group numbers small.
- ▶ Track visits—to SAC, nurse, guidance counselor.
- ▶ Reach out to families of the deceased, not just with condolences but with information about which memorials can potentiate contagion.
- ▶ Discourage students from wearing attire with deceased students, names and symbols.

Lessons Learned

- ▶ Support the school staff with a strong crisis plan and keep them informed with daily meetings, phone chains and emails.
- ▶ Be aware of students being bullied on social networks.
- ▶ Check out relevant resources at the Suicide Prevention Resource Center website: www.sprc.org.
- ▶ Through your state suicide prevention program, reach out to other communities around the country that have experienced similar events. The school cannot do it alone!

How We Responded to Challenges

- ▶ Reviewed response strategy with national experts
- ▶ Fostered continued ownership of response by community resources
- ▶ Empowered students/youth in the community to be part of the response plan
- ▶ Encouraged community collaboration
- ▶ Engaged the media for constructive reporting
- ▶ Continue to assess and respond to emerging needs, outcomes, & process

YOUTH SUICIDE CLUSTERS:
What you must know to recognize and respond to a youth suicide contagion

Well AwareTM

Youth **RESPONSE** in Manasquan, New Jersey





Manasquan High School

<http://www.friendshelpingfriendsmhs.com/>

Friends Helping Friends of the Manasquan Community



Mission Statement

Friends Helping Friends is an organization that represents the unity, courage and strength of the Manasquan community. This organization shows that despite challenging times friends can reach out and help friends. In the last year Manasquan has suffered many unfortunate losses to our community. Through the Friends Helping Friends campaign, we will be able to provide support for one another. Friends Helping Friends is a teen-run organization that aims at meeting the needs of teens of Avon, Belmar, Brielle, Spring Lake, Spring Lake Heights, Sea Girt and Manasquan.

It is in the Shelter of Each Other...



...**THAT WE LIVE**

Manasquan High School