

ASIST: Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training

September 2021

Description

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) is a two-day workshop with a standardized curriculum designed to develop “suicide first aid” skills. It teaches participants to recognize when someone may have thoughts of suicide, to discuss suicide in a direct manner with that person, and how to intervene and work with the person to create a plan that supports their immediate safety. The training is based on a person-centered prevention model: Rather than guiding people-at-risk through a predetermined pathway to safety, the model supports the person in developing their own safety plan using personal and community resources. The training courses are available to anyone over the age of 16 concerned with the immediate safety of people at risk of suicide; no prior experience or education is required. ASIST can also provide those in formal helping roles with professional development: Continuing Education Units (CEU) are available to workshop participants. ASIST has been designated as a “program with evidence of effectiveness” by the [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#) and adopted by the [U.S. Army Suicide Prevention Program](#) as the approved intervention training. The intervention was also [tested in K-12 schools](#) and listed as a recommended program in [SAMHSA’s toolkit for preventing suicide in high schools](#).

Is It a Good Fit for My Agency?

The ASIST model is suitable for any community-based caregiving organization wishing to train staff members in suicide prevention. Anyone over the age of 16 can be trained on the model; no particular educational background or prior experience is required. Some community organizations opt to provide a few staff members with the [ASIST Training for Trainers](#), which qualifies them to become registered ASIST trainers and to provide consultation and training to local agencies, corporations, and community members. Currently, there are over 6,000 registered ASIST trainers worldwide.

Cultural Adaptability

The training teaches skills in understanding the client’s personal and cultural background and the community resources available to them so that an individually tailored safety plan can be developed. In that sense, the training prepares the practitioner to adapt the intervention to multiple cultural contexts. The curriculum is available in English, French, Spanish, Inuktitut, and Norwegian. Training materials are also available in large print and Braille formats.



How Does It Work?

The ASIST model involves an assessment of suicide risk and the development of a “safeplan,” based on present and future risk, available resources, and the needs of the person at risk. In addition to referrals to formal mental health services, the safeplan could include connection to and support from friends, family members, and other sources in the community.

[ASIST](#) has five components through which trainees gradually build an understanding of suicide risk and suicide intervention:

- 1) understand attitudes about suicide
- 2) provide guidance and suicide first aid to a person at risk
- 3) identify the key elements of an effective suicide safety plan and the actions required to implement it
- 4) appreciate the value of improving community suicide prevention resources
- 5) recognize important aspects of suicide prevention, including life-promotion and self-care

[ASIST Training for Trainers](#) is a five-day program. The first two days cover the above five components. The remaining time is spent learning the trainer role and participating in practice sessions.

Program Materials

The 2-day workshop is interactive and includes audiovisual aids, discussions in large and small groups, and skills practice and development. Training cannot be offered via webinar.

How to Learn More

[LivingWorks](#) is the central source of information on the ASIST program where one may learn more about the [program](#), [workshops](#), and [training processes](#); locate upcoming ASIST and [Training for Trainers \(T4T\) workshops](#); order resources; and read FAQs, news, and stories.

Implementing and Financing ASIST

Training Costs

Tuition for ASIST's two-day intensive training varies from one location to another. A review of currently available trainings across the United States revealed a range between \$175 and \$350 per attendee. For an agency planning to train a large number of staff members or to offer ASIST to community members over an extended period, the [ASIST Training for Trainers](#) could be a feasible investment. The tuition for this 5-day training is approximately \$3,000 plus tax in certain states; trainees become registered ASIST trainers. After completing the training, trainers are required to deliver at least three trainings during their first year and at least one training annually in subsequent years for their certification to remain active. LivingWorks estimates that a registered trainer conducts approximately 10 trainings per year with an average of 24 participants per training.

Potential Funding Sources

The two-day trainings provide Continuing Education Units, and tuition costs are typically within the staff development budgets of most community-based organizations. To invest in a Training for Trainers course for staff to become a provider of ASIST training in the community, organizations could seek grant funding themselves or partner with another organization that has a grant. A common source of financial support for suicide prevention efforts is the [Zero Suicide Grant](#) from SAMHSA. State agencies or health systems supported by this grant program frequently partner with local caregiving organizations to implement evidence-based training and prevention activities in their communities.



Implementation Examples

[Centennial Mental Health Center](#), a community-based organization partnering with local healthcare resources to provide integrated healthcare to rural communities in northeastern Colorado, participated in a 10-community suicide prevention initiative funded by [The Colorado Trust](#). As part of their participation, they set a goal to train their entire staff in ASIST.

[Behavioral Health Response](#), a nonprofit community-based mental health organization partnering with other local caregiving organizations in St. Louis, Missouri, has registered ASIST trainers on staff who have completed the ASIST Training for Trainers. Two of their staff members recently trained the city's 911 Diversion team members in ASIST to better prepare them to provide emergency first aid to individuals at risk of suicidal behavior.

Benefits of ASIST

- ❖ A [randomized control trial](#) that monitored 1,507 calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline found that callers who spoke with ASIST-trained counselors were 31% more likely to have reduced level of depression and 74% more likely to have reduced suicide risk, compared to callers who spoke with a counselor not trained in ASIST.
- ❖ A [cost-benefit analysis](#) of California Mental Health Services Authority's investment in ASIST estimated that the state's investment in this initiative averted 3,600 suicide attempts and 40 deaths per year, saving \$1,100 in total costs per dollar invested in training. Financial gains to the state government alone were estimated to be \$50 per dollar invested in ASIST.
- ❖ Trillium Health Centre in Mississauga, Ontario is a facility that consists of a 660-bed general hospital, an ambulatory care center, and a range of outpatient and community health services. The facility provided ASIST for all clinical and administrative staff and psychiatrists in its mental health programs. [Program evaluation](#) results indicate that in the first year of the program, there was a 14.5% reduction in average length of hospital stay among patients admitted with suicidal ideation. After four years of implementation, identification of suicide risk among mental health clients increased from 14% to 21%, and hospital admissions among suicidal patients presenting in the emergency department decreased from 56% to 42%.