



Talking About Suicide: Building Open and Meaningful Conversations with Our Youth

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Learning Objectives

- ▶ Upon completion of this workshop participants will be able to...
 - ▶ Explain three components of a validating conversation with youth.
 - ▶ Identify specific statements that convey validation and support in a conversation with youth.
 - ▶ Describe at least one strategy that can be used in youth suicide risk assessment to increase rapport and honesty.

The Myths of Talking with Our Youth About Suicide

- ▶ They are just looking for attention.
- ▶ They are being overly dramatic.
- ▶ They don't really understand what they are talking about.
- ▶ Talking about suicide will put the idea in their head.

The Truth About Youth and Suicide

- ▶ 2nd leading cause of death for ages 10-14 and 3rd leading cause of death for ages 15-24
- ▶ 1 in 3 US teen girls seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year
- ▶ Manifestation of depression and suicidal crisis in boys is often misinterpreted and addressed punitively
- ▶ 50% of parents whose teens are thinking about suicide are completely unaware



**So What Do Our Youth
Want From Us?**



“Just listen to me!”

“Don’t judge me.”

“Stop trying to fix things.”

“Let me know you hear me.”

Starting the Conversation

- ▶ “I’ve been hearing about how much depression and anxiety rates in teens has increased. What do you see?”
- ▶ “I want to understand more about what things are like for you and your friends.”
- ▶ “Have you or your friends been touched by suicide?”
- ▶ “Are you ever worried about the mental health of you or your friends?”
- ▶ “So I went to this conference about suicide today...”

Providing Opportunities for Conversation

- ▶ Offer daily check-ins (highs and lows)
- ▶ Show interest in what they are engaging in
- ▶ Try side by side communication
- ▶ Implement no electronics periods of time
- ▶ Volunteer together
- ▶ When the opportunity is taken...
 - ▶ Listen.
 - ▶ Ask questions.
 - ▶ Listen some more.



Warning Signs of Suicide

Talking about or making plans for suicide

Expressing hopelessness about the future

Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress

Seeing oneself as a burden to others

Reduced feelings of belonging

Change In Behavior

Withdrawal from or change in social connections/situations

Change in plans or goals

Changes in sleep

Recent increased agitation or irritability

Emotional dysregulation, mood swings, outbursts

Improvement in mood/affect

Starting the Conversation

- ▶ Point out what you have seen and state your concern.
- ▶ Frame your concern in a non-judgmental way.
- ▶ Listen
- ▶ Ask:
Are you having thoughts of suicide?

Four Things to Remember

Validation

Support

Next Steps

Opportunities
for Control

What NOT To Say

- ▶ You didn't actually mean that, right?
- ▶ I know how you feel.
- ▶ Life can't be that bad.
- ▶ You have so much to live for.
- ▶ In five years it won't matter.
- ▶ I can't believe you would say that with everything we have going on right now.

What To Say

- ▶ I am here for you.
- ▶ I am so sorry you are hurting.
- ▶ Together let's figure out what to do next.
- ▶ Thank you for telling me.
- ▶ I love you.

The Next Steps

- ▶ If you need some guidance, contact a crisis line
Teen Lifeline: 602-248-8336 or 988
- ▶ If you need help in determining what to do, contact a crisis team
Empact Crisis Line: 480-784-1500
National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 988
- ▶ If know you need immediate help and are safe to travel, go to behavioral health urgent care such as Mind 24/7 (mind24-7.com)
- ▶ If you need immediate help and are not safe to travel, call 911 and specify mental health/suicide risk

Suicide Risk Assessments with Youth

- ▶ The most effective form of suicide risk assessment is a comprehensive interview that focuses on understanding the other person's story and their current functioning and circumstances to determine the next best steps. This includes exploration of:
 - ▶ Risk Factors
 - ▶ Warning Signs
 - ▶ Current and Previous Ideation and Comparison to the Baseline
 - ▶ Protective Factors

A Few Notes About the Suicide Assessment Interview

The interview's purpose is to gather information, it is an assessment tool

- ▶ It is NOT counseling
- ▶ It is NOT meant to change the client's perspective
- ▶ It is NOT a time to share your own story
- ▶ It is NOT confidential

Interview: Ideation and Plan

Ideation:

Are you having any thoughts of hurting or killing yourself? (ideation)

How often do you think about hurting or killing yourself? (frequency)

How would you rate the intensity of your thoughts/feelings about wanting to hurt or kill yourself on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being not at all intense or strong and 10 being extremely intense or strong? (intensity)

When did you first have these thoughts of hurting or killing yourself? (duration)

When was the most recent time that you had these thoughts? (recency)

How confident are you that you will be able to keep yourself from attempting suicide? (immediacy)

Plan:

Do you have a plan to hurt or kill yourself?

If so, do you intend to use the plan?

If so, when do you intend to use the plan?

What steps does the plan consist of? Does it involve anyone else?

What steps have you taken to follow the plan?

Do you have access to the parts of the plan (i.e., firearms, medication, etc.)?

Interview: Risk Factors and Warning Signs

Stressors

Has your life changed recently? If so, how and when did the change occur?

How have things changed since the pandemic?

What are the challenges that you are currently experiencing – social, school, family, etc.?

Family and Peer Relations, Burdensomeness

How do you feel that your friends and family see you?

Do you have any arguments with your parents about your friends, activities, or how you dress?

Do your friends and family call you by your name and pronouns?

Generational, Media/Social Trauma

How are you and your family impacted by recent news events and experiences?

Have you been impacted by issues in society, such as legislation changes?

Physical and Emotional Health

How is your sleep? Do you fall asleep easily? Do you have nightmares? What do you do before falling asleep?

How is your mood in general lately? Has this changed at all?

Have you had any challenges with anger management or impulsivity?

History

Have you ever felt like this before? If so, when and how?

Have you ever thought about or tried to hurt or kill yourself before? If so, when and what happened?

Has anyone in your family ever attempted or completed suicide?

Have you ever gone to a psychologist or psychiatrist before?

Do you take any medications?

Do you have a history of school problems, such as suspensions or expulsions?

Interview: Protective Factors

Name 3 positive aspects of your life right now.

What are 3 positive things about you?

In 3 words, how would you describe your life right now?

Do you believe that things can get better?

Who are your closest friends right now? How is your relationship with them?

Where do you feel most yourself and most where you belong?

What is your relationship currently like with your immediate family?

How do you feel about school?

Are you involved in any school activities?

Are you involved in any sort of community engagement – volunteering, advocacy, activism, etc.?

What coping skills do you use when you are feeling upset? How often do you use these, and do they help?

Who do you usually talk to when you are feeling upset? Does this help?

What is something that you look forward to...this week? ... this year? ... in your life?

Effective Communication Approaches

- ▶ Keep asking – first response is sometimes negative but wears down over time
- ▶ Provide gentle assumption of suicidal thoughts
- ▶ Utilize symptom amplification
- ▶ Probe more into denials
- ▶ Engage in open body language, eye contact, and supportive pauses.
- ▶ Limit computer intrusion or excessive writing.
- ▶ Provide validation and support.

Supporting Mental Wellness Day to Day

- ▶ Validate without minimizing
- ▶ Encourage future movement
- ▶ Replace “but” with “and”
- ▶ Hear their story without comparison
- ▶ Honor their perspective and experience right now
- ▶ Listen

Talk About Coping

- ▶ Encourage use of healthy coping strategies.
- ▶ Recognize that there are different types of coping strategies, and each has its own purpose.
- ▶ Model and encourage the use of “What can I do right now?”
- ▶ Offer some guidance if needed in setting boundaries of coping, especially distractions, in a way that promotes control and self-awareness.
- ▶ Develop a coping plan – outlets, distractions, people, places, crisis lines
 - ▶ Put this where it is easily accessible (wallpaper)
 - ▶ Make one for yourself too

We Are The Models for Self- Compassion and Self-Care

- ▶ Do you...
 - ▶ Have balance in your life?
 - ▶ Engage in regular self-care?
 - ▶ Share your feelings openly and honestly?
 - ▶ Allow others to see when you are hurt, sad, frustrated, and angry?
 - ▶ Use healthy coping strategies?
 - ▶ Express self-validation?
 - ▶ Find your areas of control in stressful situations?

Resources

afsp.org



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

save.org



semicolonsociety.org

**Semicolon
Society**

Upcoming Events:

Tuesday Talks Parent Education
Series: Monthly

Mental Health Walk: 10/28/23

Yoga Event: 11/16/23

Mental Health Community Event:
1/27/24

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