

Suicidality & Prevention in Schools



Teacher's Role

Teachers and educators are often gatekeepers:
Gatekeepers are individuals positioned to notice early warning signs and risk factors due to proximity and frequency of engagement.

Risk Factors

Warning Signs of Suicide

- Displaying overt suicidal statements/behaviors
- Giving indirect clues of suicidal thoughts/plans
- Increased use/abuse of alcohol/drugs
- Abrupt changes in appearance
- Inability to concentrate or think rationally
- Drastic changes in behavior or mood
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Losing interest in once pleasurable activities

Triggers of Suicide

- Recent break-up
- Recent bullying incident
- Stressful life events
- Witness death
- Family members or friends of deceased
- Close contact with deceased
- History of suicide attempts

General Do's & Don'ts

Do's

Be calm, nonjudgmental, and listen

Focus concern on their well-being

Act swiftly

Take all comments, statements, or discussions seriously

Don'ts

Don't assume a student is "joking"

Don't assume a student will seek the help they need if they are suicidal

Don't ignore the behavior

Avoid statements that minimize student's pain or are accusatory

Individual Student Do's & Don'ts

Do's

Be direct

Reassure the student of help

Protect student privacy

Communicate all risk factors/concerns to the school counselor

Don'ts

Don't promise to keep dangerous behaviors secret

Don't allow students out of sight until assessed

Information adapted from:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2011). *After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.
CDC. (1988). *CDC recommendations for a community plan for the prevention and containment of suicide clusters*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001755.htm>
National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). *13 Reasons Why Netflix series: Considerations for educators* [handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.
Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (n.d.). *Safe and effective messaging for suicide prevention*. Retrieved from <http://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/SafeMessagingrevised.pdf>

Contagion

"A process by which exposure to the suicide or suicidal behavior of one or more persons influences others to commit or attempt suicide."

- The way suicide is discussed can influence contagion.
- **Not talking about suicide with staff, students, and families is NOT an effective way to prevent contagion, because regardless of what you do, it will be talked about.**
- **Instead, thoughtful communication should occur that emphasizes appropriate ways to talk and think about suicide.**
- Be careful not to glamorize or romanticize the victim.
- In order to reduce the likelihood of contagion, it is critical to:
 - Identify individuals who are most at risk and provide screening and support.
 - Encourage students to seek out support if they are feeling down, unsafe, or distressed.
 - Provide extremely easy access to support and normalize help seeking behavior.

What does glamorizing look like?

- "We would miss you."
- "They did it to free themselves from pain."
- Referring to suicide as "successful or unsuccessful".

Group of Students Do's & Don'ts

Do's

Do make it clear that there are a variety of ways to solve problems without resorting to suicide

Do address topic with students individually when possible

Do encourage students to recognize and report concerns to counselor

Keep student's specific events private

Don'ts

Don't reprimand a student for making comments about death, dying, etc in front of the class

Don't discuss student's suicidal behavior in front of others

Don't normalize suicide by presenting it as a common event

Culture of Kindness

As a teacher, you are constantly creating a safe and kind environment for your students.

Reflect on these practices and write three below.

Write down two practices your co-worker does that promotes kindness in your building.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Your Support Plan

It is normal and expected that you would be upset that a student has expressed suicidal ideation.

Create a simple support plan for yourself.

✓ Activities

✓ Social Support

✓ Daily Acts

✓ Emotional Awareness

Now that you have written down your plan:

- Circle one thing you can do for yourself today.
- Star one thing you can do for yourself every day.
- Underline a person you can talk to when feeling overwhelmed.

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