

Suicide Postvention Talking Points For Counselors

(And there is permission from the family to talk openly about cause of death)

- Losing a peer to suicide can be very confusing and upsetting and we want to be sure that you all know there is help available during this time
- Not everyone has had the same reaction when they heard about (name of decedent's) death because not everyone had the same relationship with him/her. Some people may be very upset because they knew (name) well. Some may not have known (name) at all and still may feel upset about what he/she did.
- There may be some of you that didn't know him/her but may have other stresses in your life, or may have had a loved one die, and your feelings may be extra sensitive right now
- Everyone reacts differently to the news of a death, especially one by suicide and we need to refrain from judging a person's way of reacting
- After the suicide of a peer it can feel like the whole world has turned upside down and nothing makes sense. It can feel like things will never be the same again
- Some people feel numb and just can't believe it is really true
- Our bodies can react when we hear shocking and upsetting news (heart races, feel nervous, can't get disturbing thoughts out of your head, can't concentrate, can't sleep well, don't feel like eating, wanting to be alone, feeling really down, etc.)
- While these feelings are normal in these first days and weeks after a death, it is important to talk to a trusted adult if you or a friend are noticing that some of these feelings are very strong or are not decreasing
- The next few days and weeks may be very difficult for some of you and the counselors are here to talk with you. We want you to know that you are not alone in dealing with (name's) death or any other difficulties in your life.

Suicide Talking Points

- We want to take some time to talk about suicide because accurate information can help prevent it
- Suicide can be confusing. It is hard to understand why someone would take their own life
- Suicide is not the result of stress or getting a bad grade, having a fight with your family or breaking up with someone. It is much more complicated. While these things may be the last thing that happened, they don't tell the whole story
- The majority of people who have even lots of bad things happen or have lots of stress don't go on to take their lives, so we know something else is happening in the brain of someone who kills themselves
- Research tells us that over 90% of people that die by suicide have a mental health disorder at the time of their death, usually something like depression or even a drug or alcohol problem. Sometimes people who have depression or other problems use drugs and alcohol to feel better and help them cope. What often happens is the drugs and alcohol become another problem
- These disorders can cause symptoms that can make a person feel very sad, and hopeless. The symptoms kind of hijack the brain and make the person believe they will never feel better again
- Sometimes a person can do a good job of hiding their symptoms and even their family and closest friends don't know how much they are struggling
- Depression and other mental health problems can trick the brain into believing that there is no other way out of this deep emotional pain, or no other way to solve a problem
- It is important for you to know there are very good treatments for these mental health problems. Counseling and even medicine can help relieve the symptoms and the person can recover and be well again
- We want you to be very clear that suicide is not a way to solve a mental health or other problem. Suicide is a forever decision that cannot be reversed.
- It is important to reach out to a trusted adult if you or a friend is experiencing some of the thoughts and feelings we have described because there is help available
- I would like you to think for a moment "Who are the trusted adults in your life; who are the trusted adults in this school or community that you would go to if you or a friend were having a really difficult time and maybe even having thoughts of suicide?"
- The next few days and weeks may be difficult for some of you. What are some things that help people get through difficult times? (See if you can generate some ideas from the kids – if not talk about some things that have helped other youth –spending time with friends, talking, listening to music, watching TV or movies, getting immersed in a sport, drawing, playing an instrument, dancing, praying, sleeping etc)
- When people are going through hard times, it is important to get good sleep, eat healthy foods even if you don't feel like eating, drink lots of water to pee out the built up stress chemicals in your body, and engage in healthy activities

- The most important thing is to always reach out if you or a friend is struggling. There is help! Your life matters.