



KINDNESS AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

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Kindness and Suicide Prevention: How Are They Connected?

Just as kindness requires courage, so does asking another person about suicide or suicidal thoughts. It requires courage to be vulnerable. It requires courage to ask difficult questions. And it requires courage to notice and to act, rather than avoiding, missing, or dismissing that someone is hurting. Intervening with someone who is having thoughts of suicide is an act of kindness because it offers hope, fosters connection, and creates a sense a belonging to something bigger.

The most recent national data highlights that suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10-14, young adults ages 15-24, and adults 25-34. It's the fourth leading cause of death for adults ages 35-44 and adults ages 45-54. It's the eighth leading cause of death for adults 55-64 (Suicide Prevention Resource Center). On average we lose one person to suicide every 11.9 minutes across the United States—that's 121 Americans daily (Center for Disease Control, 2015). In consideration of these facts, everyone and anyone on a school campus can be at risk for thoughts of suicide, with the average being 1 person in 20. Staff, faculty, administrators, parents, and students can take positive actions toward creating suicide-safer communities and campuses.

How Kindness Can Help Us Address Suicide Prevention

There is a myth that only professionals trained in suicidology can intervene with someone who is having thoughts of suicide. But in reality, anyone can take positive action by learning to notice the signs and having the courage to ask about suicide. The first step of asking can make all the difference for someone having suicidal thoughts. In addition, research on resilience points out that when children and youth have a relationship with at least one positive, caring adult in their life, they increase their likelihood of overcoming adversity (Add health, 1994-2008).

Create a goal for the percentage of staff, faculty, and administrators you want trained in suicide prevention, and then schedule a suicide prevention training or workshop. (See resources below for more information.) In staff development sessions, practice asking students and peers about suicide and suicidal thoughts. Remind each other to use the phrase, "It's OK to not be OK sometimes," both with students and with colleagues. Communicate to your Kind Campus that guidance counselors on campus are a great resource around suicide prevention, serving as a bridge to additional supports and/or parents and guardians as needed. Work together to ensure that your school has suicide-safer policies and procedures in place.

Students can be one of your best resources for suicide prevention on campus! Train a team of students to serve as peer mentors in suicide prevention. Encourage peer mentors to identify when to ask for help and when to advocate for a peer or for themselves. Research shows that students often confide in a friend or classmate— sometimes friends will ask friends to keep their secret. But often, no one seeks further help because they are afraid of getting the student in trouble, or they don't know how to find a trustworthy adult on campus.



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In other words, “kids tell kids and then kids tell nobody.” Assist students in recognizing the caring and trustworthy adults in their lives so that they can reach out when they or their friends need help. And work together (through Kindness Dilemmas and other activities) to help students build skills that help them stay connected, enhance their listening skills, and demonstrate empathy. Equally as important, emphasize that the kind thing to do is NOT to promise secrecy, but to help find resources for students at risk.

Finally, invite parents and interested community members into your efforts. Remind your community that we are all in this together, and that creating a kind community helps create a suicide-safer community. Host a parent night when students can work directly with parents and other family members on how to talk together about difficult subjects like suicide, drugs, alcohol, sex, etc. Promote your efforts on your district webpage and school website to ensure that the community at large understands you are champions for this effort.

Steps for Bringing Awareness of Suicide Prevention to your Kind Campus

- ✿ Create kind spaces on your Kind Campus by using posters to encourage students to talk to staff and faculty, and to ask for help when needed.
- ✿ Acknowledge regularly in classes and club meetings that “It’s OK to not be OK sometimes.” Explain that the important thing is to know when to ask for help.
- ✿ Ask simple questions, such as “Are you OK?” or “Is something going on today?” When your gut instinct is telling you something doesn’t seem right, reach out—even if you may feel you have no other clues.
- ✿ Take the time to listen to students who might seem out of sorts. Take two minutes each day to practice uninterrupted listening to those who might come to you. Model this for students as a method of opening up communication between peers.
- ✿ In a private setting, say directly to students that you have noticed change(s) in their behavior and that you genuinely want to know what is happening that may have caused that change. Listen to their story.
- ✿ Remember: asking about suicide takes courage and kindness. It gives the message “I CARE!”

Developing Awareness Around Suicide Prevention

Asking about suicide does not put the idea in people’s minds. This is a myth! Most if not all people give warning signs and clues that they are thinking about suicide. They are telling us the best way they know how. Watch for these signals:

Verbal (direct or indirect) clues:

“Pretty soon you won’t have to worry about me.”

“I wish I were dead.”

“Nobody would miss me if I were gone.”

“If such and such doesn’t happen, I won’t be around much longer.”



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Situational Clues (with themes of loss):

- A recent break-up or loss of major relationship
- Sudden unexpected loss of freedom or fear of punishment
- An unwanted move
- Experienced bullying or some sort of harassment
- Death of a loved one, teacher, spouse, or close friend, especially if by suicide
- Perceived or real trauma or stress

Behavioral Clues (a change in everyday behavior that is unique to that person):

- Drug or alcohol use or abuse
- Self harm or injury (i.e. cutting)
- Unexplained prolonged anger, aggression, or irritability
- Isolation
- Lack of hygiene or change in appearance
- Giving away valuable or prized possessions

Want to Know More About Kindness and Suicide Prevention?

There are several organizations and resources that can assist in reaching out when someone might be thinking about suicide. All these resources have expertise in the field of suicide prevention and can alleviate anxiety, shame, or guilt that people might be feeling about not knowing what to do or where to turn. Parents or teachers can use these resources to increase their confidence in having these important conversations. Take a look!

- 🌸 **DJY Consulting:** Diana Jimenez-Young can assist you in setting up trainings and workshops that fit your needs and schedules. She can also help connect you to local trainers and resources through the Livingworks and QPR institute trainer networks. djyconsulting@icloud.com or 520-240-2497 for more information.
- 🌸 **Teen Lifeline:** <http://teenlifeline.org/> | 602-248-8336 (TEEN) or Statewide in Arizona 800-248-8336 (TEEN)
Teen Lifeline is an Arizona-based nonprofit that provides safe, confidential, and crucial crisis services in which teens help other teens make healthy decisions together. Resources for teachers and parents can be found on the website. Trainings offered for the Phoenix area.
- 🌸 **Youth America Hotline:** www.youthline.us | (877) YOUTHLINE (968-8454)
The Youth America Hotline is a free peer-to-peer hotline network that links callers to community-based peer counseling hotlines.
- 🌸 **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> | 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, as well as prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.



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✿ **Suicide Prevention Resource Center:** <http://www.sprc.org/>

Stay up to date with the latest national or state data. This website helps you find programs, toolkits, fact sheets, and other resources to help you take effective action in your schools and communities. They also have a link to assist with online trainings, webinars, and online courses.

✿ **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:** <https://afsp.org/>

A great resource to connect with local chapters, find events to engage in your community, latest research, and ways to get involved in policy and advocacy.

Online training:

✿ **QPR Institute:** <http://www.qprinstitute.com>

The QPR mission is to save lives and reduce suicidal behaviors by providing innovative, practical, and proven suicide prevention training. They emphasize quality education as a method to empower all people, regardless of background, to make a positive difference in the life of someone they know. QPR (Question Persuade and Refer) Gatekeeper training can be done in person with a certified trainer or online through their website.