

## Tool 3.A.7: Talking Points for Students and Staff after a Suicide

(USE WITH TOOL 3.A)

Talking Points	What to Say
<p><b>Give accurate information about suicide.</b></p> <p>Suicide is a complicated behavior. Help students understand the complexities.</p>	<p>“Suicide is not caused by a single event such as fighting with parents, or a bad grade, or the breakup of a relationship.”</p> <p>“In most cases, suicide is caused by mental health disorders like depression or substance abuse problems. Mental health disorders affect the way people feel and prevent them from thinking clearly and rationally. Having a mental health disorder is nothing to be ashamed of.”</p> <p>“There are effective treatments to help people who have mental health disorders or substance abuse problems. Suicide is never an answer.”</p>
<p><b>Address blaming and scapegoating.</b></p> <p>It is common to try to answer the question “why” by blaming others for the suicide.</p>	<p>“Blaming others for the suicide is wrong, and it’s not fair. Doing that can hurt another person deeply.”</p>
<p><b>Do not talk about the method.</b></p> <p>Talking about the method can create images that are upsetting, and it may increase the risk of imitative behavior by vulnerable youth.</p>	<p>“Let’s focus on talking about the feelings we are left with after _____’s death and figure out the best way to manage them.”</p>
<p><b>Address anger.</b></p> <p>Accept expressions of anger at the deceased. Help students know these feelings are normal.</p>	<p>“It is okay to feel angry. These feelings are normal, and it doesn’t mean that you didn’t care about _____. You can be angry at someone’s behavior and still care deeply about that person.”</p>
<p><b>Address feelings of responsibility.</b></p> <p>Help students understand that the only person responsible for the suicide is the deceased.</p> <p>Reassure those who have exaggerated feelings of responsibility, such as thinking they should have done something to save the deceased or seen the signs.</p>	<p>“This death is not your fault. We cannot always see the signs because a suicidal person may hide them well.”</p> <p>“We cannot always predict someone’s behavior.”</p>
<p><b>Encourage help-seeking.</b></p> <p>Encourage students to seek help from a trusted adult if they or a friend are feeling depressed or suicidal.</p>	<p>“We are always here to help you through any problem, no matter what. Who are the people you would go to if you or a friend were feeling worried, depressed, or had thoughts of suicide?”</p>

[Adapted from AFSP. *After a suicide: A toolkit for schools*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. Available online at <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/AfteraSuicideToolkitforSchools.pdf> and <http://www.afsp.org/files/Surviving/toolkit.pdf>]