

Youth Suicide Prevention: The **LEARN**® Steps Every Educator Needs to Know

LOCATION:

DATE:

PRESENTERS:

Suicide is not about wanting to die.



+ **Hopelessness**

The basics

- Most suicides are **preventable**.
- Suicide can seem to represent a **logical “solution”** to ending unbearable pain.
- There is **no “type” of suicidal person**.
- The information from today’s training can and should be applied to **anyone you know**, not only your students.

What is my role as an educator in suicide prevention?

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Look for warning signs

Empathize and listen

Ask about suicide

Remove the danger

Next steps

Look for warning signs

LEARN

FEELINGS

- Depression and/or anxiety
- Anger/irritability
- Hopelessness (“things will never get better”) or helplessness (“there is nothing I can do”)
- Shame / humiliation

SITUATIONS

- Loss of relationships, self-respect, status
- Death of a family member, friend or a peer (especially if by suicide)
- Sudden, unexplainable joy after periods of depression

Look for warning signs, continued

BEHAVIORS

- Increased use of drugs & alcohol
- Isolation
- Saying or writing that they feel like a burden or a failure
- Giving away prized possessions
- Losing interest in activities that were previously of interest
- Statements like “the world would be better off without me” or “you'll miss me when I'm gone”

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Listening is key to empathizing

- Just listen, even if what they are saying is hard to hear.
- Avoid judgment; maintain calm.
- Reflect back only on the things they have told you.

Helpful responses:

- “Tell me more about that.”
- “You must really be hurting. It sounds like you are in a lot of pain.”
- “I’m worried about you. I want to help.”

Empathizing can be hard, but...

Try to avoid:

- Interpreting the situation from our perspective vs. theirs
- Panicking, judging or becoming angry
- Offering to fix the problem
- Asking “why” questions
- Being in denial – “my student would never think about suicide”

Examples of what not to say:

- “Maybe if you ate something, you would feel better.”
- “It will all be ok.”
- “Extra tutoring might help.”
- “Why do you feel this way?”

Scenario

Jeremy is a 14-year-old Vietnamese student in your classroom. He is new to the school this year, having moved to Washington with his mother and younger siblings.

Jeremy doesn't appear to have a lot of friends; it seems like he comes in and exits from class without talking to anyone. You aren't sure, but you wonder if other kids are mocking him when he asks questions in class. He is doing quite well academically.

He has terrible facial acne and appears to wear hand-me-down clothes. Jeremy strikes you as being sad and lonely.

How would you empathize? What might you say to Jeremy?

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Ask about suicide

- Ask in a way that invites an honest response.
 - E.g. Avoid phrases like “you’re not thinking of suicide, are you?”
- Be direct. Say “Are you thinking about suicide?” or “Are you thinking about killing yourself?”
 - Avoid vague statements like “Are you thinking about doing something stupid?” or “Are you thinking about not being here?”
- Be prepared to hear a “yes”

Scenario

- During the empathetic conversation with Jeremy, he tells you “I hate this school and I am pissed that my family had to move here”. “No one will miss me when I am gone.”
- *In your mind, consider....How would you ask Jeremy about suicide?*

(Practice) **Ask** about suicide

- Jeremy, sometimes when people report feeling sad and lonely, and say that no one will miss them when they are gone, they are thinking about suicide. Are you thinking about suicide?

Turn to the person next to you and practice the Look, Empathize, and Ask steps.

If your student says “yes”

- Take it seriously.
- Acknowledge the pain the student must be in and thank them for their honesty and courage in telling you.
- Ask these follow-up questions:
 - ✓ Have you thought about how you might end your life?
 - ✓ Do you have access to those means?

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Next steps

Make the house suicide safer

- Firearms
 - Alcohol and drugs
 - Prescription medications
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- Over the counter medications
 - Belts, rope, cords, plastic bags
 - Knives
 - Chemicals
 - Cars / car keys
 - Pesticides and poisons



Removing the danger is similar to what you would do with a friend who is too intoxicated to drive a car. You would ask them to give you the keys or you would call them a ride.

Scenario: Jose

A student in your 1st period class shows you this screen shot from Jose – a student in your 5th period class. You had noticed some changes in Jose's appearance and mood, but you had no idea he might be thinking about suicide.

- What do you say to the student who showed you the screen shot?
- Do you try to talk with Jose before your 5th period class?
- When you do talk with Jose, what do you say?



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Next steps

Act urgently.

- Never leave the student alone.
- Walk the student to the counseling office. Make a “warm hand-off” to appropriate staff.

After school hours, or if the person of concern is not a student, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

- A clinical risk assessment will be conducted
- Community resources will be recommended that meet the identified level of risk
- Lifeline is available 24/7, 365 days a year

Longer-term resources

- **Crisis Text Line:** text 741741 or www.crisistextline.org
- **TeenLink:** 866-833-6546 or <http://866teenlink.org>
- **Crisis Chat:** www.crisischat.org
- **Trevor Line:** 866-488-7386 or www.thetrevorproject.org
- **Trans Lifeline:** 877-565-8860 or www.translifeline.org

Scenario: Meredith

Meredith is a 17-year-old senior and a student in your class. She appears to be very popular with many friends and is a member of the cross country team. Meredith has plans to attend college after graduation, though has not yet received any acceptance letters.

Meredith has talked with you before about her parents: "They are so unreasonable; they want me to study and run competitively, but otherwise I am not supposed to have a life." She hasn't really wanted you to do anything more than listen and empathize. Recently though, she seems more anxious – even fearful – about where she will be attending college next year.

You have heard from Meredith's friends that they are also noticing changes in her behavior. When you approach and ask her how she is, she doesn't want to talk. You notice that she has small cuts on her wrist and lower arm.

LEARN role play

Look for warning signs

Empathize & listen

Ask about suicide ----- *Answer is “yes”*

Remove the danger ----- *Assume threat is hanging*

Next steps ----- *What resources can you offer?*

Thank you for being here today.

More information

- Forefront: www.intheforefront.org



- Suicide Prevention Resource Center: www.sprc.org

