Tips for Talking about Suicide

Suicide is a difficult topic for most people to talk about. This tool suggests ways to talk about key issues that may come up when someone dies by suicide.

Give accurate information about suicide.	By saying….
Suicide is a complicated behavior. It is not caused by a single event. In many cases, mental health conditions, such as depression, bipolar disorder, PTSD, or psychosis, or a substance use disorder are present leading up to a suicide. Mental health conditions affect how people feel and prevent them from thinking clearly. Having a mental health problem is actually common and nothing to be ashamed of. Help is available. Talking about suicide in a calm, straightforward way does not put the idea into people's minds.	"The cause of **[NAME]**'s death was suicide. Suicide is not caused by a single event. In many cases, the person has a mental health or substance use disorder and then other life issues occur at the same time leading to overwhelming mental and/or physical pain, distress, and hopelessness." "There are effective treatments to help people with mental health or substance abuse problems or who are having suicidal thoughts." "Mental health problems are not something to be ashamed of. They are a type of health issue."

Address blaming and scapegoating.	By saying….
It is common to try to answer the question "why?" after a suicide death. Sometimes this turns into blaming others for the death.	"Blaming others or the person who died does not consider the fact that the person was experiencing a lot of distress and pain. Blaming is not fair and can hurt another person deeply."

Do not focus on the method.	By saying….
Talking in detail about the method can create images that are upsetting and can increase the risk of imitative behavior by vulnerable individuals. The focus should not be on how someone killed themselves but rather on how to cope with feelings of sadness, loss, anger, etc.	"Let's talk about how **[NAME]**'s death has affected you and ways you can handle it." "How can you deal with your loss and grief?"

Address anger.	By saying….
Accept expressions of anger at the deceased and explain that these feelings are normal.	"It is okay to feel angry. These feelings are normal, and it doesn't mean that you didn't care about [**NAME**]. You can be angry at someone's behavior and still care deeply about that person."

Address feelings of responsibility.	By saying….
Help students understand that they are not responsible for the suicide of the deceased. Reassure those who feel responsible or think they could have done something to save the deceased.	"This death is not your fault. We cannot always see the signs because a suicidal person may hide them." "We cannot always predict someone else's behavior."

Promote help-seeking.	By saying….
Encourage students to seek help from a trusted adult if they or a friend are feeling depressed.	"Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness." "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 or depressed or had thoughts of suicide?" "If you are concerned about yourself or a friend, talk with a trusted adult."