

GPS: A Community Conversation About Suicide – the Signs and Symptoms: How Parents and School Staff Can Work

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notes by Shannon Kennedy

Jonathan B. Singer, Ph.D., LCSW
Loyola University Chicago
Social Work Podcast @socworkpodcast
Author of **Suicide in Schools**

Craig Miller “How it Feels” (about his suicide attempt). As a 42-year old, he sees that there were good times and there were bad times. As a 15-year old, it was all bad times ... it is hard to see the good when a student is in the middle of it.

There’s a connection b/c our emotions and our memories. Kids who are sad, scared and angry ... it’s easier for them to access bad memories.

“What do you want to live for?” was the question that helped Craig. Help them figure out how to have a life worth living. If they have nothing to say, then make sure to validate their feelings. Sit with them and make sure they know that you’re aware they’re really sad.

“We continue to give even when the results are uncertain because it is better than not giving, any day, any time, it’s all we got.” -- Dr. Bart Andrews

The internet will tell you what you want to find. If you’re suicidal and depressed, you will find things on the internet that will try to convince you to kill yourself. We need to dilute it - put stuff up that people will find when they’re searching for stuff about suicide.

How do we dilute the crap we find on the internet? PUT GOOD STUFF ON IT. TWEET, POST ON INSTAGRAM, PUT ON PINTREST.

Comprehensive School-Based Suicide Prevention

- Step1: Gatekeeper Training
- Step 2: Screening
- Step 3: Student Education and Advocacy
- Step 4: Parent Education (need to be aware of what happens when the crisis team is activated at the school)
- Step 5: Identification and Response (what is the school supposed to do)
- Step 6: Monitoring
- Step 7: Postvention (after a suicide death in order to prevent future suicides)

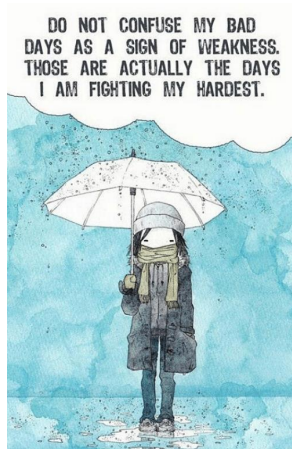
If I’m suicidal, and I think 100% of my friends are suicidal, it will increase my chances of attempting/completing suicide.

Myths and Facts

M: People who are suicidal are weak.

F: People are suicidal in spite of enormous strength and courage.

Meme: “Do not confuse my bad days as a sign of weakness, those are actually the days I am fighting my hardest.”



<3 everyone is #MoonlitMystics
#WUVIP

M: All adolescents think about suicide.

F: Lifetime prevalence for serious thoughts of suicide is about 12%. (Means about 88% of adults did NOT have thoughts about attempting suicide).

M: If I ask about suicide I'll put the idea in someone's head.

F: Asking someone about suicide will not make him or her suicidal.

Talking about suicide actually HELPS and even DECREASES the distress of a student with suicidal ideation. Additionally, it does NOT increase the stress of a student who is NOT having suicidal ideation.

Screening students is important because you don't know who is suicidal.

M: Suicide is a white people problem.

F: Suicide kills people of all ethnicities.

M: If someone really wants to die by suicide there isn't anything I can do about it

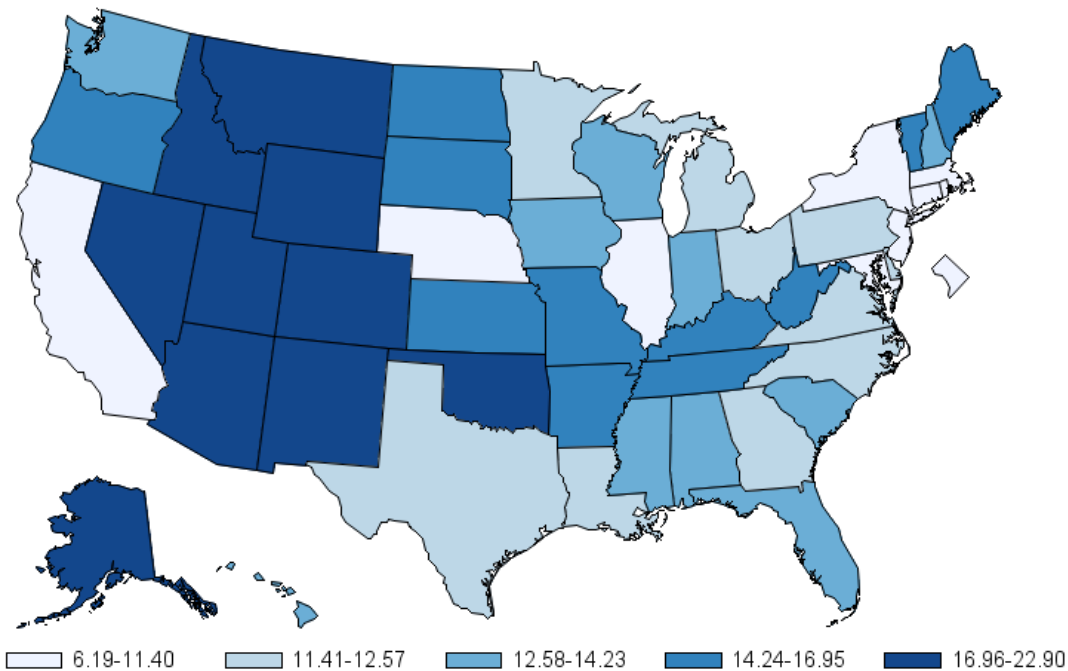
F: Suicide is preventable. Even those at the highest risk for suicide still have part of them that wants to live.

“Suicide is a preventable public health problem.” We don't say this after a death, and rather focus on the grief. This message is for professionals.

One life lost is too many.

1999-2017 USA Youth Suicide Deaths 10-24 year of age have steadily increased. We don't really know why, but one theory is smartphones. Another theory is the Great Recession. Peak in 2004 was because of a black box warning on antidepressants ... correlation, but we're not sure of the reason why.

2017 Suicides USA, 10-24 Years Map Graphic



Biggest percentage of youth suicides have to do with school problems, arguments, intimate and family problems, and a crisis happening (such as an upcoming court date). FAMILIES and SCHOOLS are the places to be when trying to combat the suicide crisis.

You need to ask, “Have you had serious thoughts about ending your life?” or “have you had serious thoughts about killing yourself?” This is different than asking, “Have you been thinking about suicide?” or “Have you been having suicidal ideation?”

Suicide Attempt - ANY action taken with the intention of ending one's life (“I was thinking of taking those pills”; this is an attempt. A suicide attempt DOES NOT require injury)

Non-Suicidal Morbid Ideation - thoughts of death without suicidal intent (The ceiling fan may fall on me and die; my car may swerve off the road and kill me) We need to be careful because this is NOT suicidal ideation.

Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) - intentional destruction of body tissue without an intention to die. Cutting or burning (usually associate with girls). But boys do this too ... banging their head, or punching walls, etc. **There is a small portion of these kids with NSSI who are ALSO suicidal. Someone is likely to attempt suicide if he or she has moderate to severe symptoms of depression and he or she is using substances. Sometimes NSSI is a coping strategy to keep yourself alive ... and not go all the way and complete suicide.**

Ask: "When you're hurting yourself, do you think about killing yourself?"

LGBTQ+ students are significantly higher in regards to suicidal thoughts and behaviors (more for students who are of the female gender). ... Because of rejection, sexual harassment, stigma and bullying by friends, family, community.

When we repeatedly and pointedly deploy this narrative of the suicidal LGBTQ+ youth AND we ignore the positive aspects of being queer, we offer queer youth a script that suggests they will be entering a dangerous and risk-filled life ahead of them.

Substances (drinking and drugs) affect the suicides and how lethal they are.

Warning Signs

1. Talking about or making plans for suicide.
2. Expressing hopelessness about the future.
3. Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress.
4. Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, particularly in the presence of the warning signs above.

Resilience

There are adults that are able to connect kids with resources in the community. If those resources aren't available, then there are adults that are willing to create them. That's what makes someone resilient.

Anti-Suicide Programs (there isn't just one!)

Anti-bullying programs
Educational Awareness
LGBTQ+
Crisis Team

Leading Up to THE Question

Have you had thoughts of ...

Hurting yourself? ...

Wanting to die? ...

Killing yourself? ...

What to Say: ACT (Good Acronym to share with teens so they can help peers)

Acknowledge - validate rather than dismiss their thoughts and feelings.

Care - listening without judgement

Tell/Treatment - offer to accompany them to get help or suggest a step they can take.

Don't say...

- Things could be worse
- Don't you know I'd be devastated if you killed yourself? How could you think of hurting me like that?
- Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem
- Suicide is selfish
- You have so much to live for
- You're just going to give your pain to someone else
- You don't mean that. You don't really want to die.

Tips for Parents

1. Make your teen sleep
2. Talk with your teen
3. Model mental health treatment
4. **Want the best for your child, not for your child to be the best**
5. It's you and the teachers for your teen, not you and your teen *against* the teacher
6. Get a pet
7. Keep calm

Tips for Schools

1. Conduct Universal Screening
2. Collaborate with parents/communities
3. Aspire to zero suicides
4. Train staff to recognize and respond to suicides
5. Recognize mistakes as learning
6. Care for self

5 Tips for Youth

1. Don't worry about upsetting adults.
**You have the right to your feelings.*
2. When you are going through hell, keep going.
**Your reasons for living might not be in your life yet...#LiveYourBestLife*
3. Don't confuse being scared, sad, lonely, or angry with wanting to die.
**Learn to sit with sadness, anger, fear, and sadness.*
4. Don't discount your feelings.
**Remember that some experiences are mirrors and some are windows.*
5. It isn't all about you.
**It is all about you.*

Validate emotions to help teens process emotions. Just be present.