

TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE

Give accurate information about suicide.

Suicide is a complicated behavior. It is *not* caused by a single event such as a bad grade, an argument with parents, or the breakup of a relationship.

In most cases, suicide is caused by an underlying mental disorder like depression or substance abuse. Mental disorders affect the way people feel and prevent them from thinking clearly and rationally. Having a mental disorder is nothing to be ashamed of, and help is available.

Talking about suicide in a calm, straight-forward manner does not put ideas into kids' minds.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

- *"The cause of _____'s death was suicide. Suicide is most often caused by serious mental disorders like depression, combined with other complications."*
- *"_____ was likely struggling with a mental health issue like depression or anxiety, even though it may not have been obvious to other people."*
- *"There are treatments to help people who are having suicidal thoughts."*
- *"Since 90% of people who die by suicide have a mental disorder at the time of their death, it is likely that _____ suffered from a mental health disorder that affected [his/her] feelings, thoughts, and ability to think clearly and solve problems in a better way."*
- *"Mental disorders are not something to be ashamed of, and there are very good treatments to help the symptoms go away."*

Address blaming and scapegoating.

It is common to try to answer the question "why?" after a suicide death. Sometimes this turns into blaming others for the death.

EXAMPLE OF WHAT TO SAY:

- *"The reasons that someone dies by suicide are not simple, and are often related to mental disorders that get in the way of the person thinking clearly. Blaming others – or blaming the person who died – does not acknowledge the reality that the person was battling a mental health disorder."*

Do not focus on the method or graphic details.

Talking in graphic detail about the method can create images that are upsetting and can increase the risk of imitative behavior by vulnerable youth.

If asked, it is okay to give basic facts about the method, but don't give graphic details or talk at length about it. The focus should be not on *how* someone killed themselves but rather on how to cope with feelings of sadness, loss, anger, etc.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

- *"It is tragic that he died by hanging. Let's talk about how _____'s death has affected you and ways for you to handle it."*
- *"How can we figure out the best ways to deal with our loss and grief?"*

Address anger.

Accept expressions of anger at the deceased and explain that these feelings are normal.

EXAMPLE OF WHAT TO SAY:

- *"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."*

Address feelings of responsibility.

Reassure those who feel responsible or think they could have done something to save the deceased.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

- *"This death is not your fault."*
- *"We can't always predict someone else's behavior."*
- *"We can't control someone else's behavior."*

Encourage help-seeking.

Encourage students to seek help from a trusted adult if they or a friend are feeling depressed or suicidal.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

- *"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?"*
- *"There are effective treatments to help people who have mental health disorders or substance abuse problems. Suicide is never the answer."*
- *"This is an important time for all in our [school, team, etc.] community to support and look out for one another. If you are concerned about a friend, you need to be sure to tell a trusted adult."*

"After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools AFSP& SPRC

TALKING POINTS FOR STUDENTS AND STAFF AFTER A SUICIDE

TALKING POINT	WHAT TO SAY
<p>Give accurate information about suicide. Suicide is a complicated behavior. Help students understand the complexities.</p>	<p><i>Suicide is not caused by a single event, such as fighting with parents, or a bad grade, or the breakup of a relationship.</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>There are effective treatments to help people</i></p>
<p>Address blaming and scapegoating. It is common to try to answer the question “why” by blaming others for the suicide.</p>	<p><i>Blaming others for the suicide is wrong, and it’s not fair. Doing that can hurt another person deeply.</i></p>
<p>Do not talk about the method. Talking about the method can create images that are upsetting, and it may increase the risk of imitative behavior by vulnerable</p>	<p><i>Let’s focus on talking about the feelings we are left with after _____’s death and figure out the best way to manage them.</i></p>
<p>Address anger. Accept expression of anger at the deceased. Help students know these feelings are normal.</p>	<p><i>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</i></p>
<p>Address feelings of responsibility. Help students understand that the only person responsible for the suicide is the deceased. Reassure those who have exaggerated feelings of responsibility, such as thinking they should have done something to save</p>	<p><i>This death is not your fault. We cannot always see the signs because a suicidal person may hide them well.</i></p> <p><i>We cannot always predict someone’s behavior.</i></p>
<p>Encourage help-seeking. Encourage students to seek help from a trusted adult if they or a friend are feeling depressed or suicidal.</p>	<p><i>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?</i></p>