



SOCIETY *for the*
PREVENTION *of*
TEEN SUICIDE



HEALING AFTER SUICIDE IN A SCHOOL COMMUNITY:

**Helping Parents Help
Their Kids**

**Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide
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THE PLACE TO START:

***Understanding Our
Own Reactions To
Suicide***



Why Our Reactions Are Important

- **We all have beliefs, values, attitudes about suicide**
- **They come from our families, our religion, our personal experience**
- **They are neither right nor wrong- they simply are**
- **We need to be aware of them because they can impact our communication with our kids**



Understanding Our Reactions to Suicide

- **Shock and disbelief**
- **An 'exaggerated sense of responsibility'**
- **Search for the reasons**
- **Blame or scapegoating**
- **Confusion generated by gossip and rumors**



Understanding Our Reactions to Multiple Suicides/Deaths

- **Disbelief/ sense of unreality**
- **Fear**
- **Anger**
- **Worry/anxiety**
- **Numbness**



Why Our Children's Grief is Different

- Immature cognitive development/understanding of death
- Limited ability to verbalize feelings
- Limited life experience



Death in Adolescence

- **Directly confronts developmental tasks**
- **Can disturb sense of life purpose**
- **Defies adolescent omnipotence**
- **Can reactivate other losses**



What We Know About Suicide

- **There is never one reason**
- **Thoughts about suicide are common in adolescence**
- **There is a big difference between thinking about suicide and acting on those thoughts**
- **It is often seen as a problem-solving alternative**

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What We Know About Suicide

- **Crisis thinking & irrationality color thoughts of suicide**
- **Suicidal adolescents are often ambivalent and may tell others of their plans**
- **Suicide is often a form of communication**
- **Talking about suicide cannot plant the idea**
- **Despite best efforts, not every suicide can be prevented**



Suicide Contagion Concerns

- **Imitation risk highest in adolescence**
- **Can occur after any type of death**
- **Risk appears higher when deaths are sensationalized, romanticized**
- **Speaks to the importance of identifying & reaching out to 'vulnerable' youth**



What Makes Youth ‘Vulnerable’?

- **Contact with deceased- (positive or negative)- teammates, classmates, friends of siblings**
- **Previous history of losses/exposure to suicide**
- **Personal history**
 - **Previous suicide ideation/attempts**
 - **Drug/alcohol use**
 - **Mental health treatment**

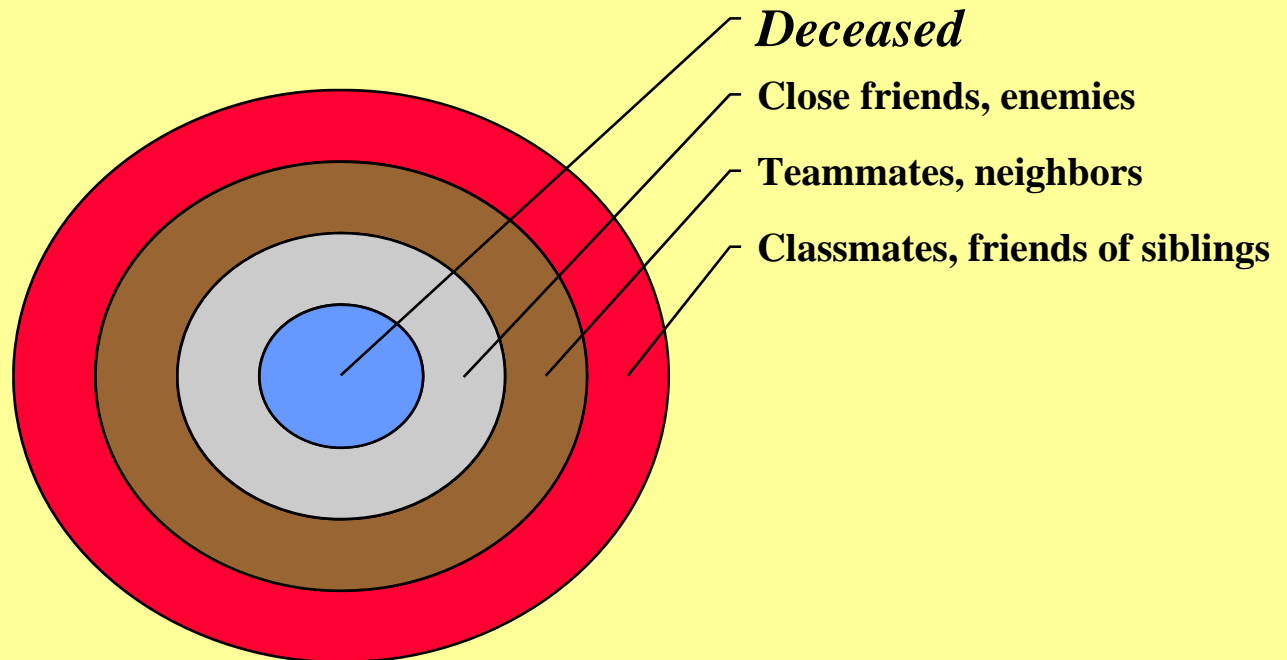


What Makes Youth ‘Vulnerable’?

- **Close relationship with the deceased – siblings, neighbors, dating, best friends**
- **Witnessing the event**



Identifying Vulnerable Youth





Steps To Help You Deal With Your Children's Reactions....

- 1. Understand that there is no 'right' way to react**
- 2. Realize you may not understand your child's reactions**
- 3. Expect some kids to have no reaction or delayed reactions**
- 4. If you are concerned about your child's reactions, consult with resource staff**



How To Help Your Child

- **Deal with your own reactions first**
- **Avoid gossip about the causes**
- **Remain nonjudgmental about the deceased**



How To Help Your Child

- **1. Share your reactions with your child**
- **2. Ask for his/her response**
- **3. Remain nonjudgmental**
- **4. Validate his/her response**



How To Help Your Child

- **5. Ask “ tell me more”**
- **6. Acknowledge rumors & put into context**
- **7. Underscore the dangerous behavior of the deceased**



How To Help Your Child

- **8. Introduce topic of help-seeking**
- **9. Encourage peer responsibility**
- **10. Discourage secret-keeping**
- **11. Review adult resources**
- **12. Keep channels of communication open!**



How To Help Yourself

- **Become educated about youth suicide**
- **Be alert to what's going on with teens in your community**
- **Be nosey- ask about rumors or gossip**
- **Monitor behavior, especially alcohol use**
- **Know your resources**
- **Stay concerned**



What To Say To Your Kids

Address issues related to suicide contagion

- **Acknowledge that sometimes the suicide of another person can make us think about suicide ourselves**
- **Validate that these thoughts can be upsetting/scary**
- **Reinforce the importance of sharing these thoughts with a trusted adult**



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