

Template for talking to young people about suicide loss

It is always important to be prepared to have responsible conversations with young people. Research has shown that discussion with young people does not lead to increased thinking about suicide or suicidal behaviors.

Here are some points to remember:

Be open and honest and communicate at the young person's level of understanding

Suicide is complicated and requires honesty but also restraint. Always answer questions honestly but at a level that the young person understands. Unless it has been confirmed by the coroner, cause of death is not known. Rumours may circulate after a death and we ask you (youth) not to spread them since they can be inaccurate, hurtful and unfair.

Address anger

Accept expressions of anger at the deceased and explain that these feelings are normal "It's okay to feel angry. These feelings are normal and it doesn't mean that you didn't care about [student's name]. You can be angry at someone's behavior and still care deeply for them." "We can't always predict or control someone else's behavior and choices"

Encourage help-seeking

Encourage youth to seek help from trusted adults when they are feeling depressed or suicidal. "We [identify appropriate staff] are here to help you through any problems. Who are the people you would go to if you or a friend were feeling worried, depressed or had suicidal thoughts?" "This is an important time for all in our community to support and look out for one another. If you are concerned about a friend, you need to be sure to tell an adult that you trust".

Give practical coping strategies

Encourage students to think about specific things they can do when intense emotions such as worry or sadness well up, including:

- Simple relaxation and distraction skills (deep slow breaths, counting to 10)
- Engaging in preferred activity such as music, reading, etc.
- Exercising
- Thinking about how they have coped with difficulties in the past
- Writing a list of people they can turn to for support
- Writing a list of things they are looking forward to
- Focusing on small, step, clear goals

Sometimes youth will need permission to engage in activities that will make them feel better.

Providing information to students regarding suicide awareness, teaching problem solving skills and coping skills and reinforcing protective factors while addressing risk factors may lead to improvements in students' problem solving skills as well as reductions in self-reported suicide vulnerability (Miller, Eckert, & Mazza, 2009)

