WHO WE ARE

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Susan Tellone
WHAT WE’LL COVER

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE WORLD & HOW IT AFFECTS YOU/YOUR STUDENTS

SUICIDE RISK IN ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL

HOW SHELTER IN PLACE MAY INCREASE RISK

HOW TO HELP KIDS COPE
WHAT MAKES THE PANDEMIC CHALLENGING?

- We’ve never had an experience like this before
- There’s no clear end in sight
- We’ve lost identified roles
- We are surrounded by stories of loss
WHY LOSS IS HARD TO DEAL WITH

- We want to focus on living, not dying
- There’s so much of it - where do you start?
- Our losses don’t seem as significant as a lot of others
- Loss & its aftermath create stress in our lives
Stress happens when we perceive we have to do something beyond our capacity or skill.

The lizard part of our brain gets activated. So we go into fight/flight/flee mode.

Our thinking brain gets flooded with stress hormones and it’s harder to use logic and good problem solving.

We can make decisions based on emotions rather than facts.
TWO KINDS OF STRESS

- Acute stress. This is short-term stress that goes away quickly.
- Chronic stress. This is stress that lasts for a longer period of time.
WHY THE COVID PANDEMIC IS POTENTIALLY A CHRONIC STRESSOR

- We don’t understand what it is or why it happened
- There’s uncertainty about what to do to stop it
- It’s created a climate of worry for a lot of people
- There have been a lot of practical ramifications (economical, in health care system, education) that have turned life as we knew it upside down
- People have a wide range of emotions so we may not be on the same page, even in our families
- We don’t have our usual outlets for support or coping
WHERE ARE YOU IN ALL THIS??
STRESSES EDUCATORS LIKE YOU HAVE TOLD US THEY ARE FACING...

- Online teaching
- Handling disappointment, cancelled events
- Worrying about loss of control during “opening-up” phase
- Keeping youth with mental illness safe
- Drinking/eating/unhelpful coping
- Burn-out from WFH and Homeschooling
- What will the next school year bring?
POLL #1A

What are your potential stressors for the next school year?

- Personal Safety
- Continued schedule disruption
- How prepared/unprepared students will be
- What if someone in the school gets COVID
- More students with economic problems
- Other
What do you think the potential stressors will be for your students?

- Concerns about Personal Safety
- Being unprepared
- Worries: what if someone in the school gets COVID
- Economic problems in family
- Possible deaths from COVID
- Other
SUICIDE RISK: STRESS AT A MORE INTENSE LEVEL
Suicide is a frequent topic in media

Attempt rate increased 200% for 10-14 yr old girls (1999-2014)

Decreasing age of puberty increases risk

Younger kids use social media

Students may be impacted by suicide of parent, sibling or peer

Protective factors can be encouraged early
The data:

5-11 Years Compared To Early Adolescence 12-14 Years

- Rate = .17/100,000
  (12-14=5.18/100,000)
- Most common diagnosis: ADD/ADHD (adolescence=depression)
- Less likely to leave a note
- Relationship problems with family & friends
- Exposure less likely as a risk factor
- Less cognitive ability to plan and carry out a fatal suicide plan
EQUALLY AS LIKELY TO TELL SOMEONE ELSE (29% V.30%)
WHY PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS IS IMPORTANT

Youth spend most of their time in school

Prevention falls under the mandate to provide a safe learning environment for students
THE SCHOOL’S ROLE IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

Critical

Limited

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SUICIDE AWARENESS QUESTIONNAIRE

LOOK AT YOURSELF FIRST:

LET’S TAKE A POLL
Do you have personal or professional experience with suicide?

- Yes
- NO
What words do you think describes how a suicidal youth feels?

- Confused
- Angry
- Discouraged
- Alone
- Trapped
- Not understood
- Desperate
What would help you understand suicide better?

- More training
- Talking to someone who was suicidal
- I don’t know
- Other
YOUR ACTION PLAN STEPS

1. Why youth suicide prevention is important in your school

2. What your school is doing for youth suicide prevention

3. What your role is in prevention
WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW TO FULFILL YOUR ROLE

Information

| Suicide | Differences between risk factors and warning signs | Importance of protective factors |

Action steps that outline the prevention process
WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

HIPPA

FERPA
What is confidential...?

Everything you say is kept between us unless you or someone else is not safe.

ES

MS

What is confidential...?

All information except:

Drug use including alcohol,
Pregnancy or
Sexual or physical abuse
Or that you may harm yourself or someone else

HS
DISPELLING SUICIDE MYTHS

- Will talking about suicide plant the idea in someone’s mind?
- Isn’t suicide just a way to get attention?
- Don’t most suicides happen without warning?
- Don’t suicidal children need to be in psychiatric hospitals?
# THE LANGUAGE OF SUICIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid</th>
<th>Use Instead</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committed suicide</td>
<td>Died by suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide victim</td>
<td>Person who died by suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful attempt</td>
<td>Attempt or completion</td>
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</table>
A behavioral definition puts suicide into words that are easy to understand:

Suicide is an attempt to solve a problem of intense emotional pain with impaired problem-solving skills.
WHAT WORDS WOULD MIDDLE AND ELEMENTARY STUDENTS USE TO DESCRIBE INTENSE EMOTIONAL PAIN
What words would elementary and middle school students use to describe immense emotional pain?

- Sad
- Upset
- No one listens to me
- Like a loser
- “I hate myself”
- Other
WHAT DOES “INTENSE EMOTIONAL” PAIN FEEL LIKE?

- Worthlessness
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Like being a loser
- Confusion
- Emptiness
- Desperation
therapist: you need to open up more
me: i can’t
therapist: why not
me: let me visualise it for you

❤️️  📡  🦇
25,397 likes
THE SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF TEEN SUICIDE

1,101 likes

increasing exhaustion paired with the inability to sleep
contemplating every mistake I've made over the past five years
that one time someone made a comment about my nose

me at 3am
Today's Schedule

10 AM
2 PM
6 PM
10 PM
2 AM
6 AM

Panic

Spend an hour in bed, in the dark, on my phone.

Heart AlecWithPen

14,883 likes
WHAT WOULD KIDS DESCRIBE AS UNSOLVABLE PROBLEMS?
What would elementary and middle school students describe as unsolvable problems?

- No one likes me
- No one listens to me
- I’m so ugly/fat/.....
- “I hate myself”
- I failed my test
- I wasn’t picked for the A team
- I didn’t score in the game
- Other
WHAT PROBLEMS CAN SEEM “UNSOLVABLE?”

- Getting into trouble at home, in school or with the law
- Being humiliated in front of friends, especially for boys
- Loss of a relationship, an opportunity, a dream
- Any transition/change for which the student feels unprepared
A crisis is any situation in which we feel our skills don’t meet environmental demands.

Crisis response: fight, flight or freeze.

Crisis thinking - emotional, constricted, sometimes irrational.
UNDERSTANDING CRISIS THINKING
HERE’S AN EXAMPLE

7th grade student - Jeremy

- Bullied in 5th grade
- Self-injured in 6th grade
- Having problems in math

Helpful

- Teacher always busy
- Can’t do extra credit assignment
- Fails midterm
- Girlfriend breaks up with him

Unhelpful

- Fails math
- Gets cut from team

Thinking about suicide

WHAT TO DO? VENTILATE AND VALIDATE

- Tells parents
- Structures study time
- Decides to go to teacher

- Stops doing homework
- Lies to parents
- Cheats on tests
• **Ventilation** gives the victim a chance to “vent” or express their feelings without being judged,

• **Validation** is the step that helps the person understand that you have heard their feelings
Student says:” My life is over. I counted on getting picked to be on the A team. Everyone’s gonna laugh at me”

What is validating?

- I know it feels like the end of the world, but you can try again next year.
- Let me know if kids laugh and I’ll talk to them
- Sounds like a tough break
• I'D RATHER BE DEAD. WHAT IS THERE ABOUT THAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND?” WHAT STATEMENT IS VALIDATING?

• You have so much that’s positive in your life- let’s talk about that.

• I understand that you always say that when you’re angry about something

• I agree, it’s hard for me to wrap my head around the fact that you feel so miserable.
“My mom is in heaven and I want to be with her. This world is horrible. Heaven is great.” What would be a validating response?

- Are you missing your mom?
- When it’s your time, you will go to heaven.
- You think your life is bad at 10?
- My mother died when I was your age and I know exactly how you feel.
## Suicide Risk Factors & Warning Signs

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Warning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Protective</td>
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DYNAMICS OF RISK FACTORS

- Biopsychosocial
- Stressors
- Access to lethal means
- Previous Attempt
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RISK FACTORS:

- Risk factors are situations or factors that increase the possibility that someone might be suicidal.
- Most people have risk factors and are never suicidal.
- There is always more than one risk factor for suicide.
- You may never know your students’ risk factors.
RISK FACTORS CAN INCLUDE:

**Family history of suicide**
- Family history of mental illness
- Mental health diagnosis
- Impulsivity
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Suicide ideation before age 12
- Exposure to family violence, traumatic events (e.g., ACEs Score)
HOW COVID MIGHT INCREASE STUDENT RISK

- Increase student and parent anxiety levels
- Wreck daily schedules
- Destabilize study habits
- Increase school phobias
- Increase economic hurdles
- Delay identification of kids who might need treatment
- Elevate ACE factors
ACES SCORES AS RISK FACTORS

- Verbal abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect
- Witness IPV
- Substance abuse in the home
- Separated/divorced parents
- Family member incarcerated
- Family member mentally ill or suicidal
Early Death

Disease, Disability & Social Problems

Adoption of Health-risk Behaviors

Social, Emotional & Cognitive Impairment

Disrupted Neurodevelopment

ACEs SCORES & RISK
Warning Signs FACTS

- Feelings
- Actions
- Changes
- Threats/Talk
- Situations
WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- RECOGNIZE possible warning signs
- TALK to the student
- LISTEN to student’s responses
- USE PROTOCOL for parent notification/referral
WHAT ARE SOME WARNING SIGNS YOU MAY SEE IN SCHOOL?

- Frequent visits to school nurse
- Frequent restroom requests
- Actual threats or suicide notes
- Talking about suicide
- Disturbing themes in school assignments
- Unusual pattern of absences or tardiness
- Leaving school early
- Concerns expressed by other students
WHAT ARE SOME WARNING SIGNS YOU MAY SEE IN SCHOOL?

- Changes in student appearance
- Changes in mood, for example, no longer cheerful or suddenly cheerful
- Changes in eating habits
- Student isolated on school bus, in cafeteria
- Bullying behavior- even as a bystander
WHAT NOT TO SAY

- Don’t worry, everything will be all right
- By next week, you’ll forget all about it
- This is nothing!
- Cheer up!
- You have so much to be thankful for
- Think about how your family would feel if you killed yourself
PRACTICE
“TELL ME MORE”

- Reflects the 3 hardest but most important words to say to a suicidal student
- Opens the door to talking about suicide in a conversational way
- Addresses questions about suicide risk from a developmental perspective
- Explains suicide as the solution to that seemingly unsolvable problem
IF YOU ARE WORRIED THE RISK IS SO SERIOUS THAT IT NEEDS IMMEDIATE ATTENTION....

SEE SOMETHING SAY SOMTHING!
DO NOT WAIT!!!

FOLLOW YOUR SCHOOL PROTOCOL!
Your Critical but Limited Role Simplified

OBSERVE
All students for signs of risk

IDENTIFY
Students potentially at risk

REFER
Student to appropriate resources
TIPS FOR TALKING WITH UPSET STUDENTS

- Start with breathing prompts
- Validate their upset
- Remind them you can’t fix the feeling of “I wish I were dead”
- Find out what the problem is
- Create classroom action plan
HOW TO TALK WITH ELEMENTARY STUDENTS ABOUT SUICIDE

- Resist trying to explain the finality of death
- Explain that doing risky things can have unintended consequences
- Explain that feeling like you want to die often means there is an upsetting problem in your life you can’t solve
- Reinforce messages about personal safety
ASK ABOUT PACES
(PROTECTIVE & COMPENSATORY EXPERIENCES)

RELATIONSHIPS

- Does someone love you unconditionally?
- Do you have at least 1 friend?
- Do you do anything regularly to help others?
- Do you have an adult you can trust and count on?
- Are you an active member of a non-sport social group?
ASK ABOUT PACES
(PROTECTIVE & COMPENSATORY EXPERIENCES)

RESOURCES

- Do you have a hobby?
- Do you play sports or have regular physical activity?
- Is your house clean and do you have enough to eat?
- Does your school give you the resources and experiences you need to learn?
- Are the rules in your house clear and fair?

(Morris, Hays-Grudo et al. 2015)
THE ABILITY TO RECOVER QUICKLY FROM DIFFICULTY

Encourage RESILIENCE:
THE MINDSET OF THE RESILIENT TEACHER

- Fosters independence
- Lets students do their own problem solving
- Encourages students to find additional resources
RESILIENCE THEORY BELIEVES THAT THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE ARE TO EMBRACED, NOT AVOIDED...

AND THAT COPING WITH RISK AND BOUNCING BACK FROM ADVERSITY ARE GOOD FOR US.
WHAT HELPS STUDENTS BECOME RESILIENT?

PROVISION OF SUPPORT, STRUCTURE, CONTROL
PROVIDING SUPPORT

- Be there however you can
- Listen again and again and again
- Express genuine praise for accomplishments
- Encourage reflection & self-praise
- Validate and name feelings
STRUCTURE

- Safe, structured predictable schedule
- Advance notice of changes
- Organized & neat environment
CONTROL

- Implement enough rules to make the environment safe
- Explain the reasons for the rules
- Teach calming techniques
- Give students some choice in learning techniques
REINFORCE THE “CHALLENGE MINDSET”

Guiding Principle:
Let children experience life in a way where they grow to believe they have the personal strength to overcome any obstacle
If you are dropping off your son's forgotten lunch, books, homework, equipment, etc., please TURN AROUND and exit the building. Your son will learn to problem-solve in your absence.
ENCOURAGE PROTECTIVE FACTORS

PERSONAL, BEHAVIORAL OR SITUATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO RESILIENCY AND SERVE AS A BUFFER AGAINST RISK
ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Sense of connection to home, school or community
- Sense of safety
- Access to care for physical, emotional problems
- Supportive family environment and social networks.
- Concrete support for basic needs.
- Contact with one caring adult
FOSTERING PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Teach students it is okay to ask for help
- Help students identify trusted adults
- Encourage participation in school & community activities
- Acknowledge student efforts
- Be a good listener, as often as you can
HOW DOES A SCHOOL REINFORCE PROTECTIVE FACTORS DURING COVID?

- Make it clear to students that it’s ok to talk about feelings
- Ask the students for ideas
- Proceed as close to normal as possible
- Give homework about COVID safety
- Discuss strategies for online learning, ‘just in case’
WHAT ARE PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR YOU?
Recognize your role in helping your students learn to help themselves

If a student does need your help, remember the first step is to listen - not immediately fix the problem

If you’re worried about yourself or a student, reach out for help
“If you think you are too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito.”

Betty Reese
THANK YOU FOR TAKING CARE OF OUR KIDS!