

**SOS for School Staff**  
Your role in suicide prevention

Copyright © 2022 MindWise Innovations®, a service of Riverside Community Care.

1



**Riverside Trauma Center**  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

2

**Suicide can be a challenging topic.**

Please take a break if needed.

Remember, help is always available >

The Crisis Text Line and National Suicide Prevention Lifeline are available 24/7. Text **ACT** to 741741.

3

**But today is focused on prevention**

- Recognizing warning signs
- Engaging in caring conversations
- Connecting students to help
- The big picture

Hope




4

But I'm a...

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

5

Craig Miller Video

Survived a suicide attempt at 20 years old and has written a book about his experience entitled "This is How it Feels: Attempting Suicide and Finding Life"

[www.thisishowitfeels.com](http://www.thisishowitfeels.com)

- At what age did he begin thinking of suicide?
- What purpose did thoughts of suicide serve for Craig?
- Things could have been different...

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

6

Attempt Survivor: Craig Miller

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

7

**A Major Public Health Issue for Young People**

2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey:

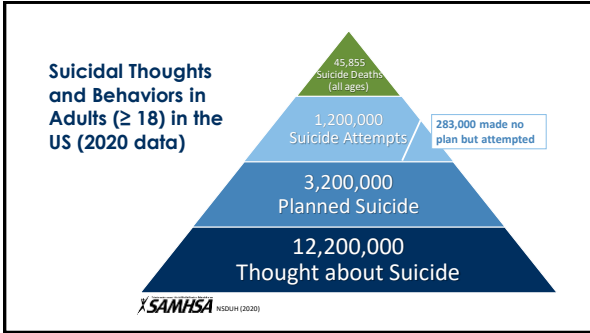
	US	MA
What % of students felt so sad or hopeless for 2+ weeks that they stopped doing some usual activity?	36.7%	33.8%
What % of students seriously considered attempting suicide?	18.8%	17.5%
What % of students made a suicide plan?	15.7%	14.8%
What % of students made a suicide attempt?	8.9%	7.3%
What % of students made a suicide attempt that required medical attention?	2.5%	2.6%

- Suicide ranks as the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for young people (ages 10-14). (CDC, 2017)

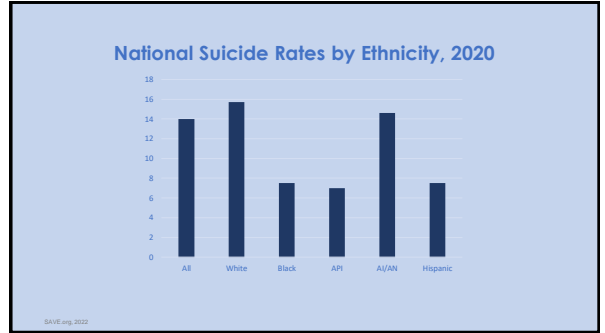
YRBS (2019)

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

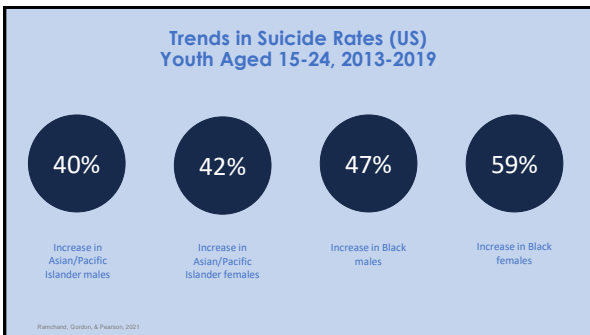
8



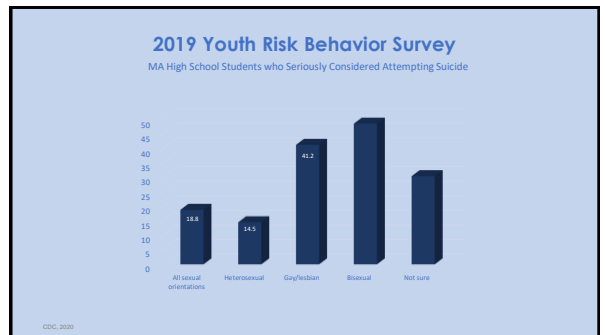
9



10



11

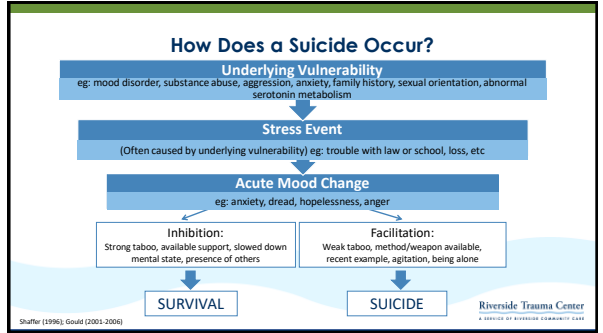


12

# Suicide: A Major Public Health Issue

There is no single cause for suicide – it is always a **complex, multi-factorial** event.

13



14

### Language Matters

How do we talk about suicide?

Committed Completed Suicided Successful Suicide	➔	Died by suicide Suicide death Killed themselves
Failed attempt	➔	Suicide attempt
Suicide gesture Suicide threat Parasuicide	➔	Describe behavior

15

### Your role in suicide prevention

**Relationships matter**

- School mental health professionals and student support staff have the **MOST TRAINING** in identifying and intervening with youth at risk for suicide.
- All other school staff are the **MOST LIKELY** to interact with students who aren't already identified as needing support.

MindWise INNOVATIONS

16

### Groups of Students at Higher Risk

- Students with mental health challenges;
- Students who have previously attempted suicide or who know someone who died by suicide;
- Victims or perpetrators of abuse or bullying;
- Students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning their sexuality (especially if their families or community are rejecting of their sexuality);
- Perfectionists and high-achievers;
- American Indian students and white, male students;
- Students at risk for dropping out

Adapted from dpi.wi.gov & 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

17

### Groups of Students at Higher Risk (cont.)

- Students who are highly aggressive or impulsive;
- Students who abuse alcohol or other drugs.
- Students recently discharged from an Inpatient Psychiatric Hospitalization;
- Students involved with the Justice and/or Child Welfare Systems;
- Students Who Engage in Non-suicidal Self-Injury;
- Students With (certain) Medical Conditions;
  - Cancers, CNS Disorders/Injuries, HIV/AIDS, Chronic Kidney Disease, Arthritis, Asthma

Adapted from dpi.wi.gov & 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

18

### Adverse Childhood Experiences

Dube et al., 2001 JAMA

ACE Score	Attempts during childhood/adolescence (%)	Attempts during adulthood (%)
0	0.2%	0.8%
1	0.4%	1.6%
2	0.8%	3.2%
3	1.6%	6.4%
4	3.2%	12.8%
5	6.4%	25.6%
6	12.8%	51.2%
7+	25.6%	102.4%

- 80% of suicide attempts during childhood/adolescence were attributable to ACEs.
- Childhood and adolescent suicide attempts increased 51-fold, or 5,100% with an ACE score of 7 or more.

Dube et al. (2001)

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

19

### Impulsivity

Age Group	Percentage (%)
0-17	33%
18-24	21%
25-44	20%
45-64	13%
65+	6%

Miller (2001); www.high.harvard.edu/means-matter/

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

20

## Depression & Suicide Risk Factors

Depression is a one risk factor for suicide and is also linked to other risk factors including:

- Use/abuse of alcohol and other drugs
- Non suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI)
- Social isolation
- Bullying (Both victim and perpetrator)
- Physical pain/poor health outcomes

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

21

## What Does Depression Look Like?

- Frequent sadness, tearfulness, crying
- Expressed hopelessness
- Decreased interest in activities; or inability to enjoy previously favorite activities
- Persistent boredom; low energy
- Social isolation, poor communication
- Low self-esteem and guilt
- Frequent complaints of physical illnesses such as headaches and stomachaches

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

22

## What Does Depression Look Like? (cont.)

- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Increased irritability, anger, or hostility
- Difficulty with relationships
- Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school
- Poor concentration
- A major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Talk of, or efforts to run away from home
- Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behavior

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

23

- What are some of the ways teens might communicate their wish to die?
- What about younger children? What might we see or hear?



Dad's Tree - B Matros

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

24

## Warning Signs of Suicidal Youth

If a youth shows or expresses any of the following behaviors or symptoms, they may signal a suicidal crisis.

- Feelings of **Hopelessness**
- **Anxiety**, agitation, trouble sleeping or sleeping all the time
- Expressions of having no reason for living; no sense of **purpose** in life
- Feelings of being **trapped** - like there's no way out
- Increase **alcohol and/or drug use**
- **Withdrawal** from friends, family, and community
- Rage, uncontrolled **anger**, expressions of wanting or seeking revenge
- **Reckless** behavior or more risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Dramatic **mood changes**
- **Giving away** prized possessions

AAS (6-6)

Riverside Trauma Center  
A DIVISION OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

25

## Meet Elli



26

“  
If you think something's wrong,  
the only way to find out is to ask.  
”

Riverside Trauma Center  
A DIVISION OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

27

## Why Wouldn't Someone Ask?

- Fear of:
  - Not knowing what to do if the answer is yes
  - Not having time to respond adequately
  - Mandated reporting requirements
  - Putting the idea in someone's head
  - Liability
- Thinking it's none of their business
- Belief that suicide is not preventable

Riverside Trauma Center  
A DIVISION OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

28

### How to Ask the Question

#### Indirect:

- "Do you wish you would go to sleep and not wake up?"
- "Do you wish you were dead?"

#### Direct:

- "Have you thought about killing yourself?"
- "Have you had thoughts about suicide?"

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

29

### How Not to Ask the Question

**"You're not thinking  
about suicide, are you?"**

Quinnert (2000)

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

30

### Why Not?

**"Are you thinking about  
hurting yourself?"**

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

31

### How Would You Ask?

- I'm concerned....
- I've noticed that you seem really quiet lately, like something might be bothering you...
- You know, you've been saying some things that make me wonder....
- Sometimes when kids are feeling as upset as you're telling me you feel, they say they might have thought life wasn't worth living or they wish they were dead. I'm wondering if you've ever thought that?

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

32



### ACT to help a student in need

**A**

**Acknowledge** that you are signs of depression or suicide in a student and that it is serious.

**C**

**Care:** Let the student know you **care** about them and that you can help.

**T**



**Tell:** Follow your school protocol and **tell** your mental health staff or designated administrator.

Riverside Trauma Center  
A DIVISION OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

33

**Because you work with students on a regular basis, you have a unique opportunity to ...**

**help prevent suicide by **ACKNOWLEDGING** signs that someone is struggling**

34

### ACT to help a student in need

**A** **Acknowledge-** that you are noticing **warning signs** of suicide in a student and that it is serious.

**C** **Care-** Let the student know you **care** about them and that you can help.

**T** **Tell-**Follow your school protocol and tell your mental Health staff.

- **Be aware** of the warning signs
- **Take all signs seriously**
- **Know what to do** if you see signs of depression or suicide

35


## Acknowledge

Review

36


### What signs did Mr. Newell **A**cknowledge?

- Down mood
- Not turning in assignments
- Not participating in class
- Change in peer relationships
- Angry outburst




37

### You've acknowledged signs of depression or suicide and now...



it's time to show the student you **CARE**




38

**A** Acknowledge- that you are noticing warning signs of suicide in a student and that it is serious.

**C** **Care-** Let the student know you **care** about them and that you can help.


**T** Tell-Follow your school protocol and tell your mental health staff.

- Encourage **connection** by offering a listening ear
- **Validate** the student's feelings and experiences
- Use open-ended questions and provide **judgement free** support



39

### Care Review



40

**You've talked with the student and increased their feeling of safety, now...**

it's time to **TELL** a school mental health professional




41


**A** **Acknowledge**- that you are noticing warning signs of suicide in a student and that it is serious.

**C** **Care**- Let the student know you care about them and that you can help.

**T** **Tell**- Follow your school protocol and tell your mental health staff

**Student Safety is the #1 Priority**

- Follow your **district protocol**
- Supervise the student** - physically keep the student with you
- Physically walk the student to the mental health professional's office **OR** invite the mental health professional to come to you
- Avoid promising confidentiality; all concerns about suicide **must be reported**



42

**ACT**  
Review



43

**Managing reactions**

You don't need to be an expert or have all the answers.



Give yourself permission to be human. It's common to feel uncomfortable with this topic.



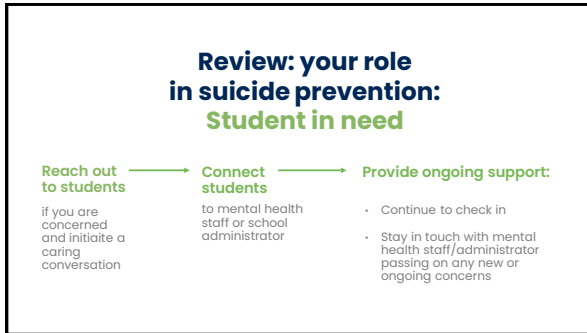
Seek support for yourself. Debrief with your school counselor or seek support from your supervisor.



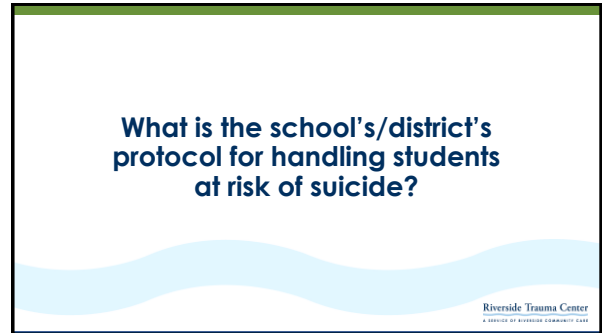
Pause to breathe. Take a walk, journal, and reflect.



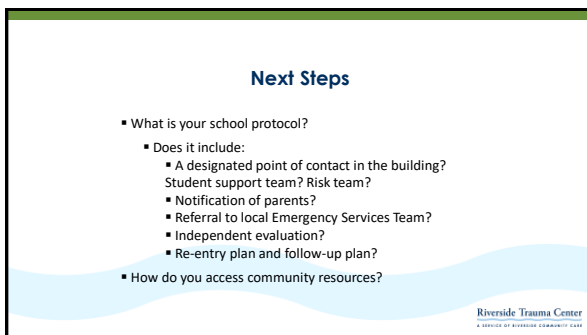
44



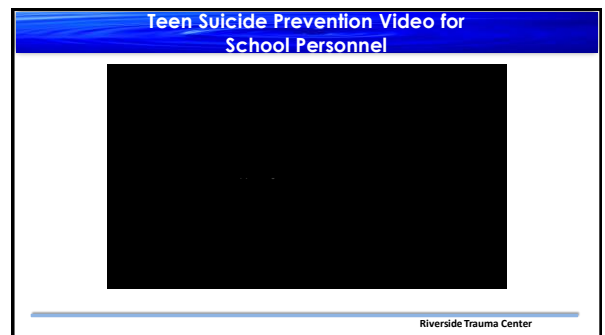
45



46



47



48

### Your role in suicide prevention: Upstream

**Risk Factors**

**Protective Factors**

**Vulnerability** ← → **Resilience**

MindWise  
INNOVATIONS

49

### Vulnerability to suicide

An attempt to escape  
**intense psychological pain and hopelessness**  
stemming from a **complex mix of factors**

Rejection (ex. LGBTQ+ experiencing bias)

History of aggression

Untreated depression, anxiety or other mental health problems

Lack of social connection

Drinking or drug use

History of childhood adversity

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

50

### Building resilience and hope

Feeling of hope

Coping skills

Treatment for depression/mental health

School connectedness

Healthy habits

Connection to peers and trusted adults

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

51

### Your role in suicide prevention: The big picture

**Risk Factors**

**Protective Factors**

MindWise  
INNOVATIONS

52

### Three Principles to Improve Outcomes

- + PROSOCIALITY**
  - Supportive social networks
  - Empathy and concern about the welfare and rights of others
- TOXIC INFLUENCES**
  - Biological, Psychological, Social, Environmental, Cultural
- + CORE CAPABILITIES**
  - Executive Functioning - Problem solving, response inhibition, working memory, task switching, etc
  - Self-Regulation – Psychological flexibility, managing emotions, etc.

Adapted from Center on the Developing Child (2017); Biglan, et al. (2012)

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

53

### The Role of Schools in Prevention & Identification

- How/where do we spot youth with emotional challenges?
- How/where in our curriculum can we address these concerns?
- Do we have procedures/policies for what to do when we're concerned?
- How do we promote strength and resilience in our students?

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

54

### To Be or Not to Be, That is NOT the Only Question


Examples of Ways to Include Suicide Prevention and Healthy Coping Messaging Into Existing School Curriculum:

- Reframe the narrative: *"The real tragedy here is..."*
- Downplay the romanticism of suicide and mental illness
- Mention that suicide is complex and avoid simplistic explanations for suicide
- Talk about other choice points/problem solving option for the characters
- Embed information into regular conversations and interactions about: Trauma, Coping skills, Self-regulation, Prosociality, & Problem solving
- Offer hope and assert that there is always help

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY CARE

55

### The big picture




56

**"Take Home" Message**

- Everyone is a "gatekeeper"
- Always take a suicidal communication seriously!
- Don't be afraid to ask directly about suicide.
- Holding the hope for a suicidal student
- Clear school protocols that everyone knows

Riverside Trauma Center  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

57

 **MindWise**  
INNOVATIONS

**Riverside Trauma Center**  
A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

**SOS for School Staff**  
Your role in suicide prevention

Larry Berkowitz, Ed.D.  
[lberkowitz@riversidecc.org](mailto:lberkowitz@riversidecc.org)

Copyright © 2022 MindWise Innovations®, a service of Riverside Community Care.

58