

# Talking About Suicide

from *After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools*

## 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, straightforward manner does not put ideas into kids' minds.

## 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.

## 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.

## by saying . . .

"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 percent of people who die by suicide have a mental disorder at the time of their death, it is likely that \_\_\_\_\_ suffered from a mental 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."

## by saying . . .

"The reasons that someone dies by suicide are not simple, and are 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 disorder."

## by saying . . .

"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?"

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### Address anger.

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

by saying . . .

"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.

by saying . . .

"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.

by saying . . .

"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 disorders or substance abuse problems. Suicide is never an 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."