

Operation Snowball, Inc.

SUICIDE AWARENESS & PREVENTION TOOLKIT



OPERATION
SNOWBALL

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OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

The Suicide Awareness & Prevention Toolkit serves as a manual to guide Action Teams and Individuals through the steps of bringing suicide awareness and prevention to your local schools, organizations and communities.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for adolescents and adults ages 10 - 34. By providing the proper information and resources to our communities, we can work together to save lives.

This toolkit will walk you through what activities and events you can host, the proper language to use when discussing suicide, what resources are available to youth and adults in your community and more.

*This toolkit does not discuss signs, symptoms or crisis response. If you are looking for that information, please see the resources page!

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES

As you look through this toolkit, we want to encourage all of our teams and individuals to think about effective prevention strategies and best practices!

Plans for suicide awareness and prevention events and activities should be structured around evidence-based programs and practices. What does this mean? You should be looking to do and share things that are credible, reliable and effective based on data! What will statistically and beneficially engage the community? What statistics can you provide that can be sourced back to trusted organizations? What will support the cultural diversity of your community and display the cultural competency of your event? What will ensure the well-being of all participants?

In recent years, we have seen that many of the practices that used to be followed, like scare tactics, are not effective for our youth. It's best to remain informative, engaging and evidence-based to create an impact instead of relying on fear to start conversation and participation.

We always suggest that teams and individuals refer to the [Strategic Prevention Framework](#) as a resource for best practices. The SPF is a reliable foundation for assessing and planning prevention activities, events and more that are most effective and impactful for the communities they support!

PERSON-FIRST & RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE

Hand in hand with effective prevention strategies comes person-first and respectful language. It is essential, especially in prevention programming that we use language that is understanding and kind.

Person-first language means referring to a person by who they are and not by their disorders or the challenges they are experiencing. For example, instead of referring to someone as "a depressed person" you would say they are "experiencing a mental health challenge."

Furthermore, there are some very important terms that we should focus on eliminating from our vocabulary that relate to suicide. First and foremost, we want to avoid saying someone "committed suicide." The word commit comes with a long line of negative connotations (commit sin, commit a crime, be committed). Instead we use "died by suicide." Along with this, it's important to not refer to suicide as successful or failed - this puts an emphasis on the idea that the loss of a life is good, when, of course, it is not.

Changing language can be hard - we have been conditioned by our societies to hear and use specific terms without a second thought. Mistakes happen and it's okay to correct yourself - practice helps! By using the correct, appropriate and respectful terminology, we eliminate the stigma surrounding depression and suicide and the individuals experiencing these challenges.

LOCAL RESEARCH

The first step in bringing suicide prevention and awareness to your community is thinking about what resources they already have and what information they already know.

Questions to ask:

- Who is your target audience? Why?
- What information about suicide and depression is taught or available in your community?
- What people or organizations are available in your area that may be helpful in learning about or dealing with suicide and depression?
- What holes, if any, do you see in the information and resources in your community?
- What specific groups of people do you think may benefit from more information outside your audience (i.e. youth, parents and guardians, students, teachers, etc)?
- What data is there about suicide and depression in your community?
- Who or what can help us find out this information?

It's important to know before planning where your audience is at. Some of the community you are looking to work with may have first or secondhand experience while some may have little to no understanding at all. That's okay! This will help you cater to your audiences needs as well as make sure your plan is approachable and safe for all.

IMPORTANT DATES

There are a few important dates you can incorporate into events, campaigns or activities or that you can acknowledge with your Action Team or as an individual.

The entire month of September is Suicide Prevention Month. Throughout this month you'll see multiple organizations focus on ending the stigma surrounding suicide, promoting awareness, sharing resources and more.

The calendar also acknowledges the week surrounding September 4 as National Suicide Prevention Week with September 10 always being observed as World Suicide Prevention Day.

Incorporating these dates into your action plan can help bolster the resources available at one given time, provide more comfort and support to those who need it and increase the knowledge spread.

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

With an audience, a possible time frame and data - what can you do? Check out the categories of ideas below and think about how you can expand on them with your own ideas!

ONLINE

- Host a webinar
- Create an online challenge
- Share statistics
- Create PSAs or videos
- Run a social media campaign
- Create a hashtag or profile picture

IN SCHOOL

- Hold an assembly
- Host an awareness week
- Provide ribbons for everyone
- Host a "wear purple" day
- Include information in daily announcements
- Hold an essay or poster contest

IN COMMUNITY

- Ask local businesses and orgs to display ribbons
- Host a community-wide event or speaker
- Identify prevention organizations, resources and facilities to share with peers
- Ask local orgs to sponsor your event(s)

AT HOME

- Talk to family and friends about mental health
- Hang a ribbon on your door to show support
- Have family and friends join in wearing purple or in events/activities
- Review local resources with friends and family

GET THE COMMUNITY INVOLVED

Getting the community members far and wide involved in your event is a great way to educate the masses, show support for the people in your community and come together to better address mental health challenges in your organizations and schools.

Think about the makeup of your community. What businesses and individuals in your community are also supporting the same cause(s) as you? Are there first responders, local educators, prevention workers and others who would be interested in taking part or sharing resources and information? Are there parents, guardians or families who need to know more information about understanding the signs and symptoms of depression? How can you get school administration involved?

There is always benefit in reaching out and discussing common goals! You can create long-term partnerships and support by initiating these connections! Through these partnerships, the more education you can spread and the more lives you can save.

IMPORTANT SAFETY REMINDERS

Suicide and depression-related events, activities and campaigns are very serious and require critical attention to detail - the statistics should be credible, the events should be safe and, overall, anything you do should be considerate of those who have experienced mental health challenges or who know those who have.

Suicide is a serious topic, one that can be intimidating, scary and emotional to discuss. It's important that resources are available for those who may be struggling or for those who may have experiences related to the topic. Whether that means having counselors at your event, numbers available to call, or information available, it's important to support your audience!

Two of the most important contacts you can offer anyone and everyone through whatever action plan you choose to follow are the National Suicide Prevention Hotline and the Crisis Text Line. These operate 24/7 and are open to all, with multiple language options.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline - (800) 273 - 8255
Crisis Text Line - 741741

RESOURCES

WEBSITES

- [National Council for Mental Well-Being](#)
- [SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](#)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Health](#)

PROGRAMS

- [Mental Health First Aid Classes](#)
- [Find Your Anchor](#)
- [More Than Sad Program: High School Students, Teachers & Parents](#)
- [It's Real: College Students & Mental Health](#)
- [Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention](#)

NUMBERS

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline: (800) 273 - 8255
- Crisis Text Line: 741741
- The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+): (866) 488 - 7386

SOURCES AND CREDITS

This toolkit was made based on suggestions from the SPF-trained staff of the Illinois Association for Behavioral Health, Operation Snowball and the Cebrin Goodman Teen Institute. These staff are not responsible for any medical issues or otherwise that occur at any events hosted based on this toolkit. Teams and individuals hosting events are responsible for what occurs at their specific events.

This Toolkit is meant to be used as a basis for planning and is not suggested as the *only* way to plan. This Toolkit is meant to serve Snowball Teams and CGTI attendees in action planning within their communities and to support thorough, organized and detail-oriented events and is based on the experience of past event-planning and hosting, the SPF framework and years of training.

This toolkit should be used by and shared with Operation Snowball and Cebrin Goodman Teen Institute Actions Teams only and was made with that specific use and implementation in mind.