

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Will talking about suicide make youth more likely to think about it?

NO! This is one of the most pervasive and dangerous myths that exist about suicide. Research shows that talking about it does not increase the incidence, particularly when young people are made aware of the resources that are available to help them or their friends if they are feeling suicidal. Asking someone about their suicidal thoughts will not put the idea in their mind.

Why should we talk about it?

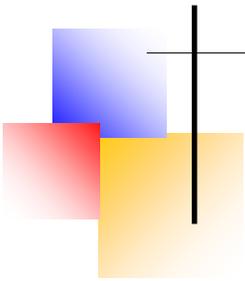
Creating opportunities for open and non-judgmental dialogue about feelings of suicide and depression is one of the most important ways to prevent suicide before it happens. People who are thinking about suicide are desperate for help to escape their pain. Helping young people realize that they are not alone and that there are people who care and who will help, is crucial. Young people are not able to fully understand the finality of suicide in the same way as adults. ***Youth sometimes need assistance to realize that problems are temporary and do not require that most permanent solution – suicide.***

What if a student discloses feelings of suicide?

It is important for parents and teachers to be as educated and prepared as possible for students to express their feelings – which may be distressing for us as adults. However, we would rather hear about, and have the opportunity to discuss those feelings before it is too late. As a community, we must create a safe environment for discussion by putting aside our own fears and judgements.

All schools that book the play will be involved in pre and post-educational activities, building the confidence and capacity of each school community to respond to possible disclosures – now and in the future. The Youth Talk initiative will build on the resources that schools already have in place to create sustainable change.

Schools should plan on having social workers, child and youth counsellors, psych consultants, and teachers involved in education awareness so that resources are in place for the youth.



If there is a disclosure of suicidal feelings:

- Do not minimize or dismiss those feelings
- Listen to what they are saying and encourage them to talk; help them clarify and define the problem if you can
- Provide them with some immediate options for help (guidance, child and youth workers, parents, community mental health workers/crisis line)
- Ask if they are planning on harming themselves. If they say yes, ask them if they have a plan. Get the details out.
- If possible, get the student to make a verbal 'contract' with you – no suicidal actions for a specified period of time. If the student is in extreme crisis, it should be a short amount of time – a couple of hours – enough time for you to access other resources such as the Distress Centre, the Police, Child and Youth Crisis Response team etc.

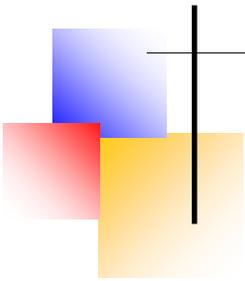
What NOT to do:

- If possible, do not leave the student alone or turn them away if they want to talk.
- Do not minimize or dismiss those feelings.
- Don't judge or 'moralize'
- Don't worry about silences – you both need time to think and process
- Don't promise confidentiality. (Do promise assistance and privacy/discretion). If you believe that a person is of immediate risk of harm to themselves or others, you must call in other resources.
- Don't argue about whether suicide is right or wrong, morally.

What if religious beliefs are raised or questioned through the course of the post-performance discussion?

We all have our own beliefs about suicide – for some of us, religion plays a large role in what we believe. Some religions believe that suicide is morally wrong, or a 'sin'.

If a student raises religious beliefs as an issue or question in the discussion after the play, the teacher/facilitator should steer the discussion back to the issue at hand – how we can all help each other by being open, getting help and connecting with others. It is important to be respectful and non-judgmental while also recognizing that religious beliefs can act as strong protective factors for some young people. Their faith and spirituality can be a life-affirming support to them, but that is not the case for everyone.



The teacher/facilitator is not there to make judgements on the 'rightness or wrongness' of suicidal behaviour.

Remember the message in the final poem – this is what should drive the discussion, as well as making students aware of resources they can access if they, or their friends need help.

FINAL POEM

*There are a multitude of horrors in the world but
Don't give up hope.
Don't stop talking.
Don't stop trying.
Don't stop caring.
We all have masks
We all have pain.
We all experience misery and loss but
Be true to yourself and
Help each other.
Fill each other's lives with hope and remember
Love does exist.
They say that only in death can pain be released.
Only in death is there hope –
Who the hell are 'they' anyway?
It seems to me that:
Only in life can the questions be answered.
Only in life can you work through the pain.
Only in life is there hope.
Life – the true leap of faith.*