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Foundation**

"Suicide Prevention"

Estimated Time of Completion: One or two 50-minute periods for activity, plus 30 minutes for viewing the video

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I. Summary:

For grades 7-12. Students will use cards to sort and understand a large quantity of information regarding suicidal teens, then apply what they learn to analyses of case studies.

II. Objectives:

- To learn key concepts of suicide prevention
- To understand the characteristics of students who are at higher risk to attempt suicide, warning signs of suicidal teens, and what to do if a friend is suicidal
- To practice needed skills by studying stories of suicidal teenagers
- To discern facts and myths of suicide

III. Materials Needed:

- PBS **In the Mix** video: ["Depression: On the Edge"](#)

- TV/VCR

- 4" x 6" index cards prepared by teacher with information from the following appendices. Laminate for reuse.
 - [Facts On Suicide](#)
 - [Suicide Myths](#)
 - [Students Who Are At Higher Risk](#)
 - [Warning Signs of Suicide](#)
 - [Verbal Signs of Suicide](#)

- 5 sheets of construction paper or posterboard, with one of five categories written on each.

- One copy of each of four **What's Going On?** stories, with answers:
 - [What's Going On?: Latosha's Story](#)
[Answers to Latosha's Story](#)
 - [What's Going On?: Haley's Story](#)
[Answers to Haley's Story](#)
 - [What's Going On?: Ryan's Story](#)
[Answers to Ryan's Story](#)
 - [What's Going On?: Peter's Story](#)
[Answers to Peter's Story](#)

- Masking tape

- Notebook paper

- Pencils

IV. Procedure:

1. Introduce the subject with the following key concepts (preferably after information on depression has been studied):
 - Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem; or, as the **In the Mix** video states, the "only irreversible choice."
 - It is the result of a teenager unable to see any other solutions to the problems that are consuming him/her.
 - Suicide is preventable.
 - Suicidal people do not want to die, they want their problems to end.

2. Explain to students that they will be studying ways to help other teenagers who may need help finding solutions. Suicidal teens are depressed and need help, but how do we recognize this, and what do we do?
3. Put the following categories on the board or on construction paper/posterboard spaced around the room:
 - **Facts On Suicide** (5)
 - **Suicide Myths** (5)
 - **Students Who Are At Higher Risk** (10)
 - **Warning Signs of Suicide** (8)
 - **Verbal Signs of Suicide** (7)
4. Briefly explain each one of the categories:
 - **Facts On Suicide** will give general information that could help students understand the seriousness of the problem.
 - **Suicide Myths** are statements or beliefs that people believe about suicide, but are NOT true.
 - **Students Who Are At Higher Risk** of suicide are groups of students 'statistically' at a higher risk of attempting suicide. That doesn't mean that if a student is a member of the group, they are automatically suicidal. Nor does it mean that if they are not members of the group, they are not suicidal. It means that when statistics are compiled on teenagers who attempt suicide, results show that these teens are often members of at least one of these risk groups.
 - **Warning Signs of Suicide** are clues given before someone attempts to kill themselves. Remember: suicidal individuals do not want to die, they want their problems to end. They often give out these warning signs before a suicide attempt.
 - **Verbal Signs of Suicide** are statements that hint at someone's suicidal feelings or intentions.
5. To help understand this complex problem, a great deal of information needs to be sorted. Tell students that you have cards with information on them that they must categorize. You can hold the cards face down, and have them draw a card(s). They may show the cards to their neighbors and decide where they think it belongs. Each student should take a piece of masking tape, and put the card(s) under the correct category. Urge them not to worry about making a mistake, since the class will be discussing each of them later. If necessary, go through categories again, with the brief description. **(Note: Make sure that every student gets at least one card, and that all cards are dispensed.)**
6. Start with **Facts on Suicide**. Stress the importance of studying the subject of

suicide prevention by using these facts. (**Note: There are brief comments after each fact, which is information for the teacher to explain to the students.**) Continue through each category, giving comments and encouraging discussion. This could take minutes or hours, depending on discussion.

7. Tell students to copy the information from the cards containing **Students Who Are At Higher Risk and Warning Signs of Suicide** on notebook paper. This information will be helpful to complete the rest of the activity (or you could leave all cards up for everyone to see).
8. Put students in 4 groups, with each one receiving one of the "What's Going On?" stories. Assign a reader and a recorder for each group. The rest of the group will discuss the story and have the recorder list the 'at risk group' and 'warning signs' that are revealed in the story. Read the story to the whole class and report findings. OR Have the small group do a role play of the "What's Going On?" story, and have the classmates then list the 'at risk group' and the 'warning signs.' verbally. Either way, it will give the students opportunity to practice looking for clues to a potentially suicidal student.
9. Brainstorm ways to help a suicidal friend. Guide the discussion to these important areas:
 - Listen to your friend's feelings.
 - Be direct about the situation: "Are you considering suicide? Do you have a plan? Will you talk to someone who will help?"
 - Get help from: hospital, family physician, counselors, clergy, teacher, advisor, psychiatrist, etc. Take them to the person, if possible.
 - Call 911 if danger is immediate. (Never swear to secrecy; your friend might get mad at you, but they will be alive!)

V. Classroom Assessment:

Since this activity is primarily participation, teacher can grade according to her/him own personal accepted practices. A cognitive test could be developed, having students list information learned.

VI. Extensions and Adaptations:

- Have a guest speaker who has worked on a suicide crisis line speak to the class.
- Have a guest speaker who treats suicidal students (psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, etc.) speak to the class.
- Research teenage suicide statistics, comparing today with the previous 10, 20, or 30 years.
- Have students dialogue ways they express their sadness with their parents, and have parents record the answers to hand in to the teacher.

- Have students list names of people who could help them when they are sad, and look up their phone numbers.
- Discuss ways that students can stay "safe". (Talk out their troubles with parent, teacher or trusted adult friend; stay away from dangerous firearms; get an officer when they are confused or lost, etc.)

VII. Online Resources:

- PBS In the Mix - "Depression: On The Edge"
www.pbs.org/mix/depression_index.html
- National Mental Health Association
<http://www.nmha.org>
- National Institute of Mental Health
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>
- National Foundation for Depressive Illness
<http://www.depression.org>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
<http://www.afsp.org>
- The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
<http://www.nami.org>
- Knowledge Exchange Network
<http://www.mentalhealth.org>
- Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network (SPAN)
<http://www.spanusa.org>

VIII. Relevant National Standards:

These are established by the National Health Education Foundation and can be viewed at <http://www.cancer.org/cshe/cshestud.html>:

- Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid health information and health promoting products and services.
- Students will demonstrate and ability to practice valid health enhancing behaviors and reduce health risks.

About the Author:

Kathleen Gasparini has her Master's in Curriculum and has taught secondary health education for over 20 years. She was the "Health Teacher of the Year" for state of North Dakota, and presently is on the National Health Standards Committee for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. She is a state HIV trainer. She teaches grade 10 health classes in Grand Forks, as well as School Health at the University of North Dakota.

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