

The SEHS Suicide Prevention Program

Program description

The SEHS Suicide Prevention Program incorporates three prominent prevention strategies into a single program, combining (1) a curriculum that aims to; challenge incorrect and undesirable attitudes about suicide, educate participants about the symptoms of major depression, and reduce the stigma and fear associated with seeking help from a mental health professional, and (2) to screen for, and (3) intervene with, students indicating a willingness to consider suicide after participation in the program. The SEHS program has, since its inception in 1987, continuously promoted the concept that suicide is directly related to mental illness, typically depression, and that it is not a normal reaction to stress or emotional upset.

The SEHS program utilizes the following core components:

- written intervention policies for all staff
- freshman orientation presentations by an on-site school social worker with all 9th-grade students to reduce access barriers and stimulate self and peer referrals to the same school social worker
- easy access to school social workers, on-site from September through June, for assessment, intervention, and referral
- structured classroom discussions on mental health, mental illness, and suicide to all 10th-grade students in health class
- prevention information materials for distribution to all 10th-grade students
- formal and informal evaluations of prevention message effectiveness
- follow-up screening mechanism for pro-suicide attitudes
- intervention with at-risk students
- post-vention component to be used following any student death

The SEHS program has the following goals for students and presenters:

The primary goals of the program for students are to:

- learn appropriate initial responses to take with a peer who seems to be at risk for suicide
- become more willing to inform a trusted adult if a peer is told by a friend about intent to commit suicide, even if in confidence
- become convinced that suicide is not an option
- become more willing to make the initial connection with a trusted adult or professional counselor if having suicidal thoughts

The primary goals for the program presenters are to:

- reinforce appropriate attitudes about suicide
- normalize feelings of loneliness in adolescence
- reinforce the importance of having a satisfactory relationship with parents
- help students to recognize symptoms of major depression
- disassociate stress alone as the pathway to suicide and associate suicide with thinking errors and mental illness
- increase the visibility and acceptance of school and community mental health services
- unsettle those who are complacent about their history of suicidal behavior or current suicidal thinking
- screen and provide one-to-one follow-up with those who maintain a pro-suicide attitude

Program Activities

A 50-minute, small-group, didactic presentation is given to all 9th-grade students regarding the services of the mental health professionals within the school. All 10th grade students receive a 50-minute classroom presentation that features a 15-minute video and subsequent discussion by a mental health professional and a 24-minute video and subsequent discussion on the following day by the same person or by a health teacher. Support materials in the form of handouts are provided and all students are given a quiz at the end of the second day. If the discussion of the 24-minute video runs longer than expected the handouts and quiz may be given out on a third day.

Evaluation Design & Outcomes

Three experimentally designed studies were conducted. The first study, done in 1993, compared attitudinal change between a test and control group. Significant change was observed in 7 of 8-targeted areas.

The second study was conducted in 2003 utilizing a set of questions that were nearly identical to those asked in the 1993 study. There were two purposes to this study. One to see if the results of the 1993 study could be replicated and two to see if a different presenter in a different school could obtain similar results. According to the program developer the results of this study showed that changes in attitude occurred in the desired direction for each of the eight target areas.

A third study was conducted in 2005 to compare the reported incidence of suicidal ideation and attempts during the past 12 months between students who participated in the program and those who did not. According to the program developer the results showed that program participants were 69% less likely to report suicidal ideation and 73% less likely to report a suicide attempt than were students in a control group. A separate analysis was conducted with students who identified themselves as having had at least one or more periods of depression during the past 12 months. In this subgroup, program participants were 70% less likely to report a suicide attempt within the past 12 months than students in the corresponding control group. The results of the 1993, 2003 and 2005 studies are available for review at www.u-46.org/sehs/spp

Implementation essentials

Awareness of, and, easy student access to, on-site mental health professionals
Discussion guide for presenters
Use of the videos: *Choosing Life* and *More Than Sad*
Use of follow-up quiz
Follow up assessments with at-risk students by on-site mental health professionals

Program costs:

Video; *Choosing Life: Ashley's Story*..... 15.50 VHS or DVD
Video; *More Than Sad*.....49.99 DVD

All other materials are available from the program developer at no cost. These materials include a classroom discussion transcript, ready-to-print transparencies, student handouts, a follow-up quiz, and program survey. All are available by e-mailing a request to Jerry Ciffone.

Program contact information

Program developer

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Video order information:

Choosing Life: Ashley's Story
Infinite Video Productions, Inc.
1880 Fabyan Parkway
Batavia, IL 60510
630-389-0000 FAX 630-389-0208
info@infinitevideo.com

More Than Sad: Teen Depression
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
120 Wall Street, 22nd Floor
New York, NY 10005
212-363-3500
www.morethansad.org