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#1

Definitions

Disclose: share personal information that is likely private and possibly not shared before.

Suicide: taking one's life intentionally.

Suicidal ideation: any thoughts about, wishes for, visions of, or plans to die by suicide.

- Passive ideation: thoughts, wishes, etc. to be dead or no longer alive
- Active ideation: thoughts, wishes, etc. to die by suicide
- Intent: will to die by suicide
- Method: the means one would use to die by suicide
- Plan: intent is present, method is chosen and accessible, and there is a timeframe.

→ See Continuum of Risk (below) for more information on urgency related to these terms.

Suicide attempt: any action taken by an individual with the intent or thought to take their own life (note: for some youth, even coming very close to the act – e.g., standing on a roof, but never jumping – may count as an “attempt” in their eyes).

Confidentiality Rules

*Note: how you define confidentiality or privacy at your camp may be different, but these are some good guidelines. Campers should always be aware of what types of updates and information camp will share with their parents.

WHAT YOU
→ SAY ←
in here
STAYS IN HERE

UNLESS:

- 1. Someone is Hurting You***
- 2. You Want to Hurt Someone***
- 3. You Want to Hurt Yourself***
- 4. You Give Permission to Share With Another Trusting Adult***

#3

Responding to disclosures of current and past suicidal thoughts or actions

*Note: These recommendations are framed based on a disclosure by a camper. The same strategies are applicable if the person disclosing is a fellow staff member.

Dos:

- Stay calm! Practice whatever strategy you use to feel grounded (taking a deep breath, repeating a mantra, etc.).
- Use the word suicide.
- Validate the difficulty of sharing this information with another person and the bravery/courage of the person speaking out. ("I know this must be hard to talk about, and I am so proud of you for sharing it.")
- Respond with compassion. ("I'm so sorry you are/were going through such a difficult time.")
- Normalize mental health struggles that may lead to and include thoughts or actions of suicide. ("It's normal to feel overwhelmed," or "it's not unusual to feel worried/sad/scared/angry.")
- Ask for help! Pull in another staff member or go to your supervisor as soon as you need to, especially if you feel overwhelmed or are feeling triggered.
- Remind camper of confidentiality rules and explain why you have to bring in or tell your supervisor.
- Center the safety and well-being of the person disclosing. ("Your safety is the most important thing to me.")
- Include your supervisor, or camp mental health professional, and continue the conversation when appropriate.
- Tell camper exactly what you are going to report to your supervisor. ("I'm going to tell [my supervisor]...")
- Provide clear information about *your* next steps and the likely outcome of those steps (as far as you know). ("When we go to swimming in 15 minutes, I am going to tell [my supervisor] what you shared with me. I think she will probably tell her supervisor, who will help arrange a time for you to talk with [mental health professional] this afternoon.")
- When sharing with your supervisor, be explicit. ("The camper told me that she swallowed 20 Aspirin in May and was hoping it would kill her.")
- Be okay saying, "I don't know." (For example, if a camper asks if their parents will find out or if they will need to go home.)
- Depending on urgency, make sure they stay with you or stay in a space with staff supervision (with or without peers). If they say they'd prefer to be alone, be honest with them. ("It's important to me that you're in a space with other people right now, I want to make sure you're safe.")

Don'ts:

- Freak out!
- Diagnose a camper. ("You're obviously depressed.")
- Attempt to determine how "serious" the situation is – any mention of suicide, whether past or present, thoughts or actions, must be reported to your supervisor.
- Minimize a camper's disclosure (e.g., thinking it's not serious if they never attempted).
- Share your own or your friends' stories about suicidal thoughts or attempts.
- Avoid using the word suicide (e.g., don't replace with "hurt yourself").
- Shame or share negative thoughts about suicide. ("Suicide is selfish," or "suicide is for the weak.")
- Promise to keep this information a secret or that their parents won't get involved.
- Discuss the situations with other campers and staff, except for your supervisor, or when deemed appropriate by supervisor or mental health staff.

#4

Continuum of Risk

Based on the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale [C-SSRS], accessible at cssrs.columbia.edu

Note: as general staff, it is NOT your job to determine the severity of a suicidal disclosure. ANY disclosure about past or current thoughts about suicide should be reported to your supervisor. This continuum of risk is provided to give you a sense of the **urgency of how soon to tell your supervisor – from immediately (most urgent) to before bedtime (less urgent); this may vary based on different camps' protocols.*

Less urgent:

- Passive suicidal ideation. Statements you might hear:

“I wish I didn’t even exist anymore.”

“I wish I wouldn’t wake up in the morning.”

- Active suicidal ideation *without intent*. Statements you might hear:

“Killing myself would solve everything.... But I would never do it.”

“I have thought about committing suicide, but I could never do that to my mom/dog/friends.”

More urgent:

- Any thoughts about method. Statements you might hear:

“I’m not gonna do it but... if I did, I would just steal all my dad’s prescription pills and take them all.”

“I live in a really tall building. So the roof is always an option.”

- Active suicidal ideation with intent. Statements you might hear:

“I am thinking about doing something to sleep forever.”

“Maybe I’m just selfish, but suicide seems like a good option.”

Most urgent:

- Active suicidal ideation with method, intent, and plan. Statements you might hear:

“As soon as you all go to bed tonight I am going to head down to the lake and take a swim.”

“The day my parents come to pick me up, I am going to jump out of the car and into traffic.”

- Any actions done towards committing suicide (e.g., gathering pills, writing a suicide note, giving away belongings), *no matter how far in the past*.

“Things are better now, but last year there was this one night where I just started texting all my friends goodbye and then turned off my phone.”

“I would never do it but... I checked to see if the lock works on the cabinet where my parents keep their gun, just in case.”

#5

Scenarios

Scenario A: Samuel is an 11-year-old camper on his third summer at this camp. Samuel was known for being rambunctious, outgoing, and playful in past summers. However, this summer he has often seemed angry, withdrawn, or bored. You (staff) decide to pull Samuel aside after a particularly negative day and ask him what's going on. Samuel discloses that one month before coming to camp, he found out that his parents are planning to divorce. He tells you, "I really can't imagine life without my parents together. What's the point even? If they go through with it, I might just kill myself."

Scenario B: Judith is a 13-year-old, first-time camper. During evening activity, her cabin begins talking about their most challenging moment. Judith reports to the whole group that her most challenging moment was a night this past year when she made a list of ways she could die. She laughs as she is telling the story and jokes about how she was too chicken to go through with any of them.

Scenario C: August is 15-year-old camper who, while boating during a scheduled activity, shares with their counselor and two of their peers that they attempted suicide one year ago. August assures everybody that they are glad they lived, learned so much from the experience, and hasn't felt suicidal in several months.