

Responding to Suicidal Ideation

AUTHOR(S):	Elizabeth DeWan, LMSW Elizabeth.DeWan@gmail.com
SUMMARY:	Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among U.S. teenagers, and data shows that rates have grown in recent decades (CDC 2018). Adolescent campers often build intimate bonds with their peers and their young adult staff and share significant details about their mental health. Knowing how to respond and intervene on suicidal ideation is an essential mental health skill. - <i>Submitted by Elizabeth DeWan</i>
TOPIC(S):	In-the-moment response to disclosures that campers have had or are having thoughts of suicide or have previously attempted suicide.
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	After this training, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Define a continuum of risk - Respond calmly and effectively in real-time to a disclosure - Facilitate role plays to train frontline staff
AUDIENCE:	Adolescent and young adult camp staff.
TIMING:	45 minutes.
APPENDICES:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Definitions 2. Confidentiality rules 3. Do's and don'ts of responding to disclosures about suicide 4. Continuum of risk (adapted Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale [CSSRS]) 5. Role-play scenarios
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Above-mentioned handouts – enough copies for each participant. Feel free to print double-sided, make half-sheets, etc.
SET-UP DETAILS:	The ideal space and set-up allows enough room for a group to move back and forth across a room, then to sit in a circle to debrief the activity, and then to sit in pairs to role play.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

- **Opening (5 minutes):**
 - Introductions – name and why you chose this workshop
 - Trigger warning; acknowledge the uncomfortable feelings that can come up when we are faced with suicide. What emotions and bodily sensations come up when you talk about suicide?
 - Introduce objectives of the workshop: make it more comfortable to hear and talk about suicide.



- **Content (20 minutes):**
 - Give out Handout #1: “Definitions.” Discuss.
 - Give out Handout #2: “Confidentiality Rules.” Tell staff that campers will be informed of these rules in the first day orientation at camp. What questions do you have?
 - Learn the dos and don’ts of responding to a suicidal disclosure through the “Social Barometer”:
 - Label one side of the room “do” and one side of the room “don’t” with signs and point it out to staff. Tell staff you are going to read a series of possible reactions to a disclosure about suicide and they should move to the side of the room they believe is correct. Staff may stand in the middle if they’re not sure. After each statement, select 1-3 participants to share why they chose that answer. Facilitators should choose 5-10 possible reactions from Handout #3: “Responding to disclosures of current and past suicidal thoughts or actions” to use for the game.
 - Give out Handout #3 to all participants and debrief. Which responses seemed natural? Which surprised? Which do you not understand? Which would be hardest to use?
 - Learn about levels of urgency by reviewing Handout #4: “Continuum of Risk.” Emphasize that staff are ALWAYS expected to report to their supervisor; level of urgency is designed to help them determine if a supervisor should be pulled in immediately or if it can wait until later that day.

- **Role-play (10 minutes):**
 - Break staff into pairs and instruct one person to act as the camper and one as the staff. You will practice for five minutes and then switch. Use Handout #5: “Scenarios.” Staff may choose any scenario.

- **Questions and considerations in order to turnkey (ten minutes):** You are invited to critique the workshop, ask questions, and plan how to replicate activities during your own training!

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

- It is essential that each camp have a protocol in place for responding to any mention of suicide at an administrative level and communicate what the next step in that protocol is for a general staff member (e.g., “tell your supervisor within the hour” or “bring to immediate attention of the camp mental health professional” and “never leave the camper alone without another staff member”). This training is only meant to address the moment of disclosure itself – NOT the full process of ensuring a camper’s safety.
- It’s also essential that adolescent and young adult staff are clear about confidentiality rules from day one with their campers: confidentiality will be broken when there is concern that you may hurt yourself, hurt others, or are being hurt by someone (see Handout #2).
- Mental health professionals use a standard format for a “safety plan,” or a set of escalating actions an individual can take when feeling suicidal. A mid-summer activity can include reviewing this format so that staff can be more knowledgeable about next steps for campers working with mental health professionals (see Mid-Summer One Pager).