

SOS for High School

Discussion Guide & Screening Instructions

“Today we are going to be learning about suicide prevention. We will be watching some videos and discussing them as a group.

This can be a difficult topic to talk about but it’s important to learn how we can help each other.

*(Continue reading except for end-of-day classes**)*

At the end of the class, we will be asking you to complete a brief survey where you will be answering some questions about how you have been feeling over the past month. You will also have an opportunity to indicate if you would like to speak to an adult privately about any questions or concerns that you may have about yourself and/or a friend/peer.”

****NOTE: For classes being facilitated the last 1-2 periods of the school day (pre-determined by your school’s SOS Team), students should be directed to complete the survey *before* the SOS lesson.**

Directions for End-of-Day Classes:

****Read the directions to students before passing out the forms! Let students know that they should turn their paper over when they finish, and you will collect it from them. Do NOT have students pass papers forward or deposit in a pile!**

“Today we will be viewing and discussing the SOS High School Program videos. Before we start, I am going to pass out a brief survey. Please write your first and last name legibly at the top, and then answer the seven yes-or-no questions to the best of your ability. All but one question asks you to think about how you have been feeling over the ***past 4 weeks***, *not* just how you are feeling today, or even how you were feeling two summers ago or last school year, just how you’ve been feeling over the past month. Next, think of trusted adults both at home and at school, and complete this portion of the survey. If your trusted adult at home is a relative (mom, grandma, uncle, etc.) you can write their title as opposed to their name. For school, please specify a particular person (don’t just write “teacher” or “counselor”).

In our discussion today we will be talking about the importance of the ACT help-seeking message. I want to give you an opportunity right now to request to speak to an adult at the school about concerns that you may have about yourself or a friend. Please fill in the appropriate bubble on the bottom of the form indicating whether or not you would like to talk to someone. Your choices are 1) I would like to talk to someone today, because it is an emergency, 2) I would like to talk to an adult one day this week—it is not an emergency, or 3) I do not need to talk to an adult at this time. Just fill in one of the three bubbles. I know we have not gone through the lesson yet, so just make a choice based on how you feel right now. If your answer changes by the end of the lesson, please notify me at the end of the class period.”

Video 1 - Introduction

“In the first video, you will hear from Connor who talks about his struggle with depression and suicide and his path to recovery. You will also watch a scene between two friends debating what to do when one of them is struggling with these concerns.”

Show Video 1 & Guide Class Discussion

Q1: How does Connor describe depression? What makes it different from sadness?

A: Connor describes:

- Self-hatred
- Feeling sad “all the time”
- Feeling drained of all positive emotion
- Stopped doing schoolwork
- Withdrawing from friends and family and feeling alone even when surrounded by friends
- Feeling like a burden, “wasn’t enough for the people around me”

Sadness is a common reaction to bad news or something negative in your life. Feelings of sadness are temporary and often go away on their own. We can also help minimize sad feelings by doing something to help take our minds off whatever is bringing us down (e.g., talking to a friend, listening to music, playing sports, etc.). When people are sad, they can still go on with their daily lives.

Depression, however, is a serious health condition that affects more than just your mood. It can impact *all areas* of your life (e.g., eating and sleeping habits, energy level, interest in activities, academic performance, concentration, decision-making, etc.) and prevent you from doing the things that were once important to you. Depression is an *illness* and therefore requires treatment from a qualified doctor or mental health professional. Without treatment, it can even lead to thoughts of suicide. It is essential to get treatment to feel better.

Q2: What helped Connor feel better?

A:

- He talked to his school counselor and then got connected to a therapist. He says that therapy was awkward at first, but it really helped him feel better to talk about it.
- He made a post about how he was truly feeling on social media, and it felt good for him to stop hiding his pain.
- Focusing on the things he loves to do helped him feel better too. He enjoys music, playing guitar, and theater.

Q3: How does Riley use the ACT technique in the “right way”?

A:

- Acknowledge: She noticed that Caitlin was struggling and talked to her about it directly. When Caitlin said, “I wish I could go to bed and never wake up”, Riley recognized that this was a warning sign that Caitlin needed immediate help.
- Care: She listened, and let Caitlin know that she took her feelings seriously. She told Caitlin about her own struggles to show that she “had been there” too.
- Tell: She insisted that Caitlin go talk to an adult. When Caitlin initially said no, she said, “if you don’t, I will,” and persisted until her friend agreed to get help.

Optional Question:

What important messages does Riley bring up in describing her own experience with depression?

A:

- That Caitlin’s not alone in feeling this way. That many students struggle with similar things, even if they seem to have it all and even if their friends aren’t aware.
- That counseling can make a big difference in how people feel; depression is treatable
- That there is help available and things can get better

Video 2 – Introduction

“In the next clip, you will hear from Elli and her friend, Mikhaila. Imagine what you would do if you were Mikhaila and saw these warning signs in your friend.”

Show Video 2 & Guide Class Discussion

Q4: What warning signs did you hear in Elli’s story?

A:

Elli, her parents, and Mikhaila all describe warning signs including:

- Feelings of worthlessness
- Increased anger
- Body aches, feeling sick to her stomach
- Self-injury
- Putting herself in danger
- Substance use
- Becoming withdrawn
- No hope for the future
- Saying things like she didn’t want to live

Note to Facilitator:

Keep information about self-injury very general and within the context of seeking help from a trusted adult.

- Self-injury is when a person hurts their body on purpose without the intention to die. It is often an attempt to cope with overwhelming emotional pain.
- Self-injury is a mental health concern that can be treated; there are people in the school who can help students who self-injure.

Q5: How was Mikhaila a good friend to Elli?

A:

- Elli says that although Mikhaila didn't know what she was going through, she never left Elli's side.
- When Elli said she wanted to kill herself, she recognized that this was an emergency so she told her mom. Mikhaila's mom did the right thing too by getting in touch with Elli's parents immediately. Even though Elli told her not to tell, she knew she had to get adults involved to save her life.

Q6: How could you use Elli's story to convince a friend to get help?

A: When someone is struggling with depression, they often believe that things will never get better. It's important to remind those who are struggling that depression is treatable. Elli's story highlights the importance of getting help. Despite her struggles, she has been able to find her own happiness through treatment and coping skills.

Q7: Imagine you were Carmen and a friend told a trusted adult they were concerned about you. How would you react? How would you handle it as Angelina if a friend got mad at you for trying to get them help?

A: Encourage students to share their thoughts. One of the biggest barriers for students who are worried about a friend is the concern that their friend will be angry with them, or even hate them, for "reporting" them to an adult. Some teens' initial response will be anger. However, most friends will come around quickly, and are almost always grateful after the fact that someone cared enough to see what was going on and get them help. And even if they stay angry, it's better to have a friend be angry and alive than do nothing. Being a good friend means not keeping a secret.

Video 3 - Introduction

"In the final video you'll watch a scene between two siblings, Luke and Sydney. Think about how you can apply the ACT message outside of a school."

Show Video 3 & Guide Class Discussion

Q8: What warning signs did Sydney notice?

A:

- Suddenly drinking
- Feeling like his parents don't accept him for who he is
- Sounding hopeless – saying things like "think how happy they'd be if I wasn't here" and "no me, no problem"
- Irritability/anger – Sydney says that he's "angry all the time," and he lashes out at her when she asks what's going on
- Sleeping all the time
- Getting in trouble at school

Q9: Drinking and drug use are major risk factors for suicide. Why do you think that is?

A: People often drink or use drugs to try to cope with intense emotional pain. Drinking/drug use can lower inhibitions, making someone more likely to make a rash or impulsive decision. It can also encourage black-and-white thinking, or tunnel vision, where someone believes there is no way out of the pain they're experiencing. Alcohol and drugs can also make it harder for someone to remember to use healthy coping skills to deal with problems.

Q10: Asking someone about suicide will not put the idea in their head. Instead, how can you help a friend by talking about suicide?

A:

- Bringing up the question directly shows your friend that you aren't afraid to hear their answer.
- Talking about suicide shows your friend that they should not be ashamed of how they feel.
- Asking directly is your best chance of encouraging your friend to tell you the truth so you can get them help.

Optional Question:

Luke says that his mom wants "prom pictures" with a girlfriend," and Sydney agrees that she's "old-fashioned" and says she knows "not being accepted for who you are really hurts." What do you think they're talking about?

A: They could be talking about Luke's sexual orientation or gender identity. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and youth questioning their sexual orientation or gender (LGBTQ) often experience additional turmoil during their adolescent years, putting them at greater risk for depression and suicide.

Note: This is a great time to share information about The Trevor Project with students. The Trevor Project provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ young people ages 13-24. Feel free to write the website and hotline on the board for your students to take note: www.thetrevorproject.org or 1-866-488-7386. You may also want to share school-specific resources available to LGBTQ students at your school.

Video Review

Allow time for students to ask any additional questions. Remind students of resources available on and off campus. Reinforce the ACT help-seeking message and ensure that students can name the three steps (Acknowledge, Care and Tell).

Depression Screening Introduction

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