



Suicide Intervention Practice

Purpose: To help normalize the conversation around help for suicide and to help attendees sharpen their skills if they ever have to assist someone who is experiencing suicidal thoughts.

In each scenario, you're asking students collectively what would they would say to help the person in crisis. Your aim is to get the person in crisis to accept professional help and assure their immediate safety. You'll also want to review a few crisis resources with the students at the start of the session so they'll be ready to use them as referrals when the time is right during the exercise.

A few other notes:

If anyone gives any kind of advice without building rapport or without being asked or if they make trite statements— "Have you ever thought about...," or "Maybe you should...," or "Think about your family...," —your default response can be silence. If you're feeling confident enough, you can respond with things like, "Why don't YOU think about YOUR family," or "it doesn't matter," or "have YOU ever thought about...?"

If someone says, "I know how you feel," you can respond with "you don't know how I feel and you'll never know." And then allow the students to try to respond and get things back on track. You can step out of your role as facilitator and encourage students not to argue with the person in crisis but be vulnerable.

“You’re right, I don’t understand. I can only imagine what you’re going through. But I want to try to understand. Will you tell me more?”

If someone says anything like, “You’ll feel better,” or makes a promise, you as the facilitator can reply with, “when? How do you know I’ll get better?” If after the students have had a few chances to reply and can’t get things back on track you can step out of your roll as facilitator and guide the students to an appropriate response with something like, “you know you’re right. I shouldn’t have promised things will get better. I know they’ll be different. I love you so much and wanted to help you so much that probably went a little too far. Can you forgive me?” You want to encourage vulnerability because it will beget vulnerability from the person who is in crisis and suicidal.

Especially early on in the process, you want to encourage them to validate a person’s feelings and emotions and what they’re going through. “That must be difficult.” “I can see you’re in a lot of pain and I feel for you.”

Lastly, at times the students may veer in a direction that goes a little off script. As best you can you want to veer back toward the script and ultimately toward professional help. You can also take “time-outs” during each scenario to brainstorm with the students to find ways to create positive, healthy dialogue between the person in crisis and the person being of help.

Chris is a 19-year-old white male and in his first semester a freshman in college. His parents recently got divorced, and after graduating high school, he and his mom moved to a new town in a new state while his dad and little brother stayed behind. He comes from a very sheltered background (and only 50 in his graduating class), but his new college has over 35,000 students. He feels lost, is struggling with his classes, has had a hard time making friends, and is teased in nearly every class because of his bad acne and because he is overweight.

You and Chris sit next to each other in class and he sheepishly asks if you two can talk for a few minutes after. It’s the end of the day and he unloads all of his problems on you in the span of a few minutes.

He finally says, “It’s just too much. There’s so much pressure with grades, and friends, and to look perfect, and to be perfect, and no one really cares in the end anyway. Maybe it would just be better if I were dead.”

- What would you say?

He then says one or more of the following (or something along the lines that fits the situation):

- “That’s nice of you to say but I don’t believe it”
- “You don’t really care”
- “Never mind”

- What would you say?

He then responds with one or more of the following (or something along the lines that fits the situation):

- “I don’t know”
- “Are you sure?”
- “I never thought of it that way before”

- What would you say?

He then agrees to accept the professional help offered

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Marquise is a 21-year-old African American who identifies as gender-fluid. Marquise goes by the pronouns, “they,” “them,” and “theirs,” and has recently decided to dress more on the masculine side. They prefer to wear boots and khakis and plaid shirts and keep a shaved head. You’ve known Marquise a long time and were best friends with them from Kindergarten till the beginning of middle school, when you naturally drifted apart because of different classes and social circles.

Marquise has recently been getting pressure at home to dress more feminine and at school, students are making fun of them and calling them an “it,” a “thing,” and a “piece of garbage.”

A few of Marquise’s LGBT friends have been alienating them as well, because they think that Marquise is playing into LGBT stereotypes. Marquise has stopped going to school and even though you’re not great friends anymore, you still care

about them and are friendly. While walking back to your dorm one day, you notice Marquise outside the dorm residences crying and smoking a cigarette. Marquise confides in you that they feel like no one understands them and no one ever will and they're going to make sure they don't wake up tomorrow.

- What would you say?

Marquise then says one or more of the following (or something along the lines that fits the situation):

- That's not true.
- Maybe I am.
- Thank you.

- What would you say?

Marquise then says one or more of the following (or something along the lines that fits the situation):

- You're just saying that
- You mean I can?
- Who is really going to care?

- What would you say?

Marquise then says one or more of the following (or something along the lines that fits the situation):

- I don't think my parents would go for that
- I don't think I can do that
- This is nobody's business

- What would you say?

Marquise then agrees to get professional help (this one is a bit more serious and should probably involve a hotline, and counseling services. This can't be kept between friends)

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Fatima is an 18-year-old sophomore in college who moved to the U.S. from Syria only 6 months ago. She's doing her best to learn the language, learn in school, and make friends. Fatima and her family aren't religious but she likes to wear her head wrap, a hijab, because it reminds her of home and where she came from.

She's been getting along with everyone at school for the most part, but someone at school recently hacked her Instagram and has been posting racist memes and hateful speech. Fatima continues to go to school and puts on a brave face but you share two classes with her and you can see she's cracking a bit. One day after class you notice she has scar lines up and down one of her arms and she's sitting on a bench alone in quiet tears with her head in her hands.

You ask if anything is wrong and she says, "I'm fine."

- What would you say?

Fatima then says one or more of the following (or something along the lines that fits the situation):

- It's not your problem
- You wouldn't understand
- Nobody cares about people like me.

- What would you say?

Fatima won't respond

- What would you say?

Fatima still won't respond

- What would you say?

Fatima then says one or more of the following (or something along the lines that fits the situation):

- I've been thinking about ending it all
- I can't go on any more like this
- The world doesn't need me anymore

- What would you say?

Says

- I never thought of it like that
- Are you sure?
- How would you know?

What would you say?

Fatima then agrees to get professional help