

Your Kulshan Middle School counselors, Aaron Tiger and Jen Newbauer, have noticed an uptick in students expressing thoughts of self-harm. As days get darker and colder and the ability to hang out with friends diminishes we thought this would be a good time to reach out with some tips for you in case your student or a friend of theirs expresses self-harming ideas.

Here is an acronym that might help you remember how to respond:

ALGEE

Assess for potential harm: Sometimes we just need to be direct and ask the question, “are you thinking of hurting yourself?”, or “Are you thinking of suicide?” Asking these questions does not put the idea in their head but might be the only way we can effectively help.

Listen non-judgmentally: This means to be genuine, be present, be understanding, and to take them seriously. We shouldn’t dismiss what they are saying, but also need to remain calm. Listen to them without judging their thoughts/feelings.

Give reassurance: Tell them that you are going to help them, that things will be okay, that they will get better and that you are there to help them get the support they need.

Encourage them to talk to a parent/guardian (if that isn’t you), or their friends; people that they trust and who they know have their best interest at heart.

Encourage them to get help from a professional: This could be helping them find a counselor, connecting them to an emergency hotline, calling an emergency number or connecting with a school counselor.

If you find yourself in a situation where you are needing to talk to someone about their harmful thoughts and think there is any chance they might take action then you can follow the previous steps and then help them get support from a professional. There are several counseling services in the area; Compass Health, Catholic Community Services, Seamar, plus many private counselors. Connecting with the student’s school counselor is also a good idea as we have a list of community resources and have the capacity to meet with students in one-on-one zoom sessions for additional support. If a student is harming themselves or thinking about harming themselves they should be under the care of a professional/clinical counselor and we, Jen and Aaron, can help you connect with one.

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Dr. Rohan, in a recently published New York Times article, suggests staying connected and finding things to enjoy in order to battle feelings of depression: “It’s more important than ever to push yourself to stay engaged with activities you enjoy and stay connected with people as best as you can.” Help your teens stay connected to friends and family while encouraging them to continue pursuing things that bring them joy.

Training Available

If you are interested in learning more about suicide prevention the district is making a training available to the community.

“This course is for those interested in knowing how to respond and support someone who is suicidal. Take this free, online, evidence-based training and learn three steps to help prevent suicide. The training is taken at your own pace and typically takes one hour to complete. Course objectives include knowing the common causes of suicidal behavior, the warning signs of suicide and how to get help for someone in crisis. Participants will learn how to question, persuade, and refer someone who may be suicidal, and how to get help for themselves or learn more about preventing suicide.”

It is free of charge to all staff, families and community members through Dec. 31. To request a direct link and password via email click the link below:

https://bellingshampublic.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_71CPXd7YMLZUmCV

Protective Factors

It is also good to know that there are many protective factors that can play a roll in helping prevent suicide ideation and self-harm. Here is a short list:

Family connectedness

School connectedness

Healthy adult to talk to

Supportive Peers

Access to mental health and substance abuse services

Skills in problem solving & conflict resolution

Healthy self-esteem

It is worth pointing out that “Family connectedness” and “Healthy adult to talk to” are within your realm of influence. These are things you have direct influence over. As mentioned above by Dr. Rohan it is extra important to spend time with your student, doing things that they find joy in, and helping them find a way to connect to peers.

Additional Resources

Here is a link to the district site of listed resources. Look under “Mental Health” for counseling opportunities and other helpful links.

<https://bellingshamschools.org/families/family-support-services/homeless-support-program/community-resources/>

Here are some local and National hotlines for support as well:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

People in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know someone in crisis, should call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255 or chat online at suicidepreventionlifeline.org. Confidential support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.
Trevor Project Lifeline:

Supporting LGBTQ Youth with suicide prevention 24/7 – 1-866-488-7386

Whatcom County Resources/Local Support:

Crisis Line 1-800-584-3578, Mental Health Treatment Access Line 1-888-693-7200