

From Hopelessness to Hope Handout

Hopelessness

- I believe that in life there is always hope – but sometimes you have to change what you are hoping for.
- Finding a more positive outlook is possible if you have the right kind of help and support.
- Hopelessness is a very negative emotion that can cause people to be at risk of self-harm.
- It's hard to be hopeful when you have long-lasting sadness or depression.
- Hopelessness can also happen with irrational, distorted, or negative thinking.

Irrational Beliefs

- *Are these irrational beliefs? Discuss why or why not.*
 - I shouldn't make any mistakes.
 - I shouldn't get angry.
 - I shouldn't get sick.
 - People shouldn't die.
 - Things shouldn't change.
 - Relationships should be easy.
 - If I'm not in control of everything in my life, I've failed.
 - Everyone has abandoned me. - They just don't care.
- To find out if your negative thoughts are true or not, you can ask a trusted friend or health care provider.

Depression and Self-Harm

- Hopelessness can increase the risk for depression and suicidal thoughts.
- Sometimes deepening depression can lead to self-injury, like cutting, scratching, burning, bruising, picking at hair or scabs, or refusing to take prescribed medicines.
- People may try to harm themselves to try “to cope with unbearable emotions,” “release tension,” or to “feel alive again”.
- Self-harming behaviors may sometimes be used to get attention, get revenge, to manipulate, or to control others.

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Discussion

- *What is the difference between self-harm and suicide?*
- *Do you know anyone who died because of impulsive, dangerous actions, but didn't intend to kill themselves? How did that make you feel?*
- *Do you believe that suicidal thoughts are temporary?*

Suicide Affects Others

- Many people feel guilty, thinking "I should have known." or, "I should have been able to stop him."
- However, people often hide suicidal thoughts and some may not give any warning signs.
 - Don't blame yourself!
 - The only person you have control over is yourself. - You can't control what other people do.
 - If they are suicidal, you should try to quickly get them to professional help, but sometimes they refuse.
 - Forcing someone to go to treatment is not easy to do, but sometimes law enforcement officers can help with that.

Emotional Effects

- People may feel both anger and grief after a loved one commits suicide because:
 - They left you in a shocking, traumatic way.
 - It may be seen as "a selfish act" to those left behind.
 - Huge emotional scars and negative feelings can make it much harder to cope and grieve in a healthy way.
 - It is more difficult to talk about a loved one who committed suicide.
 - Survivors may have less support because people "don't know what to say."

Family and Community Effects: Discussion

- Why is there a higher suicide risk when other family members, relatives, or friends have died from suicide?

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- When someone close to you dies, it is natural to think about them and to want to be with them.
- It may be seen as an option in the minds of those left behind. (You might think they would avoid it at all costs because of the pain it caused, but it doesn't seem to be that way.)
- Suicide risk increases with each suicide in your community (even more among young people).
- An important goal of a healthy community may be to increase awareness and to prevent suicides.

Case Study: Hopelessness

- Carol (not her real name) was a young woman in the hospital with depression.
- Looking back at a past suicide attempt as a teenager, she said, "I was too sick to even care how my family and friends would be affected by it."
- Recently she started to have suicidal thoughts again.
- She came to the hospital saying, "It's like a circle. Every day I wake up hopeless and I go to bed hopeless."
- "I can't go on like this. I need help!"
- She said, "I was mad at my family for calling 911 and saving me when I overdosed. I didn't want to be alive. But this time, I came here to get the help I need. I'm feeling better now."
- To increase hope in her life, she began learning about her risk factors and preventative factors:
 - **Stage-setting factors** that make her at risk for suicide
 - **Contributing factors** that make risk higher
 - **Trigger factors** that leads to risky or self-harming behaviors (along with other risk factors for suicide)
 - **Protective factors** that can decrease risk for suicide

Stage-setting Factors (Mark the ones you have.)

- Mental illness and distress
- Family history or personal history of suicide attempt

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- Having a friend that committed suicide
- Loneliness, social isolation, separation, unresolved grief

How can you control or decrease the impact of these risk factors?

- Take your medication and treatment for mental illness
- Use crisis lines or other resources if needed
- Use “talk therapy” or counseling to resolve unhealthy grief, anger or stress after loss of friends or loved ones
- Improve relationships, or become more socially active

Contributing Factors (Mark the ones you have.)

- Substance abuse
- History of physical or sexual abuse
- Poor coping skills, low self-esteem
- Impulsiveness, conflict with the law
- Unstable family
- Excessive media reporting of suicidal acts
- Rigid, narrow thinking (all-or-nothing, black-or-white)
- Perception of poor control or poor general health
- Access to guns, overdoses, or other ways to hurt self
- Not wanting to get professional help

Control Your Risk Factors

- Avoid alcohol or substance use - Get treatment if needed
- Learn how to think positively, and be more flexible
- Develop new coping skills for anxiety and depression
- Be accountable for what you have done, and take the consequences (so the problem can be put behind you)
- Keep your home safe, without hazards
- Have regular appointments with your primary care provider and mental health professionals
- Decrease TV time and spend more time talking to each other

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Trigger Factors (Mark the ones you have.)

- Conflict, bullying, cruelty, or rejection
- Trauma, personal failure, or humiliation
- A significant loss, or the death of a loved one

How can you decrease these contributing factors?

- Get the help you need for the problem – Use conflict resolution, counseling, or other resources.
- Learn new coping skills, stress, or anger management.
- Be kind to yourself. You have permission to be emotional.
- Resolve anger or grief without “stuffing it inside” and try to be assertive, not aggressive.

Protective Factors

- Even if you have risk factors, you can still have some control.
- People have protective factors and strengths that can help increase feelings of hope.
- Carol’s strengths were:
 - “Every Sunday, my son takes me to church and then to his house for a visit.”
 - “I have a pet cat. Even when I’m too tired to do anything, I can spend time with my cat.”
 - “I try to keep busy. I like doing crafts and baking.”

Examples of Protective Factors (Mark the ones you have.)

- Spirituality
- Strong family connectedness, warmth and belonging
- Social support and acceptance
- Positive attitude toward education
- Good communication skills - discussing problems with family, friends, or others
- Good physical and mental health
- Using available resources when needed
- Creative problem solving and a sense of humor
- Seeing adults or peers who have healthy lifestyles

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- Having realistic expectations

Find Ways to Overcome Hopelessness

- Build self-esteem to include a sense of security and trust.
- Improve self-image by developing strengths and having positive experiences.
- Learn more about ways to stop negative thinking and do more positive thinking.
- Recognize and challenge irrational thoughts.
- Attend counseling, group therapy, family therapy, or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) if needed.
- Take part in education for developing healthy relationships and self-management.

Improve Life Skills

- Social skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Decision-making skills
- Coping and stress management skills
- Practicing relationship and communication skills
- Suicide Awareness Education - Learn warning signs and know what to do if a friend may be suicidal (Do not promise to keep it a secret). Know how to get professional help for yourself or others

Recognize Warning Signs in Others:

- Hinting or threatening to hurt or kill self
- Looking for ways to kill self (guns, pills, etc.)
- Talking or writing about death/suicide
- Giving away belongings/Seeing no purpose in life
- Increased substance use (alcohol or drugs)
- Feeling trapped, hopeless, or having dramatic mood swings
- Being suddenly cheerful after being very depressed
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Doing risky activities or having bizarre thoughts

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What Can You Do?

- Trust your instincts that the person may be in trouble
- Talk with the person about your concerns and LISTEN to them
- Ask direct questions without judging them
- Determine if the person has a specific plan- having a detailed plan means a greater risk
- Get professional help, even if the person resists
- Stay with a person who feels suicidal until professional help comes – Don't leave them alone

How to Get Help

- Doctor, counselor, community mental health agency
- Clergy or spiritual leader (in some cultures)
- Law enforcement (call 911 for emergency)
- Police can take a person to the hospital involuntarily (against their will) if they are a danger to themselves or others
- Can call telephone hotlines, crisis and resource information lines (like 211), or a nurse advisor if you are not sure what to do
- 1-800-273-TALK or 1-800-273-8255
- 1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-784-2433

More Ways to Improve Hope

- Reach out to others for support. Then, be willing to help others when you are feeling better
- Identify what you feel hopeless about - Is it negative or irrational thinking that you can be changed?
- Talk about it and release blocked feelings instead of “stuffing” your emotions inside
- Find connectedness/spirituality for strength to “let go of old baggage” from pain in your past
- Take control of your behaviors
- Break down problems into smaller parts to work on

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- Recognize growth and successes, even if there are temporary setbacks

Discussion

What protective factors do you have? How will you increase your protective factors during recovery?

Talk about or write about a strength that you have. How can that strength help you be more hopeful?

List a phone number you can call if you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, hopeless, or suicidal.

Hopeless / Hopeful Expressions

“I can’t face the mess I’ve made” / “There has to be a way out of this if I take it day by day, step by step”

“What’s the use of trying anymore?” / “I don’t give up easily. If I don’t keep trying, things won’t get any better”

“I’ll never be happy again.” / “Even if it seems like I’ll always feel sad, I can’t predict what tomorrow will bring. I might be surprised by something good that happens”

Have you said or heard these statements before? Practice saying the hopeful ones aloud.

Conclusion

- Many factors that contribute to hopelessness are within our control.
- Being more aware of our strengths can increase hope.
- Recognizing hopelessness and suicidal thoughts can help prevent suicides and their devastating effects.
- We can find help when illness, situations or trauma trigger hopelessness or suicidal thoughts.
- Ups and downs can be managed with the right help and support.
- Hope is the first step in your recovery journey.

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Resources:

Mental Health America. Factsheet: Suicide. (2011). Retrieved from
<http://www.nmha.org/go/information/get-info/suicide>

American Association of Suicidology. Survivors of Suicide Fact Sheet: Retrieved from
http://suicidology.org/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=232&name=DLFE-160.pdf

Nemours Kidshealth handout (2011). Suicide. Retrieved from
http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/feeling_sad/suicide.html#cat20448