

# 8th GRADE: SELF-HARM & SUICIDE

## LESSON 3 OVERVIEW



## Suicide: The Permanent Decision



### Lesson Time:

30 Minutes

### Materials Needed:

- Handout: "Suicide Awareness" (printed one per student)
- Lesson Slides [Download](#)

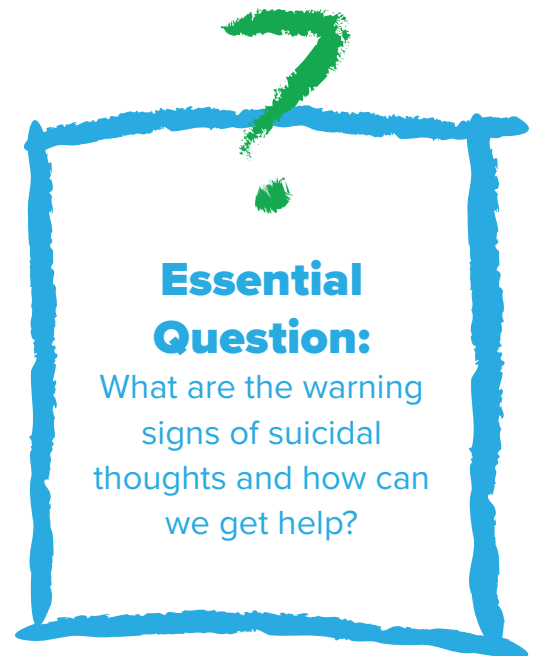
### Materials Needed:

- Projector with Video/Audio Capability

### Objectives:

Students will be able to...

1. Identify warning signs of suicide.
2. Recognize and debunk myths of suicide with facts.
3. Create a plan for what to do if you or someone else is contemplating suicide.



# Suicide: The Permanent Decision



## Slide/Handout

## Lesson Script/Talking Points

**Suicide Awareness: The Permanent Decision**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Sui (self) + Cide (kill) = suicide

**Definitions**

suicide \_\_\_\_\_

suicide attempt \_\_\_\_\_

suicidal ideation \_\_\_\_\_

**Read in the margin:** What do you think it means to be brave enough to talk about suicide?

**Let the myths that you heard particularly through providing writing for or for writing:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Let the warning signs that someone might be contemplating writing for or for writing:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

SUICIDE HOTLINE: \_\_\_\_\_

**Suicide Awareness: The Permanent Decision**

**Answer Key**

Sui (self) + Cide (kill) = suicide

**Definitions**

suicide is defined as death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior.

suicide attempt is an attempt to commit suicide without suicidal ideation.

suicidal ideation refers to thoughts about, contemplation, or planning suicide.

**Read in the margin:** What do you think it means to be brave enough to talk about suicide? Why is it so awkward and difficult to talk about suicide?

**Answers will vary.**

**Let the myths that you heard particularly through providing writing for or for writing:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Let the warning signs that someone might be contemplating writing for or for writing:**

1. Increased alcohol and drug use
2. Aggressive behavior
3. Withdrawal from family, friends, and community
4. Chronic mood swings
5. Negative or pessimistic outlook

SUICIDE HOTLINE: \_\_\_\_\_

### Lesson Introduction: (1 minute)

As the topic of mental health and taking care of someone's mental state is talked about more and more in public, the topic of suicide will be inevitable in the discussion. Suicide is a scary thing to talk about. However, talking about it might prevent it. Getting information out to people is a good start to deterring one's own intention, or it may open to conversation and serve as a lifeline for someone else. According to an article at PBS.org, "The rate of U.S. adolescents and young adults dying of suicide has reached its highest level in nearly two decades," according to a 2019 report published in the Journal of the American Medical Association." How can we decrease this number? I want you to think about that question carefully as we talk today. In order to get our minds around the idea of getting the numbers decreased, we need to be able to do three things: differentiate between the myths and facts regarding suicide, be aware of the warning signs, and develop a plan to help yourself or someone else. Today's subject is a very sensitive one. Please be extra-cautious with your words and attitude today. Show respect for others in the room who may have family loss or personal knowledge of our topic.

As we begin our lesson, I am going to give you a graphic organizer. This handout aligns with our lesson today and will be good for you to keep and refer to in the future if needed. (Provide each student with a copy of the Suicide Awareness handout. Instruct students to complete the portions of the handout that they can as the following slides are discussed. At the conclusion of the slides you may want to review the answers found on the handout answer sheet to ensure that students have a firm grasp of this extremely important information.)

**SUICIDE**

Sui → Cide

1

Why do you think it is so important for people to be brave enough to talk about suicide?

### Core Lesson Slideshow: (25 minutes)

#### SLIDE 1

The word suicide can be broken down into two Latin parts: *sui*, which means oneself, and *cide*, which means to kill. Unfortunately, suicide has become an issue that we all must talk about. Think to yourself a minute. Why do you think it is so important for people to be brave enough to talk about suicide? Why is it so awkward and difficult? (Allow some time for sharing if anyone is willing.) It can be really difficult to tell about the times when we are sad and scared. Think about how you usually keep that to yourself - the times when you are the absolute most afraid or the most devastated by something. That's why people may keep their toughest, most vulnerable thoughts to themselves, but just talking about it with someone opens the door for letting the light in - for getting help. Today we are going to talk about it and I'll give you some resources to help you talk about it with others.<sup>1</sup>

**SUICIDE**

**Terms to Know**

- Suicide
- Suicide attempt
- Suicidal ideation

2

#### SLIDE 2

In order to fully have mature conversations about this topic, we need to know a few terms:<sup>2</sup>

- Suicide is defined as death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior. We have talked about self-

# Core Lesson (cont)

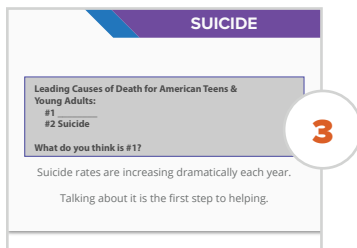


## Slide/Handout

## Lesson Script/Talking Points

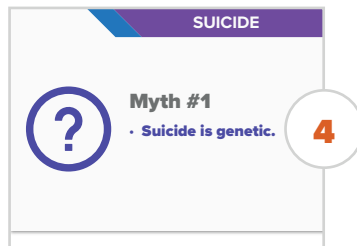
harm, but remember that was without the intent to die. This is quite different and far more serious.

- A suicide attempt is a non-fatal, self-directed, potentially injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior. A suicide attempt might not result in injury. If someone lives through an attempt, that does not mean they were not serious about dying. We never make light of someone's feelings regarding this.
- Suicidal ideation refers to thinking about, considering, or planning suicide.



### SLIDE 3

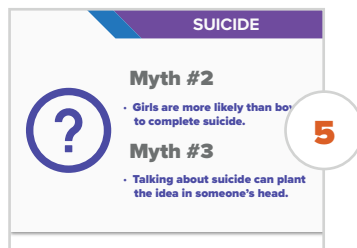
In the report mentioned earlier (by the Journal of the American Medical Association), over 6,200 American teens and young adults commit suicide yearly. This is the second leading cause of death in YOUR age group. Can anyone guess the first cause? (*Pause and allow students to call out answers.*) The answer is car accidents, which in 2017 caused 6,697 deaths in people aged 15 to 24. However, suicide rates have increased dramatically from 2000 to 2017. This is why we need to educate ourselves on what to look for and how to find ways to help. By educating yourself, you can share your knowledge with others. Talking about it is the first step to helping. Even though that information was a few years ago, the reports are only released every couple of years as trends are studied.<sup>3</sup>



### SLIDE 4

In order to continue educating ourselves about suicide, we must first debunk some common myths. In the past you might have learned about some myths like the following:

MYTH #1: Suicide is genetic. FALSE. There is no "suicide gene," but there is a link for depression which can sometimes lead to suicidal thoughts.



### SLIDE 5

MYTH #2: Girls are more likely than boys to complete suicide. FALSE. Although more girls attempt suicide, more boys complete suicide. The reasons for more boys completing even though more girls attempt has nothing to do with one being more serious than the other. Some reasons, though, do include the method of the attempt. They often use methods that cause death more quickly leaving less time for the possibility of rescue. Also, boys are often taught to hide their feelings which makes it harder to detect the warning signs. This is something that we need to fix in the future. We need people to understand that talking about feelings is not weakness. You don't have to tell everyone your feelings, but we all need our Go-To People that we can trust with our deep thoughts and feelings. This idea leads us to myth #3...

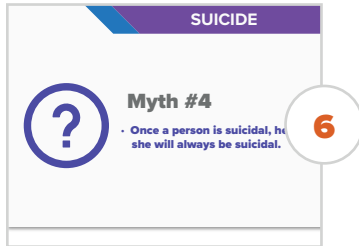
# Core Lesson (cont)



## Slide/Handout

## Lesson Script/Talking Points

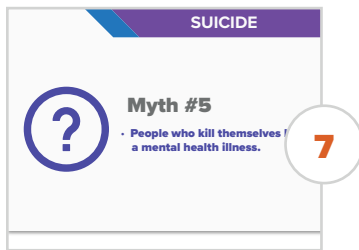
MYTH #3: Talking about suicide can plant the idea in someone's head. FALSE. People who are struggling with suicidal thoughts often feel alone in that desperation. Talking with someone will not give them an idea, but it more than likely will free them from that secret and allow them to expand their support system.



### SLIDE 6

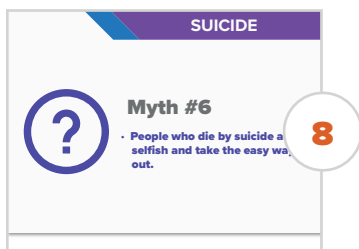
Myth #4: Once a person is suicidal, he or she will always be suicidal. Fact: Active suicidal ideation is often short-term and situation-specific. Turn to your neighbor and talk about what short-term and situation-specific mean (*Give them a minute or two to think and share.*) Short-term means the struggles they faced when feeling suicidal are able to be worked out or at least things they learn to cope with in a positive manner. Situation specific means one situation was causing the feelings, not a mental disorder.

The act of suicide is often an attempt to control deep, painful emotions and thoughts. Once these thoughts begin to go away, so will the suicidal ideation. While suicidal thoughts can return, they are not permanent. An individual with suicidal thoughts and attempts can live a long, successful life. The important thing to know is that they do need help every time. No one should attempt to help someone alone.<sup>4</sup>



### SLIDE 7

MYTH #5: People who kill themselves have a mental health illness. FALSE. Many people who consider or act on suicide are responding to situational events, relationship struggles or other stressors and are not necessarily suffering from a mental health disorder. They are not as some people say "crazy." This is a word we need to avoid so that we aren't casting judgement.



### SLIDE 8

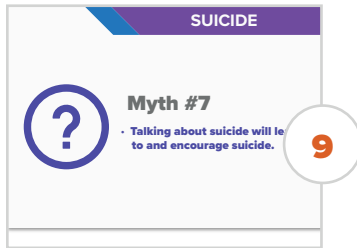
MYTH #6 : People who die by suicide are selfish and take the easy way out. It's this kind of thinking that puts so much judgement out there onto others. The more open-minded and caring you are toward people, the more likely we are to begin to turn the corner in making a difference to get people the help they need and lower the numbers. Fact: People die by suicide because they want to end their suffering. Their suffering is deep and intense, and they begin to feel helpless and hopeless. Individuals don't experience suicidal ideations by choice. They are not thinking only of themselves, but instead are experiencing a very serious symptom due to either mental illness or a difficult life situation. Love and support people enough to show them there's a way to live through the painful experiences.

# Core Lesson (cont)



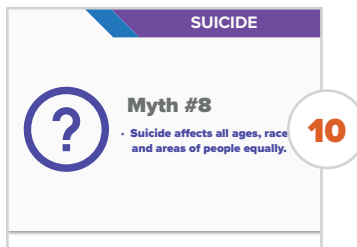
## Slide/Handout

## Lesson Script/Talking Points



### SLIDE 9

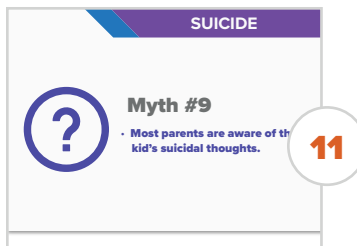
MYTH #7: Talking about suicide will lead to or encourage suicide. Fact: Many people are scared to discuss it, or they find it awkward. However, talking about suicide will reduce the stigma - the thought that it's wrong to talk about - and will also allow individuals to seek help, rethink their opinions, and share their story with others. We all need to learn to talk more about suicide. I don't mean talk about it on social media by posting "feeling suicidal" like some people do. We mean genuine conversations about how hard life is and how there are ways to cope with any pain. It may just be that we need the right audience to speak to - whether that's a counselor, family friend, pastor, relative, or someone else.<sup>4</sup>



### SLIDE 10

MYTH #8: Suicide affects all ages, races, and areas of people the same. Even though anyone can have suicidal ideations, some kids are more susceptible. The following facts are according to a recent study published in JAMA Network Open:

- From 1999 to 2017 the annual suicide rate among boys ages 10 to 14 grew from 1.9 suicides per 100,000 to 3.3.
- For girls, suicides roughly tripled from 0.5 per 100,000 to 1.7 (suicide rates in girls are rising at a faster pace than for boys).
- Whites have the highest suicide rate at nearly 16 (or 15.85) per 100,000, followed by American Indians and Alaska Natives (13.42), African Americans (6.61) and Asians and Pacific Islanders (6.59).
- Aside from demographics, suicide rates also vary based upon where people live, and tend to be higher in certain places like Alaska, Wyoming and South Dakota. Why might this be the case? (*Allow for a turn and talk. Answers might be sparse populations and long winters.*)



### SLIDE 11

MYTH #9: Most parents are aware of their child's suicidal thoughts.<sup>10</sup> According to a study published in the journal Pediatrics, one half of kids aged 11 to 17 who thought about killing themselves had parents who had no idea. And 75% of adolescents who had thoughts about death in general had parents who were oblivious to their children's thoughts.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes teens think the parents are part of the problem, but research shows that most parents immediately work toward support upon discovering the seriousness of their child's circumstances. The number one way to prevent suicide during the teen years is to communicate. If young people your age could talk to parents, that would be awesome. Aside from parents, you need to identify other adults to

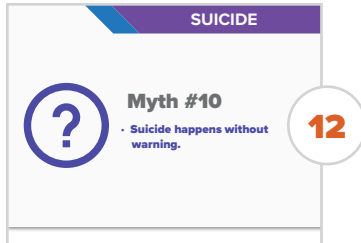
# Core Lesson (cont)



## Slide/Handout

## Lesson Script/Talking Points

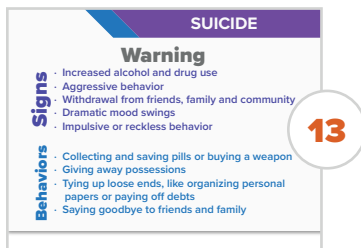
talk to, like family members, counselors, teachers, or other influential people. Some students in younger grades call these their “Go-To” People. It’s ok if you want to talk to another adult besides your parent. The important thing is that you talk. Let’s pause while you think silently about who your trusted people would be.<sup>6</sup>



A slide titled "SUICID" with a purple header. It features a question mark icon in a blue circle on the left. The text reads "Myth #10" followed by a bullet point: "Suicide happens without warning." A white circle with the number "12" is on the right side.

### SLIDE 12

MYTH #10: Suicide happens without warning. FALSE. Most people show either verbal or behavioral warning signs preceding an attempt, but some are more subtle. It is important for us to be knowledgeable about the warning signs to be a preventative factor. We are going to talk about some of those warning signs.



A slide titled "SUICID" with a purple header. It is divided into two sections: "Warning Signs" and "Behaviors". The "Warning Signs" section lists: "Increased alcohol and drug use", "Aggressive behavior", "Withdrawal from friends, family and community", "Dramatic mood swings", and "Impulsive or reckless behavior". The "Behaviors" section lists: "Collecting and saving pills or buying a weapon", "Giving away possessions", "Tying up loose ends, like organizing personal papers or paying off debts", and "Saying goodbye to friends and family". A white circle with the number "13" is on the right side.

### SLIDE 13

As we talk about warning signs, it’s important to know that one of these doesn’t mean someone IS suicidal. A headache could be a warning sign of something really bad or it could just be a headache from being dehydrated. That is just one example to show that we have to consider the whole picture. After the suicide death of a young man named Jason Flatt, some states including Alabama have adapted the Jason Flatt Act. This requires schools to educate students and school employees to learn about suicide in order to try to prevent it. The more you are aware of these warning signs, the more able you are to look out for people who might need adult or professional help.

According to NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), warning signs might include the following:

- Increased alcohol and drug use
- Aggressive behavior
- Withdrawal from friends, family and community
- Dramatic mood swings
- Impulsive or reckless behavior
- Collecting and saving pills or buying a weapon
- Giving away possessions
- Tying up loose ends, like organizing personal papers or paying off debts
- Saying goodbye to friends and family

Suicidal behaviors are considered an emergency. If you or someone you know starts to take any of these steps, seek immediate help.<sup>7</sup>



A slide titled "SUICID" with a purple header. It features a warning triangle icon on the left. The text reads "Risk Factors" followed by a list: "Substance abuse", "Intoxication", "Access to firearms", "A serious or chronic medical illness", "History of trauma or abuse", "Prolonged stress", and "Recent tragedy or loss". A white circle with the number "14" is on the right side.

### SLIDE 14

Besides the signs, it is also important to recognize certain risk factors.<sup>7</sup> Aside from mental illness, here are several other situations that might put a person at risk for attempting suicide:

# Core Lesson (cont)



## Slide/Handout

## Lesson Script/Talking Points

- Substance abuse
- Intoxication
- Access to firearms
- A serious or chronic medical illness
- History of trauma or abuse
- Prolonged stress
- Recent tragedy or loss

These are some important risk factors because you are at an age where you might be around more people who are starting to try different substances or encourage you or someone you know to try. Understand that substance use introduces way more than physical problems into your life. Drugs create mental highs and lows that worsen suicidal thoughts. You also may have known someone who experienced an abusive situation. These are times when people need to reach out to others for help. That's one important step toward recovery to prevent those problems from spilling into other areas of your life.

## Closing: Essential Question (4 minutes)

**What are the warning signs of suicidal thoughts and how can we get help?** *(Allow for responses.)*

Let's take a few minutes to process some of what we have heard today. I know it was a lot of heavy, deep information. Who are some of the people in our building who would be good Go-To People if you were worried about someone's suicidal intent. *(Allow for response and add to their list as needed - counselor, administrator, coach, teacher, nurse, school resource officer, etc.)* Why is it important to know where to turn if someone is posting about suicidal thoughts? *(Allow for response and discussion.)* Suicide can be preventable. Increased awareness, early identification, support systems and proper treatment can save lives. Today we learned about myths, warning signs, and behaviors. Being aware is a first step to helping. Remember, talking to someone at risk leads to talking to someone who can help. Lives are precious and we all are worth the help. Before we close, I want you to write the hotline number and text number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255), where trained professionals provide 24/7, free and confidential support. Their motto states, "You are not alone, and there are caring people who want to help." You can also text 741741. Please be sure you get both of those written on your handout. As you go through the day today, I encourage you to think seriously about our lesson today and take the subject we've discussed very seriously.



# Core Lesson (cont)



## References

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