

A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

2024

ON SUICIDE PREVENTION



An Educational Toolkit created
by the inaugural cohort Youth
Health Action Team

Our Approach

The Pima County Health Department Youth Executive Board and Youth Health Action Team is a group of students (age 14-24), with diverse opinions, focused on mental and behavioral health improvement for themselves and their peers in Pima County. The YHAT is supported and hosted by the Pima County Public Library (PCPL) and the Pima Behavioral Health Coalition (PBHC).



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Pressing Issues Related to Suicide

I. Substance Abuse

- According to a 2011 study of participants ages 9-17, “youth with suicidal behaviors were more likely to use and abuse substances than youth without suicidal behavior”, noting causes such as the high risk and self destructive behavior substance abuse can create or be a symptom of (Wu et al., 2004)
- According to a 2021 review, “Alcohol and opioids are the most common substances identified in suicide decedents” with 22% for alcohol and 20% for opioids (Rizk et al., 2021)
- How to approach substance abuse outreach:
 1. Create a setting where the most number of students can receive information such as a school assembly or mass classroom presentation during school hours.
 - a. Additionally, It may be a potentially good idea to arrange, through school administrations, to have constant message blasts, either once a week or a month, with information on how students can access mental health support at school, contact information for counselors, and information linking students to support networks like phone lines, peer networks, programs, and free consultations to therapy services.
 2. Using a normative education based model as well as incorporating social resistance skills are strategies used in substance abuse outreach programs (Griffin & Botvin, 2011)
 - This would mean sharing data about substance abuse in students that may be lower than what students expect, challenging the idea that substance abuse in youth is “normal” (Griffin and Botvin, 2011)
 - Between 2018 and 2022, alcohol consumption has declined from about 20% of Arizona youth to around 13% (Arizona Criminal Justice Commission et al., n.d.)
 - For marijuana it's from around 16% to 10% (Arizona Criminal Justice Commission et al., n.d.)
 - For e-Cigarettes it's 20% to a little under 10% (Arizona Criminal Justice Commission et al., n.d.)

- This also means incorporating coping skills students can use instead of turning to substance abuse (Griffin and Botvin, 2011) such as breathing techniques

II. Peer influence

- Peer influence strongly impacts aspects of adolescent life including dress, social behavior, and views of violence (Tome et al., 2012)
- A 2021 research study reported that in youth who had previously attempted suicide, an affiliation was found “with peers reporting suicidal ideation and/or engaging in suicidal behaviors was linked to adolescent’s own suicidal ideation and history of suicide attempt” (Schlagbaum, 2021)
- Additionally, the “main motives for alcohol consumption given by adolescents are related to social events” fear of being left out, or FOMO, is common amongst youth and may cause substance abuse (Tome et al., 2012)
- How to approach substance abuse outreach:
- Schools and other youth based serving institutions can take advantage of the opportunity for positive change and influence peer interaction can provide
 - The **Be There Certificate** is an online resource for youth to complete a training course on how to respond to others’ mental health crises and set appropriate boundaries. The completion of the course grants the youth a gift certificate to provide the financial means to reach out to a peer around them (*Earn Your Be There Certificate*, n.d.-b). Additionally, the BTC compensates all students who receive the certification with \$40 USD provided through any public library.

<https://www.betherecertificate.org/>



Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Resources for Youth

I. Youth and Parent Resources

- It is necessary for youth serving communities to not only provide phone numbers and links but also an explanation of what those phone numbers and links provide for the student:
 1. 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: “The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices.” (*About - 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline*, n.d.)
 2. Text HOME to 741741: This will allow you to communicate with a trained volunteer counselor over text messaging 24/7 in the U.S. (*Crisis Text Line | Text HOME to 741741 Free, 24/7 Mental Health Support*, 2024)
 3. Click <https://findtreatment.gov/>: This link will allow youth to type their address to locate treatment centers near them (*FindTreatment.gov*, n.d.)



4. Call 313-217-3201: This number will connect the caller with alcohol and drug abuse counseling (*Lpc*, 2024)
5. Click <https://afsp.org/teens-and-suicide-what-parents-should-know/>: This link will allow parents to learn about warning signs of suicide, videos, and how to approach the topic of suicide (*Teens and Suicide: What Parents Should Know*, 2023)



6. Text 678-678/call 1-866-488-7386: These 24/7 numbers will connect the youth to a counselor versed in the struggles and need of LGBTQ+ groups

Integrating A Youth Health Action Team Into Schools

Creating an action plan to include student voices in mental health policies is essential for developing effective and responsive support systems in schools. Here's an outline to help school administrators incorporate student input into mental health policies:

Action Plan Outline for Including Student Voice in Mental Health Policies

I. Establishing the Framework

1. Form a Mental Health Advisory Committee

- **Objective:** Create a diverse committee that includes students, school counselors, teachers, administrators, and mental health professionals. Empower and cultivate independence from students.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Identify and invite key stakeholders.
 - Ensure the committee reflects the diversity of the student body.
 - Establish regular meeting times and communication channels.

2. Define Goals and Objectives

- **Objective:** Clearly articulate the goals for including student voices in mental health policy development.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Develop a mission statement for the initiative.
 - Set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals.

II. Engaging Students

1. Conduct Surveys and Focus Groups

- **Objective:** Gather comprehensive data on student mental health needs and perspectives. As a starting point, refer to the 2024 YHAT's developed survey
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Develop and distribute anonymous surveys to the student body.
 - Organize focus groups with diverse student representatives to gather in-depth insights.
2. **Create Student Leadership Positions**
- **Objective:** Empower students to take active roles in mental health policy development.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Establish positions such as Student Mental Health Ambassadors, Student Board Trustee, Youth Advisory Council Leaders.
 - Provide training and resources for student leaders.
3. **Host Town Halls and Open Forums**
- **Objective:** Facilitate open dialogue between students and administrators.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Schedule regular town halls or open forums.
 - Allowing students 9-12 in high school to have a youth advisory board that directs the helm of city wide initiatives that are brought into high schools and approves of the delivery and focus on the content.
 - Promote these events through various communication channels.
 - Ensure a welcoming and respectful environment for all participants.

III. Developing and Implementing Policies

1. **Collaborate on Policy Drafts**
- **Objective:** Develop mental health policies that reflect student input and needs.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - Involve students in drafting policy proposals.
 - Review and revise drafts based on feedback from the advisory committee and broader student body.

2. Pilot Programs and Initiatives

- **Objective:** Test new mental health programs on a small scale before full implementation.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Identify pilot schools or groups for initial implementation.
 - Collect feedback and data to assess the effectiveness of pilot programs.
 - Make necessary adjustments based on pilot outcomes.

3. Integrate Policies into School Framework

- **Objective:** Ensure mental health policies are embedded into the school's overall policy framework.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Present final policies to the school board or relevant governing body for approval.
 - Integrate policies into student handbooks, school websites, and other relevant documents.
 - Communicate policy changes to all students, staff, and parents.

IV. Ongoing Evaluation and Improvement

1. Establish Continuous Feedback Mechanisms

- **Objective:** Maintain an ongoing dialogue with students about the effectiveness of mental health policies.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Implement regular check-ins through surveys, focus groups, and advisory committee meetings.
 - Create anonymous suggestion boxes or online forms for continuous feedback.

2. Monitor and Assess Policy Impact

- **Objective:** Evaluate the effectiveness of mental health policies and programs.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Collect data on key metrics such as student mental health outcomes, utilization of services, and satisfaction levels.
 - Conduct annual reviews of policies and programs to identify areas for improvement.

3. Adapt and Update Policies

- **Objective:** Ensure policies remain relevant and effective in addressing student mental health needs.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Make adjustments based on feedback and assessment data.
 - Stay informed about best practices and emerging trends in student mental health.
 - Regularly update policies to reflect new insights and developments.

General Tips/Suggestions

- Be understanding of cultural differences and expectations surrounding mental health
- Be understanding of the unique struggles of LBGTQ+ youth surrounding mental health
- Parents can help be aware of their child's mental health by taking steps as they do with any other safety or medical concern
- Avoid tokenizing youth voices during the integration of a YHAT
- Ensure the counseling department at a school provides unbiased and accepting emotional/psychological support
- Introduce the counselors in classrooms throughout the year and spread information about where and how the counselors can be accessed
- Consider giving out a survey to students using the template YHAT created
- Discourage the stigma around mental health without making light of the situation
- Provide and explain various hotlines and resources for youth to use during difficult situations
- Establish a safe space for youth to freely speak and share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences respectfully and without judgment from their fellow peers or adults
- Consider bringing in guest speakers and youth-serving organizations to provide increased

At the Root of The Issue: Prevention of Isolation and Foster a Sense of Community

The relationship between loneliness, social isolation, and increased suicide rates among students has been a significant concern, particularly as these issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and other societal stressors. Here is an overview of the relevant data and findings:

I. Statistics and Studies

1. **CDC Report (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)**

- According to the CDC, suicide rates among young people aged 10-24 increased by 57.4% between 2007 and 2018. The CDC has identified social isolation as a significant risk factor for suicide among this age group .
- The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) reported that 19% of high school students had seriously considered suicide in 2019, with 9% having attempted it. Loneliness and lack of connectedness were highlighted as contributing factors .

2. **American College Health Association (ACHA)**

- The ACHA's National College Health Assessment found that 66.7% of students felt very lonely in the past 12 months, and 13.3% reported seriously considering suicide during the same period .

3. **Journal of Adolescence Study (2021)**

- A study published in the Journal of Adolescence found that social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased feelings of loneliness, which were strongly associated with depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation among adolescents .

4. **International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (2020)**

- This journal published research indicating that social isolation and loneliness were strongly linked to mental health issues, including depression and suicidal thoughts among university students during the pandemic .

Key Findings

- **Impact of Loneliness:** Loneliness is a subjective feeling of being isolated, regardless of the actual level of social contact. Studies have shown that loneliness is a robust predictor of suicidal ideation among students. The lack of perceived social support can exacerbate feelings of loneliness, leading to a higher risk of mental health crises.
- **Social Isolation:** Physical isolation, which might result from circumstances such as moving away for college, the loss of a social network, or global events like the pandemic, significantly impacts mental health. Students who feel socially isolated often experience heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts.
- **Pandemic Effects:** The COVID-19 pandemic intensified feelings of loneliness and isolation due to lockdowns and remote learning, reducing face-to-face interactions. This sudden change adversely affected students' mental health, contributing to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal behavior.

II. Alleviating Isolation

- Encourage and support the creation of student groups to support diverse communities and identities.
- Gay Straight Alliance Network: A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), also known as a Gender and Sexuality Alliance, is a student-led or community-based organization, typically found in middle schools, high schools, and universities. These groups aim to create a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ students and their straight allies. Here are the primary goals and functions of a GSA:
- Diversity Student Unions:
 - **Creating a Supportive Community:** Diversity groups provide safe spaces where students can express their identities, experiences, and concerns without fear of judgment or discrimination. This sense of belonging can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, which are major risk factors for suicide. These groups facilitate peer support networks, allowing students to connect with others who may share similar experiences or challenges. Knowing they are not alone can provide immense emotional relief and support. By educating the

broader student body about diverse experiences and challenges faced by different groups, these organizations promote empathy and understanding. This can lead to a more inclusive and supportive school environment, which can help reduce bullying and discrimination.

- **Building Resilience and Empowerment:** Participating in diversity groups can provide students with leadership opportunities, helping them build confidence and resilience. Feeling empowered and capable can counteract feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that often accompany suicidal ideation.
- Unhoused Student Community: Unhoused students, also referred to as homeless or housing-insecure students, face unique challenges that can significantly impact their academic success and overall well-being. Clubs and organizations dedicated to supporting unhoused students play a crucial role in providing resources, advocacy, and a sense of community. Here are some key aspects of such clubs, along with examples and resources:
 - **Support Services:** Provide basic needs assistance, such as food, clothing, hygiene products, and temporary housing. Offer financial aid support, including scholarships, grants, and emergency funds.
 - **Resource Coordination:** Connect students with campus and community resources, such as housing assistance programs, food pantries, counseling services, and health care. Provide information on legal rights and protections for unhoused individuals.
 - **Community Building:** Create a supportive community where unhoused students can share their experiences, access peer support, and build connections. Organize social events, support groups, and networking opportunities.
 - **Education and Outreach:** Educate the campus community about homelessness and housing insecurity to reduce stigma and promote understanding. Host workshops, seminars, and panels featuring speakers with lived experiences of homelessness.

Examples of Unhoused Students Clubs and Initiatives

1. **The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice**
 - Although not a student club, this organization conducts research and advocacy focused on the needs of unhoused and food-insecure college students. They collaborate with colleges to develop effective support systems.
 - [The Hope Center](#)
2. **S.P.E.A.R. (Student Homelessness Initiative) at San Diego State University**
 - This student organization advocates for and supports students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. They provide resources, advocacy, and community-building activities.
 - SDSU S.P.E.A.R.

Resources for Starting and Supporting Unhoused Students Clubs

1. **National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)**
 - Offers resources, advocacy tools, and support for addressing homelessness in educational settings.
 - [NAEHCY](#)
 2. **SchoolHouse Connection**
 - Provides comprehensive resources on addressing homelessness in schools, including guides for supporting college students.
 - [SchoolHouse Connection](#)
 3. **California Homeless Youth Project**
 - Focuses on policy, research, and advocacy to support homeless youth in California, including college students.
 - California Homeless Youth Project
 4. **College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I)**
 - Offers resources and best practices for housing-insecure students, including how to create supportive campus environments.
 - [ACUHO-I](#)
-
- Domestic Violence Awareness: Domestic Violence Awareness Clubs (DVACs) on college campuses play a crucial role in raising awareness about domestic violence, providing support to survivors, and

advocating for policy changes. Here's an overview of the key functions, activities, and resources associated with these clubs:

LGBTQ+ Students

LGBTQ+ students are more vulnerable to suicide compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers. Research consistently shows that LGBTQ+ youth experience higher rates of mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Several factors contribute to this increased vulnerability:

1. Higher Rates of Suicidal Ideation and Attempts

- The **Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health** found that 45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth.
- The **CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)** reported that LGB students are almost five times as likely to attempt suicide compared to their heterosexual peers (23% vs. 5%).

2. Impact of Discrimination and Bullying

- LGBTQ+ students often face higher levels of bullying, harassment, and discrimination. The **GLSEN National School Climate Survey** found that 84.6% of LGBTQ students experienced verbal harassment, and 56.6% felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation.
- Such negative experiences significantly impact mental health, leading to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal behavior.

3. Family Rejection and Lack of Support

- Family rejection is a significant risk factor. The **Family Acceptance Project** found that LGBTQ youth who experience high levels of family rejection are more than eight times as likely to attempt suicide compared to those who experience low or no rejection.
- Conversely, supportive family and school environments can substantially reduce the risk of suicide and improve overall mental health for LGBTQ youth.

4. Intersectional Factors

- LGBTQ+ youth who belong to other marginalized groups, such as racial or ethnic minorities, may face compounded discrimination and stressors, further increasing their vulnerability to mental health issues and suicide.

Education Resources

1. **"The Queer and Transgender Resilience Workbook" by Anneliese Singh**
 - A self-help book offering practical tools and exercises for LGBTQ individuals to build resilience and mental health.
2. **"This Book is Gay" by Juno Dawson**
 - A guide that offers advice and resources for LGBTQ youth on various aspects of life, including mental health.

These resources can provide vital support and information for LGBTQ students facing mental health challenges.

Encourage Students to Lead Suicide Prevention

Students on a high school campus can play a vital role in preventing suicide by fostering a supportive and inclusive environment, promoting mental health awareness, and encouraging help-seeking behavior. Here are several actionable steps students can take:

I. Education and Awareness

a. Peer-Led Workshops and Training

- Organize and participate in workshops on mental health and suicide prevention.
- Provide training on recognizing the signs of mental distress and how to respond appropriately.

b. Mental Health Campaigns

- Initiate campaigns to raise awareness about mental health issues and suicide prevention.
- Use posters, social media, and school announcements to share information and resources.

II. Creating a Supportive Environment

a. Peer Support Groups

- Establish peer support groups where students can share their feelings and experiences in a safe, non-judgmental setting.
- Train peer leaders in active listening and support skills.

b. Inclusive School Culture

- Promote a culture of inclusion and acceptance, ensuring that every student feels valued and respected.
- Address bullying, discrimination, and other behaviors that contribute to feelings of isolation and despair.

III. Encouraging Help-Seeking Behavior

a. Normalize Seeking Help

- Encourage open conversations about mental health and the

- importance of seeking help.
- Share personal stories (with consent) to reduce stigma and show that it's okay to ask for help.

b. Provide Information on Resources

- Make sure students know where to find mental health resources, such as school counselors, hotlines, and local mental health services.
- Distribute resource lists and ensure they are visible in common areas and online.

IV. Bystander Intervention

a. Training Programs

- Participate in bystander intervention training to learn how to recognize and respond to signs of suicide risk.
- Learn and practice techniques for approaching peers who may be in distress.

b. Immediate Response Actions

- Understand the steps to take if a peer is in immediate danger, including who to contact and how to stay with the person until help arrives.

V. Collaboration with School Administration

a. Advocate for Policies and Programs

- Work with school administrators to develop and implement comprehensive mental health programs and policies.
- Advocate for regular mental health screenings and the presence of mental health professionals on campus.

b. Organize Events and Activities

- Plan events such as Mental Health Awareness Week, guest speaker sessions, and wellness fairs in collaboration with the administration.
- Include activities that promote mental well-being, such as yoga, mindfulness sessions, and creative arts workshops.

VI. Utilizing Online Platforms

a. Social Media Campaigns

- Use social media to share positive messages, mental health resources,

and stories of resilience.

- Create online support groups where students can discuss their mental health concerns safely and anonymously if needed.

b. Mental Health Apps and Tools

- Promote the use of mental health apps that offer support, relaxation exercises, and crisis intervention resources.
- Provide tutorials or information sessions on how to use these digital tools effectively.

VII. Engaging with Community Resources

a. Partner with Local Organizations

- Collaborate with local mental health organizations, crisis centers, and hospitals to provide additional support and resources.
- Invite representatives from these organizations to speak at school events and provide information.

b. Volunteering and Outreach

- Encourage students to volunteer with local mental health organizations, providing them with a sense of purpose and connection.
- Organize community outreach programs to raise awareness and provide support beyond the school campus.

VIII. Integrate Student Feedback into Policy Development

- **Objective:** Ensure student input directly influences the creation and revision of suicide prevention policies.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Present survey results, focus group findings, and feedback from the student advisory committee to policymakers.
 - Include students in policy drafting sessions and review meetings.
 - Develop a feedback loop where students can see how their input has been incorporated and what changes have been made as a result.

IX. Promote Transparency and Communication

- **Objective:** Maintain open lines of communication between students and administrators regarding mental health policies.
- **Action Steps:**
 - Regularly update the student body on policy developments,

- upcoming initiatives, and available resources through school newsletters, social media, and assemblies.
- Create a dedicated section on the school website for mental health resources, policy updates, and opportunities for student involvement.
 - Host periodic town hall meetings where students can ask questions and provide feedback directly to administrators.

X. Examples of Best Practices

1. **University of California, Berkeley**

- UC Berkeley involves students in their Mental Health Advisory Committee, which advises on mental health services and policies.
- UC Berkeley Mental Health Advisory Committee

2. **Active Minds**

- Active Minds chapters in schools across the U.S. empower students to advocate for mental health awareness and policy changes.
- [Active Minds](#)

3. **The Jed Foundation's Comprehensive Approach**

- The Jed Foundation collaborates with schools to develop customized mental health policies, incorporating student input through surveys and advisory groups.
- [The Jed Foundation](#)

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