SUICIDE PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS

Kim Kane, MPA
Program Director, Idaho Lives Project
Former Executive Director, SPAN Idaho
Member and Co-Founder, Idaho Council on Suicide Prevention
Certified QPR Suicide Prevention Trainer

IDAHO LIVES PROJECT
Helping Idaho Youth Choose to Live
Agenda

SPAN IDAHO

STATS

WHY?

PREVENTION FOR SCHOOLS

INTERVENTION

POSTVENTION

SOURCES OF STRENGTH

SPAN IDAHO
Suicide Prevention Action Network of Idaho

- A 501(c)(3) non-profit
- Vision: Idahoans choose to live
- Administers the Idaho Lives Project
- A Resource
- www.spanidaho.org
- 208-860-1703

SPAN Idaho

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
11 Volunteers

SPAN Idaho Regional Chapters
1 Coeur d'Alene
2 Lewiston
3 Caldwell
4 Boise
5 Twin Falls
6 Pocatello
7 Idaho Falls
8 Driggs
9 Fort Hall (new)

STAFF
Executive Director
Resource Specialist

REGIONAL CHAPTERS
9 Chapters
Volunteer chairperson(s)
Volunteer participants
www.spanidaho.org
### Suicide Statistics: U.S. and Idaho

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<th>US 2013</th>
<th>ID 2013</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Deaths</td>
<td>41,149</td>
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<td>Deaths/week</td>
<td>791</td>
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<td>Suicide Rate</td>
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### Average Suicide Deaths per Month in Idaho, 2013

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### Where Does Idaho Rank?

**US Suicide Death Rate Rankings (CDC 2013)**

- Montana: 23.9
- Idaho: 19.1
- U.S.: 13.0
- D.C.: 5.9
Why Does Idaho Rank So High?

- We are not unlike our neighbors
- Top Eleven States, CDC 2013:
  1. Montana
  2. Alaska
  3. Wyoming
  4. New Mexico
  5. Utah
  6. Nevada
  7. Idaho
  8. Colorado
  9. Maine
  10. Vermont

Why Does Idaho Rank So High?

- Lack of Access
- Easy Access
- Stigma/Rugged individualist culture
Youth Suicide Facts

- 2nd leading cause of death among Idaho's youth. 38%

Idaho Teen (age 14-19) Mortality
Idaho Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics, 2013

- Accident (47%)
- Suicide (38%)
- Other (5%)
- Heart diseases (3%)
- Malignancies (3%)
- Congenital malform (2%)
- Homicide (2%)

Based on 58 deaths

Youth Suicide Facts

- Idaho high school students, 2013 YRBS shows (n=1,886)

1 in 7 have considered suicide
1 in 8 actually have a suicide plan
1 in 14 have attempted suicide
School-Age Children

• Idaho has lost 85 school-aged children to suicide in the last 5 years (2009-2013).
• 15 of those children were age 14 or younger

College-Age Youth

• Idaho has lost 134 college-aged youth (age 19-24) to suicide in the last 5 years (2009-2013).
WHY?
THE SUICIDAL MIND &
FACT VS. FICTION

Thomas Joiner, PhD

- Distinguished Research Professor and The Bright-Burton Professor in the Department of Psychology at Florida State University
- Author of over 400 peer-reviewed publications
- Editor-in-Chief of the journal Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior
- Author of *Why People Die by Suicide, Myths About Suicide, Lonely at the Top, and The Perversion of Virtue.*
True or False

1. Asking someone about suicide might “plant the seed” or increase risk.
3. Suicides increase over the winter holidays.
5. Most suicidal people are ambivalent about it.
6. Suicide is often done on whim.
7. Restricting access to lethal means is an critical prevention method.
Suicide is Never About Only One Thing

• SUICIDE IS COMPLEX

Suicide is Preventable

• People routinely survive deep depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

• The basic instinct to survive is ever-present.

• Suicidal people survive because someone identifies what’s happening and gets help.

• 90% of those who complete suicide had a mental health or substance abuse disorder.

   THESE DISORDERS ARE TREATABLE!
PREVENTION

What Parents Can Do

- TALK TO YOUR CHILD
- LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGEMENT
- EMPHASIZE
  - BELONGING, CONNECTION CAPABILITY & RESILIENCY
  - EXAMPLES
    - Family History
    - Dinner Together
ACE Study

• Adverse Childhood Experiences Study
• Ongoing study of the effects of childhood trauma on life-long health.
• “Not only does the ACE Study demonstrate a strong, graded relationship between the number of categories of ACEs and participants’ lifetime history of depression, but it also demonstrates that ‘The likelihood of childhood/adolescent and adult suicide attempts increased as ACE Score increased. An ACE Score of at least 7 [categories, not incidents] increased the likelihood of childhood/adolescent suicide attempts 51-fold and adult suicide attempts 30-fold (P<.001).’”

Upstream Prevention

• Promote Student Well-being
  – School Climate
  – Belongingness
  – Capability
  – Viewing unwanted behavior through a “trauma lens”
Important Notes about Warning Signs

• The more signs, the greater the risk.

• Warning signs are especially important if the person has attempted suicide in the past.

• One signs alone may not indicate suicidality but all signs are reason for concern and several signs may indicate suicidality, and any one of three signs alone is cause for immediate action.

Warning Signs

• Previous suicide attempts
• Talking about, making a plan or threatening to complete suicide
• Isolation or withdrawal from friends, family or school activities
• Agitation, especially when combined with sleeplessness
• Nightmares
• Changed eating habits or sleeping patterns
Warning Signs

• Giving away prized possessions, making final arrangements, putting affairs in order
• Themes of death or depression in conversation, writing, reading or art
• Recent loss of a friend or family member through death, suicide or divorce
• Sudden dramatic decline or improvement in work/schoolwork
• Major mood swings or abrupt personality changes

Warning Signs

• Feeling hopeless or trapped
• Use or increased use of drugs and/or alcohol
• Chronic headaches and stomach aches, fatigue
• Neglect of personal appearance
• Taking unnecessary risks or acting reckless
• No longer interested in favorite activities or hobbies
Direct Verbal Signs

- I’m going to kill myself.
- I wish I were dead.
- I’m going to commit suicide.
- I’m going to end it all.
- If ‘such and such’ doesn’t happen, I’ll kill myself.

Indirect Verbal Clues

- I’m too tired of it all to go on any longer.
- My family would be better off without me.
- No one would care if was dead anyway.
- I just want out.
- That assignment/goal/job/future event won’t matter.
- You won’t have to worry about me much longer.
Other Clues/Triggering Events

- Acquiring means
- Co-occurring depression, moodiness and hopelessness
- Unexplained anger, aggression and irritability
- Being expelled from school
- A recent unwanted move
- Loss of any major relationship
- Sudden unexpected loss of freedom/fear of punishment/humiliation/arrest

Courtesy of the QPR Institute

Signs of Immediate Risk = Take Immediate Action

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
School-wide Prevention

• Train Gatekeepers
  – Ensure community resources are in place
  – Train adults and youth separately
• Train Students
  – Choose curriculum carefully
  – Must emphasize: code of silence, trusted adults, rarity and warning signs – NEVER normalize suicidal behavior
• Screen: individually with properly-trained screeners

Most Critical for Youth to Know

1. Suicide is rare
2. Suicide is NOT a common response to bullying
3. Warning signs
4. Tell a trusted adult
   
   Life and Death Issue = No code of silence

3. 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Prevention Tools Online

- List of school-based belongingness activities
- Guidelines for school gatekeepers
- Positive Behavior Supports
- Other web resources

www.spanidaho.org/schools

INTERVENTION
Intervention Best Practice Planning

• Train entire school community
• Pre-screen mental health help
• Involve emergency personnel and police in planning
• Have protocols for when parents are unavailable or refuse to get child help
• Prepare for cultural and language barriers

ASK

• If you see signs, don’t wait, ask the question
• If they are reluctant, be persistent
  – Direct methods
  – Less direct
• Talk to the person in semi-private setting
• Allow the person to talk freely
• Give yourself plenty of time
• Have resources handy
How to Ask

• Direct:
  “Are you thinking of suicide/killing yourself?”

• Less Direct:
  “You seem to be ________. Sometimes when people are ________, they think about suicide. Are you thinking of suicide/killing yourself?”

How NOT to Ask

“Are you thinking of hurting yourself?”

“You’re not suicidal, are you?”

“You’re not thinking of doing something crazy, are you?”
Listening

DON’T PANIC!

• Put your fear on hold
• Listen to the problem and give full attention
• Use reflective listening
• Do not problem solve
• Do not rush to judgment

Listening

Simply asking and listening may make all the difference.

It can rekindle hope and increase sense of belongingness.
Instill Hope

• Ask about reasons for dying and living
• Offer hope in any form.
  – “You are important.”
  – “I’m here for you.”
  – “I care if you live.”
  – “We’ll get through this.”
  – Other “we” statements

Get Help

• Get a commitment to accept help and make arrangements and contact family/friends
• Ensure student is not left alone
• Notify parents
• If student is deemed to be at high risk, also contact mental health agency where the student can go for further help.
• 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
• Call police if student is in possession of a weapon
• Follow up with parent and mental health agency
• Debrief staff involved – self care
• Document everything! 
Other Intervention Considerations

• Assessment tools
  – Find the best for your school/district
  – Should include:
    • plan determination
    • asking about means
    • finding all relevant information
    • inform administration of results

• Contracts
  – Not a good idea/up hopelessness
  – Use safety plan/care card instead

Intervention Tools Online

• Questions for guiding intervention
• Student interview questions
• Sample parental contact form
• Self-care document
• Sample student re-entry plan
• Sample student record of actions taken
• Sample incident report
• Sample care care/safety plan

www.spanidaho.org/schools
POSTVENTION

Why is Postvention Important?

• Maintains student and staff safety
• Provides support to grieving and/or traumatized victims
• Screens/refers/follows-up with those who need more support
• Reduces the likelihood of contagion
Contagion is Real

Postvention
Key Points for the Principal

- Verify the death
- Convene response team
- Contact family of deceased
- Inform district office, SDE and sibling school administrators
- Notify staff – phone tree if possible
- Ensure secretary is prepared for calls
- Schedule after-school debriefing
- Inform all parents
Postvention
Dos and Don’ts for the Principal

• DO NOT refer to death as a suicide unless verified
  — DO use “sudden death”
• DO NOT close school
  — DO implement enhanced student tracking and follow regular school routines as much as possible
• DO NOT announce news of death over the loudspeaker or at school assembly
  — DO use classroom student notification methods

Postvention – Key Steps for Crisis Team

• Contact law enforcement to verify facts
• Implement counseling support plan
  — Assess resources needed
  — Clarify responsibilities/coordinate with district or community resources
  — Designate area for counseling
• Implement communication plan
  — Review scripts and announcements
  — Notify staff/conduct staff session
  — Minimize or restrict student cell phone use
  — Notify or check in with close friends of deceased
  — Notify all students and staff
  — Ensure notification to schools of siblings
Postvention
Key Points for Crisis Team

• **DO NOT** refer to the death as a suicide unless verified
  — **DO** Squelch Rumors
    • Give facts
    • Explain that falsehoods do damage
    • Limit or restrict cell phone use
  — **DO** exercise discretion about the kind of information shared
    — **DO NOT** use excessive detail
    — **DO NOT** glorify or vilify the deceased
    — **DO NOT** conduct PREVENTION training for students

MEMORIALS

• **DO NOT** allow inappropriate memorials or activities
  — Those that glorify, glamorize, sensationalize the death or normalize suicide
• Avoid anything that other vulnerable youth may see as a way to get recognition
  — Memorial services at school
  — Sending all students to the funeral
  — Flying flag at half-staff
  — Student assemblies about the victim/moment of silence
  — Permanent markers/memorials
Honor the Deceased

- Do allow that which honors the student who died and can help the living
  - Donations for the family or a charity
  - Notes to the family from student and reviewed by staff
  - Dedication pages in school newspaper or yearbook – see guidelines for appropriate information to include

Postvention

- Be open to seeking assistance
  - SPAN
  - Postvention guidelines
  - Mental health
  - Clergy
  - Hotline referral list
Postvention Tools Online

• Responsibilities of Principal or Designee
  – Step-by-step instructions and Dos and Don’ts
  – Sample Media Statements
  – Sample script for school secretary
  – Sample parent letter
• Responsibilities of the Crisis Team
  – Step-by-step instructions and Dos and Don’ts
  – Sample death announcement
  – Guidelines for staff session
  – Identifying At-Risk Students document
  – Self-care document

Postvention: Survivor Support

• Simply be there

• Be a friend, family, neighbor, church community

• After 2 weeks – Reach out

• Anniversaries
Survivor Support

• Suicide Survivor Packets: contact SPAN

• Support groups
  – **Boise Area**
    Facilitators: Kirby and Susan Orme
    Where: First United Methodist Church Cathedral of the Rockies
    11th and Hays Streets, Boise
    Olivet Room, enter through glass doors on 11th Street
    When: Second Friday of each month from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.
  – **Meridian Area**
    Facilitator: Cynthia Mauzerall
    Where: Holy Apostles Church, 6300 N Meridian Rd., Meridian
    When: Fourth Monday of each month from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
  – www.spanidaho.org, click Survivor Support

• Books
  – *No Time to Say Goodbye*, Carla Fine
  – *Night Falls Fast*, Kay Redfield Jameson
  – *My Son, My Son*, Iris Bolton
Survivor Support

• Suicide Survivor Packets: contact SPAN
• Support groups
  – Pocatello Area
    Facilitators: Margaret Brown and Lynne Fullmer
    Where: 4425 Burley Dr, Pocatello
    When: Second & Fourth Mondays of each month from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. or call Margaret at 208-637-0292
  – Idaho Falls Area
    Facilitators: Jeni Griffin and Jeni Desforges
    Where: Idaho Falls Public Library, room 4, 457 W. Broadway
    When: First Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. or call 208-227-2100 for more information.

• Books
  – No Time to Say Goodbye, Carla Fine
  – Night Falls Fast, Kay Redfield Jameson
  – My Son, My Son, Iris Bolton

Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

For Hotline cards or more information, contact John Reusser at jreusser@mtnstatesgroup.org
SOURCES OF STRENGTH and the ILP Process

Idaho Lives Project Goals Model

**Goal 1:** Sources of Strength in Schools

**Goal 2:** School & Community Gatekeeper Training

**Goal 3:** Suicide Assessment Training for BH & PC Professionals

**Goal 4:** College & University Involvement

**Goal 5:** Connectedness & Capability Strategies for All Schools

**Goal 6:** Shield of Care for Juvenile Justice Facilities

**Goal 7:** Data Collection, Evaluation & Reporting
How is *Sources of Strength* Different?

- Uses Strength-based resilience model to increase eight protective factors
- Uses DIVERSE Peer Leaders to influence norms and behaviors
- Trains adults AND youth

The Process

- ILP provides suicide prevention gatekeeper training to all participating school’s staff
- Sources provides training to 2 – 10 Adult Advisors who commit to the process, ~ 40 hours/year.
The Process

• All staff nominate Peer Leaders

• Sources trains Peer Leaders half-day training

The Process

With Adult Advisor support and guidance, Peer Leaders

• Meet regularly
• Take hope, help and strength messages school-wide with a variety of activities
Man Therapy

You can’t fix your mental health with duct tape.

Therapy from the creators of pork chops and fighter jets.

Men have feelings too. No, not just hippies.

The Process

• Ongoing support from
  – Sources of Strength
  – Idaho Lives Project
  – SPAN Idaho
The Result

“There are few things more tragic than a fight against misery that is both winnable and unfought.”

~Thomas Joiner, PhD
Contact me

Kim Kane
Program Director
Idaho Lives Project
208-861-2727
kkane@idaholives.org