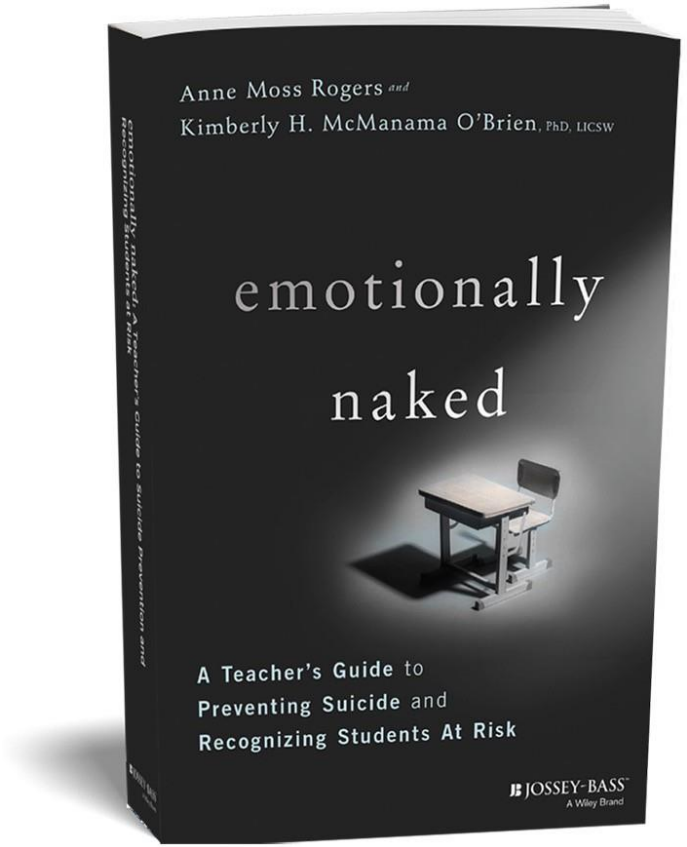
MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS EDUCATION



Educator Conversation with a Student who Might be Suicidal

Pre-Teens, Teens, Young Adults

MentalHealthAwarenessEducation.com

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USA Suicide & Crisis Lifeline 988

USA & Canada Crisis Text Line 741-741

USA Crisis line LGBTQ Youth 1-866-488-7386

USA Crisis text line LGBTQ Youth 678-678

Trans lifeline
USA (877) 565-8860
Canada (877)-330-6366

While the following conversation is between a student and an educator, know that the tactics are similar with a co-worker.

Educators also struggle with thoughts of suicide, and we should be there for them, too.

See these posts on how to help a colleague

- To those who think, 'I'm not qualified to talk to someone who is suicidal'
- They said they're thinking of suicide? What now?

Case study:

Casey. 16 years old, Sophomore, High School. Identifies as female.

What's happening in her life?

- She took on a heavy load of advanced classes this year

What's going on at school?

- She is falling asleep in class
- She has been unorganized and very anxious

Student

“I am so overwhelmed. There is so much figure out. All this is getting to me. I just can’t do this anymore. ”

Educator

“So I hear you saying you feel overwhelmed. But can you explain what you mean when you say you can’t do this anymore?”

Student

“Like I don’t care anymore or don’t want to be here anymore. I feel numb.. ”

Educator

“Many times, when someone says, “I can’t do this anymore,” they are struggling with thoughts of suicide? Are you thinking about suicide?”

We must ask the question directly! It will not plant the idea in their head.

Student

“I think so. I have dark periods. My dad has a gun. I have thought about how it would make the pain stop…”

Deep breath. Don’t panic. Validate the help-seeking. You don’t have to fix this. You just need to listen.

Educator

“This is serious. First, I’m honored and grateful you trust me with this. I also know what courage it took to come tell me all you have. So thank you.”

Student

“You don’t think I’m weak?”

Showing partnership with the word “together.” Don’t send a student in active crisis by themselves!

Educator

“It’s actually brave. Let’s talk about next steps because we need to keep you safe from suicide. Let’s reach out to the counseling Center. Together. Does that sound OK?”

Student

“Will they call my parents? I don’t want to be a burden and make them more stressed.”

Educator

“Your parents would not want to lose you. And you can be in the room when Mrs. Lowe calls your parents. You can tell them yourself or have her tell. You can even practice w/ her.”

Setting expectations and giving the student agency of their own mental health.

Student

“They might be really upset or disappointed or say that I’m just trying to get attention.”

Educator

“My main concern is your safety & your life. Thoughts of suicide means that something is gravely wrong and it’s a situation that needs immediate attention. I have your back.”

Gentle and empathetic but firm. We must share this life-or-death info.

Student

“Will the counselor call an ambulance or anything like that?”

Allow them to talk about their fears and accept them with thoughtful understanding

Educator

“We aren’t calling an ambulance because no limbs are falling off, right? You’re not having a heart attack? So we don’t need an ambulance. But we do need help & I’m with you on this, OK?”

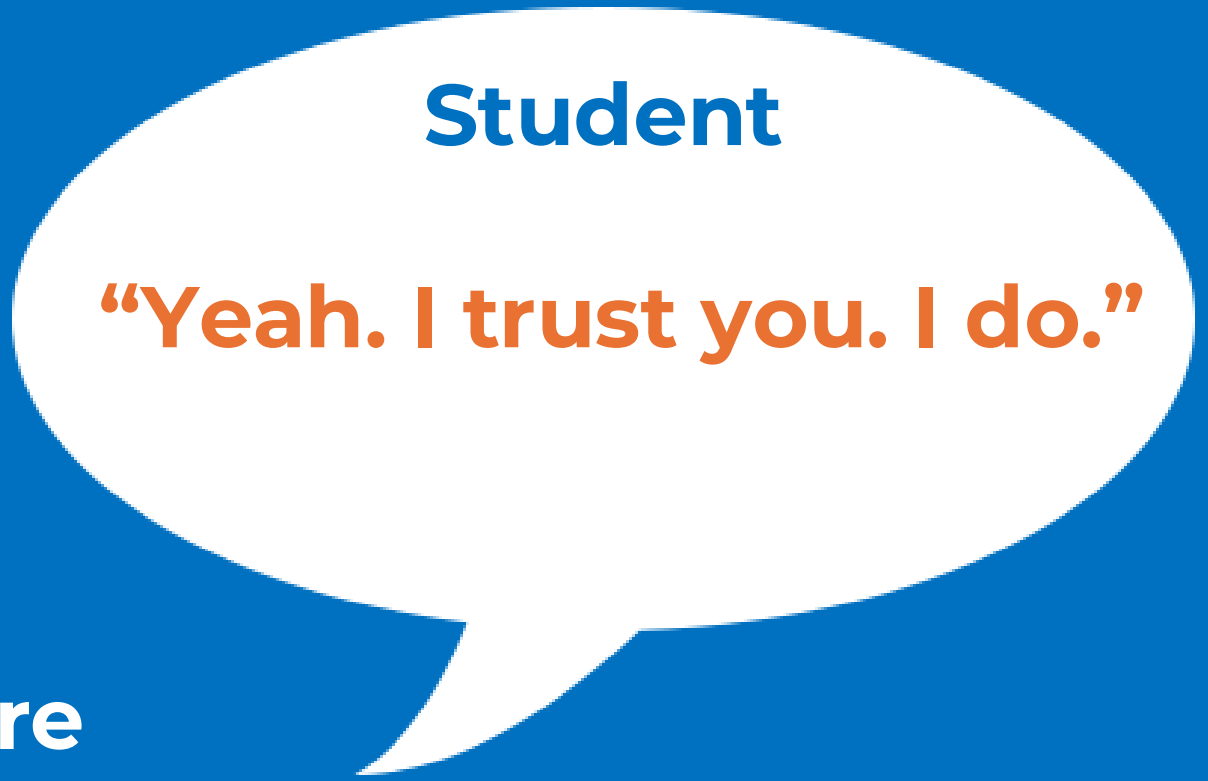
Student

“OK. But I do feel better today. . .I mean it probably won’t come back.”

Educator

“You may be right. But let’s be sure. We need to call together to be safe. I know it took courage to tell. No secrets. Are you with me?”

There would likely be more listening. But this captures the basics.



- **Don’t fix**
- **Meet them where they are**
- **Ask questions like– “*How long have you felt that way?*”**
- **What information is imperative to share when you two talk to the counselor?**

Let the student tell as much as they are willing. But make sure you share the part about the gun!

We need to do everything possible to encourage the parents to lock it up or have a friend or relative keep the firearms until the student is safe from suicide. This puts time between thought and action and saves lives!

Summary of what to do

1. Engage in private conversation

2. Listen w/ empathy, no “fixing”

3. Ask, “Are you thinking of suicide?”

4. Connect student w/ help & resources & fill out a student report or talk to the school mh contact.

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