

WHAT I WISH MY PARENTS KNEW

A Step-by-Step Guide to Implement a Youth-Guided Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Parent Event

Schools play an important role in suicide prevention. Aside from that fact that youth spend most of their day on the school campus, schools and districts can be a conduit for bringing the community together and engaging parents.

With this in mind, it is important to explore efforts to engage parents and the larger school community as partners in suicide prevention. One such effort that has shown strong potential is the *What I Wish My Parents Knew* initiative developed by school, faith, and other community leaders in the Poway Unified School District in San Diego County. *What I Wish My Parents Knew* events have proven to be a successful way to engage parents and the entire community around mental health and related topics.

What I Wish My Parents Knew Format

The goal of these events is to promote mental health and reduce risk, including risk of suicide, among youth by providing parents with knowledge and skills around a variety of mental health-related topics.

Suggested Agenda:

- Half-hour resource fair for parents featuring local community resources (30 minutes, optional)
- Brief welcome/keynote remarks by principal and possibly co-hosted by a representative from a local mental health or suicide prevention organization. (10 to 30 minutes)
- Concurrent break-out sessions featuring workshops on a variety of topics (60 min each)

As the title suggests, an integral part of *What I Wish My Parents Knew* events is to engage youth in selecting and delivering the content of the break-out sessions.

To start, youth provide input on the topics they would like to see covered at the events. Responses from youth typically cover a variety of topics related to mental health including suicide prevention, academic pressure, and bullying.

Second, youth and young adults are invited to co-present with subject matter experts during the breakout sessions.

Ideally, the events occur 2-3 times during the school year, rotating school sites within the district to make it more accessible to parents. It is suggested to have the events open to parents at all grade levels.

Step by Step Guide for Hosting a *What I Wish My Parents Knew* Event



Form a Planning Committee

The planning committee should ideally include:

- Leadership from the district as well as school administration staff.
- Parents and youth. Engaging both parents and youth is important in order to gather information about what will help adapt the event to meet the needs of the culture of your school.
- Local subject matter experts: Include experts from community-based organizations and behavioral health agencies when possible to better identify issues and resources in the community. For referrals please contact info@suicideispreventable.org
- Faith and Community leaders: These groups have resources and relational networks that can be valuable to this initiative.



Send Out a Student Survey to Gain Input for Workshop Topics

Student input is the foundation of *What I Wish My Parents Knew* events. It is important to gather a diverse set of students to provide input to shape the event. For example, although including student groups such as ASB and Peer Counseling may be important since these groups work with a variety of students, many times these groups represent a fairly homogenous set of students.

- Consider use of online tools such as google surveys or survey monkey to conduct the survey.
- When gathering input from youth on topics related to their mental health, it is important to also provide resources. The survey should include a reminder of how to access support on campus, as well as in the community.

National Resources: Crisis Text Line: text “home” to 741-741
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800.273.8255



Set a Date, Location, and Identify Speakers to Meet the Needs Expressed by Students

The events are intended to occur at least annually, preferably every semester. This allows for parents to attend multiple events and participate in each of the workshops over time.

- For the first event, consider utilizing a school that is central for the district. In subsequent events, consider rotating school sites to allow for more accessibility to parents around the district.
- Your district will want to identify individuals (preferably those already doing work in your district or at least in the school setting) to speak about the topics. Potential organizations to contact include your local county behavioral health agency, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, or the Trevor Project.

Sample Survey

(Insert High School/District Name) will be holding special events to further educate parents about challenges that students face in and out of school. Please honestly consider the following topics and select which three would be essential for parents to know more about. Thank you!

- Handling Stress
- Suicide Prevention/Mental Health
- Substance Use/Abuse
- Pressures of Social Media
- Peer Pressure
- Managing Expectations
- Grades
- Dealing w/ Bullying/Harassment
- Other (allow for open ended responses)

Step by Step Guide for Hosting a *What I Wish My Parents Knew* Event

4

Student Presenters

As the title suggests, these events are centered around hearing from the youth perspective. To accomplish this, not only is it important to allow students to guide the topics covered in the breakout sessions, but it is vital to have youth co-present with subject matter experts during these sessions. During the workshops, youth can offer insight into their experiences related to the topics.

There are a few considerations to keep in mind when identifying youth and young adults for the workshop presentations:

- For more trauma-related topics such as bullying and suicide prevention, it is vital to ensure the students who are tasked with presenting have strong support systems in place. Parent permission is key to this effort. You'll want to ensure all youth are recovering from the stressors and are in a "safe place" with their mental health.
- You can also consider recruiting youth and young adults who have recently graduated from the district.

5

Other considerations:

- Work with local organizations that reach youth and parents as **partners** to assist with promotion and follow up for the events. Don't overlook the value of faith groups, YMCA , Boys and Girls clubs , and other community organizations.
- Seek donations or funding to provide food for attendees at the event. Often the events will occur on a weeknight and parents will be coming straight from work. Pizza, water and cookies will be much appreciated.
- Consider opportunities for daycare and/or activities for older youth in case parents have concerns about leaving children at home. Engage students with providing these activities at the events.

Dear Parents,

It's no surprise that youth are carrying an enormous amount of stress these days. Many of us as parents and school staff would agree our youth are under more stress than we were at their ages. The American Psychological Association's "Stress In America" survey showed that not only are youth carrying more stress than they feel is healthy, the stressors and the bad habits that come with them are entering their lives at younger and younger ages.

To address the issues that youth are facing, and to help provide our children with the most support possible, we invite you to join us for a special event to discuss the issues they are facing. We recently sent a survey out to our students asking one simple question, "What do you wish your parents knew?". Our goal was to get honest feedback to gain a better understanding about what issues our youth are facing. We invited them to submit feedback and input on topics and issues that they would like to see discussed.

We invite you join us on (insert date) for the event "What I Wish My Parents Knew" which will feature multiple workshops on a variety of topics including: (insert workshop topics). In addition to the workshop sessions, we will have numerous community-based organizations in attendance to provide information on their programs and resources available to you.

The event is open to all parents within the district, and parents of younger children are encouraged to attend.

Although the event is focused on parents, we will be providing childcare and will also host activities for "older" youth if you are not able to make other arrangements.

By coming together to discuss these important topics, we hope that as a community we can continue to better hear and serve the needs of our children.

We hope you will consider joining us,

(INSERT NAME/TITLE)

RESOURCES

The Directing Change Program and Film Contest | www.DirectingChangeCA.org

On the “Watch and Use Films” (<http://www.directingchange.org/films/>) portion of the **Directing Change Program’s** website, hundreds of 60-second films created by youth and young adults about mental health and suicide prevention can be viewed or downloaded to incorporate into the event. The website also offers a large variety of resources for schools in promoting mental health and suicide prevention awareness, including educational videos and lesson plans. In addition, there are a variety of resources to assist schools with the development of policies and programs to meet the requirements of **AB2246**.

Each Mind Matters: California’s Mental Health Movement www.EachMindMatters.org | www.sanamente.org

This website offers a wide range of mental health information and resources in English, Spanish and many additional languages. For example, The Mental Health Resource Guide addresses the stigma of mental illness, tips on ways to boost mental wellness, steps on how to support friends and family with mental health challenges, and resources for those seeking help. The Lime Green Ribbon has been established by the **Each Mind Matters** campaign as a unifying symbol to promote mental health and suicide prevention efforts throughout California. To assist with tying these events into a broader context and conversation about mental health occurring throughout the state, consider incorporating the Lime Green Ribbon and other lime green resources into your efforts.

These and other resources and more are available for download (for free) at the **Each Mind Matters** Resource Center (www.EMMResourceCenter.org) or printed copies can be purchased by contacting info@eachmindmatters.org.

Know the Signs

www.suicidepreventable.org | www.elsuicidiodoesprevenible.org

The **Know the Signs** campaign helps Californians know the signs of suicide, find the words to offer support to someone they are concerned about, and reach out to local resources. The campaign offers a number of resources to promote suicide prevention including tent cards, brochures, and posters in English, Spanish and many other languages.

Walk In Our Shoes

www.WalkinOurShoes.org | www.Ponteenmizapatos.org

Walk in Our Shoes utilizes real stories from teens and young adults to teach students about mental health challenges and mental wellness. The website includes short vignettes about mental health appropriate for students ages 9-13 and the grown-up section of the website includes lesson plans and activities.

National Alliance for Mental Illness | www.namiCA.org

The **National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI)** is a national organization committed to building better lives for millions of Americans affected by mental illness. Through NAMI State Organizations and NAMI affiliates, NAMI offers educational programs that ensure families, individuals and educators receive the support and information they need. Contact them for guest speaker suggestions or to host a resource table.



Funded by counties through the Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63).



Directing Change
Program & Film Contest

www.DirectingChangeCA.org