

NEWSLETTER: ADOLESCENT SELF-HARM STUDY

SEPTEMBER, 2018

DEAR COMMUNITY PARTNERS,

September has arrived, and that means back to school! We hope that you are having a smooth transition to the start of the academic year.

As you know, the transition back to school can be a challenging time for teens for a variety of reasons. This newsletter will focus on suicidal behaviors in youth in the context of the school environment, with an emphasis on school safety and bullying. As a reminder, we welcome input from our community partners as to what topics they would like featured in newsletters.

RECRUITMENT UPDATE:

Understanding why teen girls of color attempt suicide at higher rates than their peers is a critical step in tackling this significant mental health disparity. Results from this study will benefit families, mental health providers, and the community.

We need your help with continuing to recruit participants for the adolescent self-harm study. If you know a girl who has attempted suicide in the past 6 months, please consider referring them to our study. Our aim is to recruit a total of 60 adolescent girls and their maternal caregivers to participate.

If you identify a potential participant who is interested in participating in the study, please ***obtain verbal parental permission or utilize the permission-to-contact form*** for them to be contacted about the study. We are relying on your support to make the project a success! Let us know what we can do to make the recruitment process as easy as possible!

YOUTH SUICIDAL BEHAVIORS, SCHOOL SAFETY, AND BULLYING

As teens spend a significant amount of their time at school, the school environment and relationships within that environment play an important role in their lives – particularly when it comes to suicide prevention. Being threatened at school is a predictor of suicidal behavior in adolescents, and the relationship between school avoidance due to feeling unsafe and suicidal behaviors is well documented. Bullying is an additional predictor of suicidal behavior in teens - youth who experience bullying as victims, perpetrators, or both are more likely to consider and attempt suicide than teens without involvement in bullying.

“School safety and connectedness have been identified as the most important protective factors in youth suicidal behavior”

CONNECTEDNESS: TEENS NEED TO FEEL THEY BELONG

School safety and connectedness have been identified as important protective factors in youth suicidal behavior. School connectedness is students’ belief that adults and peers at school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. Adult support, belonging to a positive peer group, commitment to education, and a positive school environment are four factors that are proven to increase school connectedness. The importance of supportive relationships for teens experiencing bullying should not be underestimated: evidence shows that when youth are unable to discuss bullying or do not have a supportive adult to confide in, suicide risk increases significantly.

STRATEGIES TO FOSTER SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

Work with students, parents, teachers, and administrators to create safe and welcoming spaces where teens feel that they belong and matter to others

- Empower students and families by asking how they think school climate could be improved

Develop positive relationships with teens, particularly those with a history of being bullied or bullying others

- Greet students by name and maintain a warm, non-judgmental attitude. Having a strong relationship may encourage students at risk for suicidal behavior to seek help.

Offer opportunities for families to get involved in their teen's school life

- Create workshops to teach parents skills to better support their children in school

Promote open communication, trust, and caring among school/agency staff, families, and community partners

- Model and encourage respectful and open communication in interactions with others
- Encourage teachers to reach out to students who appear to be struggling academically, socially, or emotionally

RESOURCES

- Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention: https://afsp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Model-Policy_FINAL.pdf
- How to Create a Positive School Climate: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_create_a_positive_school_climate
- Fostering School Connectedness: Information for School Districts and Administrators: https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness_administrators.pdf
- Fostering School Connectedness: Information for Teachers and Other School Staff: https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness_teachers.pdf

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Our recruitment goal for this month is to enroll 5 families in the project. We can't do it without your help! Please contact us regarding potential participants, and let us know how we can best facilitate this process.

Call/text us at 512-518-0659

Email us at UT.ASHR21@gmail.com

Website: <https://socialwork.utexas.edu/projects/why-adolescent-latinas-attempt-suicide-more-than-other-females/>