



## Suicide Prevention Grade 8

### UNIT OVERVIEW

#### DURATION

- 3 lessons (1 x 80 minute lesson; 2 x 40 minute lesson)

#### DESCRIPTION

- Suicide Prevention: *Can You Keep A Secret?*** – Students will learn to recognize and acknowledge the value of the strong loyalty that adolescents feel towards their friends, while at the same time, examine some common misunderstandings surrounding the issue of loyalty.
- Suicide Prevention – Warning Signs (2x 40 minute lessons):** Students will be introduced to the concept of warning signs and will become aware of the various warning signs that a suicidal person may exhibit. They will identify warning signs that an individual contemplating suicide may demonstrate. Students will then use steps in a decision-making model to brainstorm various ways to assist or approach an individual exhibiting various warning signs of suicide. Students will then demonstrate communication strategies to convey their concerns to this individual in a role play scenario.
- Suicide Prevention: *Reaching Out*** – Students will begin to understand the importance of accessing resources within the school or the greater community when an individual is finding life’s challenges overwhelming. Students will investigate various local support groups and community organizations (e.g. public health offices) that provide information and/or services related to health, well being and mental health issues. Students will then create a community resource guide outlining a list of crisis intervention services and resources available in the greater community with applicable numbers and background information that one can call in a crisis situation. A teacher may wish to consider inviting a member from such a community group to the classroom.

#### TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In Canada, suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst teenagers. A common misconception surrounding suicide is that discussing it will “put ideas into teenagers’ heads” and hence will lead to some teenagers making it happen. The truth is that not talking about it leaves struggling teens confused and isolated. When discussing suicide with students, it is integral that they understand that suicide is NOT a typical response to

normal stresses in the lives of adolescents, nor is it the result of any one, single event. Rather, suicide is a manifestation of depression and distortions of thinking associated with a psychiatric disorder. It is an irrational act in the face of an overwhelming experience of anxiety. It is the product of a complex interaction between many factors in life of a student at risk.

The Grade Eight unit moves away from a more theoretical background on suicide (what suicide is, what are risk and protective factors and what are the risk and protective factors for suicidal individual) to a more practical suicide prevention based program. The Grade Eight unit focuses on becoming aware of the warning signs of suicide, using effective decision making skills when an individual or his/her friend exhibits some of these warning signs, and developing help seeking skills that will allow an individual to access trained personnel in the mental health field to assist with an intervention should one be necessary.

It is vitally important to discuss suicide prevention with adolescents because young people need to recognize that any suicidal act is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Adolescents need to recognize that everyone goes through periods of feeling overwhelmed, hopeless and helpless. What adolescents need to understand is that these difficult life experiences are only temporary, and that with appropriate supports in place, these challenges can be responded to in healthy ways.

Adolescents need to recognize the importance of reaching out and communicating their thoughts and feelings during times of difficulty. They also need to learn to recognize the key role that they themselves play in overcoming difficulties in their lives as well as the lives of their close friends. A number of research studies have demonstrated that adolescents are more likely to turn to their own peers when facing suicidal thoughts than they are to turn to an adult. Thus, we need to prepare and educate young adolescents in developing problem solving skills, effective help-seeking skills and decision making skills so that tragedies such as suicide can be avoided. Adolescents must be given the knowledge and tools that they need to safely express their thoughts or feelings towards others and to access the support and resources that they or a friend may need in a crisis situation.

The teaching of the Catholic Church provides necessary direction and contributes important information to our efforts to educate our youth on such a sensitive topic.

The Catholic Church teaches us that human life is sacred. The Catechism summarizes the teaching specific to suicide in paragraphs 2280 through 2283 as part of the overall teaching on the fifth commandment: Thou shalt not kill.

As people of faith, we recognize that “suicide is contrary to love for the living God.” (CCC #2281). It reminds us that life is a gift from God, who is the master of our lives. We are stewards "not owners" of our lives. Also, we believe that life is good.

Suicide is opposed to our instinct to self-preservation. It is also contrary to a just love of the self. It violates our obligation to love our neighbor, since any suicide inflicts great suffering on others, especially family members. No Catholic should ever encourage or assist suicide. We should always seek to preserve life if that is possible.

There may be students in our classrooms that have had a family member or friend suicide. In this instance, the educator must be empathetic to the student's situation and needs. Should a student share such an experience, it is essential that the classroom teacher is prepared with a response. This approach from the Catechism of the Catholic Church is both useful and supportive. . The Catechism of the Catholic Church importantly states that "we should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives". By ways known to God alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives (CCC #2283). As such, our compassionate pastoral response to all those affected by suicide may go a long way to minimize any residual stigma that still may be associated with this kind of death.

It is important to note that topics surrounding suicide are extremely sensitive in nature. For this reason, it is essential that the teacher ensures that the climate of the classroom is conducive to discussion surrounding such a sensitive topic. The classroom environment needs to be a safe place for each and every one of the students in your classroom; a place where each student feels completely respected and listened to as they enter into potentially vulnerable discussions. All questions or comments made on behalf of the students must be acknowledged to ensure that every student feels that they have been heard and validated. Opening the communication lines is critical to further intervention. For this reason, it is an absolute requirement that a letter is sent home with the students at least a week prior to this unit informing parents of the unit's content as well as the reminder that the school should be contacted with any concerns. In some cases, parents may ask for their students to be exempted from the unit; these wishes must be respected. It is imperative to note that this lesson serves solely as Suicide Awareness Curriculum. Research indicates that a curriculum approach designed to raise awareness about suicide contributes to significant improvements in student knowledge gains, particularly, how to seek help for oneself and others.<sup>1</sup>

Journaling will be an important strategy of this unit as it will provide the student a more private avenue to express his or her thoughts and feelings regarding such a sensitive topic. Classroom expectations need to be clear before commencing the unit. These would include attentive listening, optional oral responses, mutual respect and appreciation/no put downs. Students also need to be aware that if any of the conversations trigger the need to discuss personal issues, appropriate resources will be made available to them.

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<sup>1</sup> Doan, J., Roggenbaum, S., & Lazear, K. (2003). *Youth suicide prevention school-based guide – Issue brief 3b: Risk Factors: How can a school identify a student at risk*. Tampa, FL: Department of Child and Family Studies, Division of State and Local Support, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida.

**Should any disclosures arise in your classroom, it is essential that you advise your administrator immediately so that trained personnel in the mental health field can intervene as may be appropriate.**

## **EXPECTATION:**

### **Lesson 1: Suicide Prevention: *Can You Keep A Secret?***

The student will:

- explore some of the challenges in their lives (Theme 1: Created and Loved by God)
- identify qualities that are essential for real friendship (Theme 2 :Living in a Relationship)
- deepen their understanding of the influence of friendships (Theme 2 :Living in a Relationship)
- deepen their understanding of the meaning of commitment (Theme 4 – Growing in Commitment)
- develops attitudes and values founded on Catholic social teaching and acts to promote social responsibility, human solidarity and the common good (CGE1d)
- acts morally and legally as a person formed in Catholic traditions (GCE7a)
- accepts accountability for one’s own actions (CGE7b)

### **Lesson 2: Suicide Prevention: Warning Signs**

The student will:

- explore some of the challenges in their lives (Theme 1: Created and Loved by God)
- deepen their understanding of the meaning of commitment (Theme 4: Growing in Commitment)
- explore the changing nature of commitment during adolescence (Theme 4: Growing in Commitment)
- use effective communication skills (e.g. refusal skills, active listening) to deal with various relationships and situations (OPHEA – Growth and Development)
- apply a decision making process to come to terms with the best way to approach a difficult situation (New)
- develops attitudes and values founded on Catholic **social teaching** and acts to promote social responsibility, human solidarity and the common good (CGE1d)
- presents information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others (CGE2c)
- thinks reflectively and creatively to evaluate situations and solve problems (CGE3c)

### **Lesson 3: Suicide Prevention: Reaching Out**

The student will:

- identify people and resources available within the school and community that can support someone who is experiencing suicidal ideations or mental health issues (New – modified from OPHEA’s Personal Injury and Prevention expectations)
- identify local support groups and community organizations (e.g. public health

- offices) that provide information or services related to health and well being
- identify sources of support with regard to issues related to feelings of despair and hopelessness
- uses and integrates the Catholic faith tradition, in the critical analysis of the arts, media, technology and information systems to enhance the quality of life (CGE2e)

## ASSESSMENT EVALUATION

This unit will use a variety of assessment methods for assessment purposes. Assessment strategies and tools that will be used in this unit include:

- Personal Communication – discussions (classroom and small group) as well as journaling opportunities on concepts introduced in lessons will be assessed
- Summative Evaluation/Performance Tasks – these tasks are designed to have students demonstrate their understanding of content material by applying their knowledge in activity sheets, group assignments, presentations and homework assignments

## LINKS TO FULLY ALIVE AND HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

**Fully Alive:** A potential entry point for these lessons is in Chapter 1 of the Fully Alive Program: *Created and Loved By God*. The lessons on suicide prevention might fit following the lesson entitled ‘The Challenge of Being Human’.

**Believe in Me:** A potential entry point for these lessons is in Chapter 6, Lesson 3 of the Stand By Me Program: Can suffering be meaningful? This lesson focuses on evaluating attitudes towards suffering. It also focuses on identifying the pain that exists around us, and provides Christian ways to responding to this pain. Finally, it emphasizes that in suffering, we can find God.

**Supplementary Fully Alive Program:** Another possible entry point would be following the new supplementary unit on stress or grieving. A potential consideration is to combine the Grade 7 and 8 units on Stress and teach it to the Grade 7’s in a block of lessons. Similarly, the Grade 7 and 8 units on Suicide and Suicide Prevention could be integrated into Grade 8 as a block of lessons. This will allow for the much needed separation between coping with stress and the subject of suicide viewed from a mental health perspective.

Consideration should be given to teaching this unit towards the later part of the year as the students will have developed a stronger sense of community and compassion for each other.

## ONTARIO CATHOLIC GRADUATE EXPECTATIONS

**A Discerning Believer Formed in the Catholic Faith Community** who  
**CGE1d** -develops attitudes and values founded on Catholic **social teaching** and acts to promote social responsibility, human solidarity and the common good

**An Effective Communicator** who

**CGE2b** -reads, understands and uses written materials effectively

**CGE2c** -presents information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others

**CGE2e** -uses and integrates the Catholic faith tradition, in the critical analysis of the arts, media, technology and information systems to enhance the quality of life

**A Reflective and Creative Thinker** who

**CGE3c** -thinks reflectively and creatively to evaluate situations and solve problems

**A Responsible Citizen** who

**CGE7a** -acts morally and legally as a person formed in Catholic traditions

**CGE7b** -accepts accountability for one's own actions

**SUGGESTIONS FOR ACCOMODATIONS**

It is essential that any students who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) have the specified modifications or accommodations put into place to ensure optimal learning and success. Potential accommodations that would assist a struggling student with this unit include:

- assistive technology, such as text-to-speech software
- extended time
- extra time for processing
- graphic organizers
- highlight/chunk material
- scribing
- peer/buddy tutor
- repetition of information
- pre-teach unit vocabulary
- provide access to word bank

**BLACK LINE MASTERS**

BLM 1: Can You Keep A Secret Worksheet?

BLM 3: Shane's Dilemma Worksheet

BLM 4: Kelly's Dilemma Worksheet

BLM 5: Teacher Resource - potential list of Warning Signs of Suicide

BLM 6: Pamphlet Rubric

**SOURCES**

British Columbia Council for the Family (1992). *Let's Live: A School Based Suicide*

*Awareness and Intervention Program.*

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY. THE TRUTH AND MEANING OF HUMAN SEXUALITY. Guidelines for Education within the Family. Vatican City, November 21, 1995

Christie, L., & Peterson, R. (1991). *When kids are touched by crisis*. Weston, Ontario: David C. Cook Publishing Co.

Doan, J., Roggenbaum, S., & Lazear, K. (2003). *Youth suicide prevention school-based guide – Issue brief 3b: Risk factors: How can a school identify a student at risk?* Tampa: FL: Department of Child and Family Studies, Division of State and Local Support, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida.

Ramsay, R. F., Tanney, B. L., Lang, W. A., Kinzel, T. (2004). *Suicide intervention handbook*. Calgary, Alberta: LivingWorks Education Inc.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

McDowell, J., & Stewart, E. (2000). *My friend is struggling with...Thoughts of Suicide*. Nashville, Tennessee: Word Publishing.

**PUBLICATIONS**

Garland, A., Shaffer, D., & Whittle, B. (1989). A national survey of school-based, adolescent suicide prevention programs. *Journal of the Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 28 (6), 931-934.

Greene, D. B. (1994). Childhood suicide and myths surrounding it. *Social Work*, 39 (2): 230 -232.

Grizenko, N. , & Pisher, C. (1992). Review of studies of risk and protective factors for psychopathology in children. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 37 (10), 711-721.

Kalafat, J., & Elias, M. (1994). An evaluation of a school-based suicide awareness intervention. *Suicide & Life Threatening Behaviour*, 24, (3), 224-233.

Ploeg, J., Ciliska, D., Dobbins, M., Hayward, S., Thomas, H., & Underwood, J. (1996). A systematic overview of adolescent suicide prevention programs. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 87 (5), 319-324.

## **WEBSITES**

### **Canadian Mental Health Websites:**

**Canadian Mental Health Association: Ontario**

[http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/content/about\\_mental\\_illness/suicide.asp?cID=3965](http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/content/about_mental_illness/suicide.asp?cID=3965)

**Children's Mental Health Ontario**

[www.kidsmentalhealth.ca](http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca)

**Center for Suicide Prevention**

<http://www.suicideinfo.ca>

**Youth Suicide Prevention**

<http://www.youthsuicide.ca>

### **American Sites**

**National Center for Disease Control and Prevention**

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/suifacts.htm>

**National Youth Violence Prevention Program**

<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/faq/suiciderisks.asp>

**Suicide Reference Library**

<http://www.suicidereferencelibrary.com/>

### **International Websites:**

**World Health Organization**

[http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/)

**Yellow Ribbon International Suicide Prevention Program**

<http://www.yellowribbon.org/WarningSigns.html>

### **Church Sites:**

**Catechism of the Catholic Church**

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/ccc\\_toc/htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/ccc_toc/htm)

**Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**

<http://www.cccb.ca/>

**Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops**

<http://www.occb.on.ca/>

## Suicide Prevention Grade Eight

### Lesson One

#### CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?

[top](#)

#### DESCRIPTION

Students will learn to recognize and acknowledge the value of the strong loyalty that adolescents feel towards their friends, while at the same time, examining some common misunderstandings surrounding the issue of loyalty. Students will work with Psalms to reinforce the fact that feelings of loneliness, despair, helplessness and hopelessness are normal occurrences at different points of an individual's life and that God is always there to seek help and guidance from during such trying times.

#### MATERIALS

- student copies of BLM 1 *Can You Keep a Secret*
- Religion notebook

#### NOTES TO TEACHERS

An effective suicide prevention program teaches students ways to seek help for themselves and their peers when they are in distress; this is the primary goal of this lesson. In educating adolescents about suicide, our young people need to be convinced of the absolute need to seek help for themselves or a friend, learn how to develop trust and encourage disclosure, and provide information on where to turn for help. Most students would not be equipped to make such disclosures without support.<sup>2</sup>

Adolescents need to recognize the importance of reaching out and communicating their thoughts and feelings during times of difficulty. They also need to learn to recognize the key role that they themselves play in overcoming difficulties in their lives as well as the lives of their close friends. A number of research studies have demonstrated that adolescents are more likely to turn to their own peers when facing suicidal thoughts than they are to turn to an adult. (Reference?) Thus, we need to prepare and educate adolescents in developing problem solving skills, effective help-seeking skills and decision making skills. In doing so, tragedies such as suicide can be reduced.

Should any disclosures arise in your classroom that are of a concern, it is essential that you advise your administrator immediately so that trained personnel in the mental health field can intervene appropriately.

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<sup>2</sup> Vince, C. J., & Hamrick, K. R. (1990). Preventing youth suicide: what works? Program and policy choices for schools. In P. Cimboric & D. A. Jobes (Eds.), *Youth suicide: Issues, assessment and intervention* (pp.87-101). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

**LEARNING EXPECTATIONS:**

The student will:

- explore some of the challenges in their lives (Theme 1: Created and loved by God)
- identify qualities that are essential for real friendship (Theme 2 :Living in a relationship)
- deepen their understanding of the influence of friendships (Theme 2 :Living in a relationship)
- deepen their understanding of the meaning of commitment (Theme 4 – Growing in commitment)

**CATHOLIC GRADUATE EXPECTATIONS**

- develops attitudes and values founded on Catholic social teaching and acts to promote social responsibility, human solidarity and the common good (CGE1d)
- acts morally and legally as a person formed in Catholic traditions (CGE7a)
- accepts accountability for one’s own actions (CGE7b)

**ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Summative Evaluation – students’ understanding can be evaluated by having them analyze secrets/scenarios that are potentially dangerous to keep to oneself by the completion of assignment *Can You Keep a Secret* (Appendix One)

**TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES**

- 1) Classroom Discussion – As a class, discuss the following:
  - i) What is a friend?
  - ii) What makes a good friend?
  - iii) How are you a good friend to others?
- 2) Code of Friendship – In groups of 5-6, students are asked to create a code of friendship, listing their top ten essential elements. Students will present their codes to class.
- 3) Following this, have the class brainstorm the various themes that have surfaced within their Codes of Friendships. Likely, a common theme will emerge involving the idea that friends are people who can be completely trusted and with whom secrets can be shared.
- 4) Without further discussion, hand out *Can You Keep a Secret* worksheet. Have students complete the worksheet independently.

- 5) Once worksheets are completed, review each scenario one by one with the class. Discussion should develop around the idea that sometimes in order to be a true friend; the code of friendship must be broken because the nature of a secret could be harmful to the well-being or life of your friend.
- 6) Class Brainstorming Session – As a class, brainstorm other possible scenarios where an individual might have to break the code of friendship in order to seek the assistance of a trusted adult.
- 7) Journal Entry – Tell me about **a time when you have told a friend a secret and they have broken your trust? How did it feel? Was it right or wrong of your friend to disclose your secret? Do you agree or disagree that there are situations that would warrant a true friend to tell a secret you have shared?**
- 8) In small groups, students will examine **one** of the Psalms listed on BLM 2
  - i) students will present their assigned Psalm to the class and share their thoughts with the larger group;
  - ii) once each group has presented their Psalm, provide the students with the opportunity to fill in the chart pertaining to the Psalm presented;
  - iii) give students time to reflect on whether they can relate to the situation presented in Psalm;
  - iv) have all complete the chart accordingly.

## **BLACK LINE MASTER**

BLM 1: Can You Keep a Secret Handout

BLM 2: Working with the Psalms

**BLM 1****Can You Keep A Secret?**

Read the following secrets shared between friends. In your religion book, briefly respond whether or not you believe each is a secret that is safe to keep between two friends or if it is one that you feel you may need to share with a trusted adult. Be sure to explain your reasoning for each.

1. Sarah has a major crush on John, the new student in the class. She thinks about him day and night. She has told you her big secret and expects you to tell no one.
2. Steve's best friend in grade eight, Kyle, is having a hard time getting over his parents' divorce. Kyle has confided in Steve that he has stayed up late the past two weekends in a row alone and drinking heavily to the point that he was sick. Kyle has told Steve that he can't tell a soul, as he is scared that his parents are going to find out and ground him.
3. Carla was really upset this morning at school. She has confided in you that her parents had a heated argument last night which led to her dad storming out of the house and not returning. She has sworn you to secrecy.
4. Kelly told her friend, Susan, that she is feeling really insecure about herself lately. Kelly has noticed that Susan hasn't eaten lunch at school for weeks and she appears to have lost a significant amount of weight. When Kelly asked Susan about this, Susan told her that she still had a couple of more pounds to lose and she had better keep this secret to herself.
5. Katherine's boyfriend just broke up with her. They have been going out for 1 ½ years. Katherine is devastated and has told you on a number of occasions that she doesn't think that she can live without the love of her life; that she would rather be dead. She has shared these threats with you and has sworn you to secrecy.
6. Paul's friend Samantha has confided in him that her boyfriend of three months text messages her and calls her constantly on her cell phone, wanting to know where she is and what she is doing every minute of the day. She also has shared with Sam that her boyfriend is starting to call her derogatory names and can be quite verbally abusive towards her. She feels that his behaviour is okay because she loves her boyfriend and she knows he doesn't mean what he says. She believes that it is just his way of showing her that he really cares about her. She has shared this secret with Paul, and told him that if he tells a soul, they will never speak again.

## Suicide Prevention Grade Eight

### Lesson Two

#### WARNING SIGNS

[top](#)

#### MATERIALS:

- student copies of either BLM 1 *Shane's Dilemma* Worksheet or BLM 2 *Kelly's Dilemma* Worksheet.
- Students copies of Steps in Decision Making (Grade 8 – OPHEA binder, Unit 1 – Healthy Living – Personal Safety and Injury Prevention, Appendix D).
- Teacher copy of BLM 3 Teacher Resource - potential list of *Warning Signs of Suicide*.
- Chart paper
- markers
- Religion notebook

#### DESCRIPTION:

- Students will identify warning signs that an individual contemplating suicide may demonstrate.
- Students will then use steps in a decision-making model to brainstorm various ways to assist or approach an individual exhibiting various warning signs of suicide.
- Students will then demonstrate communication strategies to convey their concerns to this individual in a role play scenario.

#### NOTES TO TEACHERS:

The Grade Eight program focuses on assisting students to become more aware of the warning signs of suicide in themselves and in others. An effective suicide prevention program teaches students ways to seek help for themselves and their peers when they are in distress. In educating adolescents about suicide, our young people need to be convinced of the absolute need to seek help for a friend, learn how to develop trust and encourage disclosure, and provide information on where to turn for help as they are not equipped to take such disclosures on their own.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it should be emphasized that every situation is unique; there is no template to apply that will guarantee the proper identification of warning signs. The risk of suggesting otherwise is to raise the likelihood that, in the event of an actual suicide, people who know the victim may unfairly judge their failure to act, or to act differently, as contributing to the death. As well, suicide ideation is more common than actual planning a suicide amongst adolescents. Students should not be made to feel that suicide ideation, on the part of themselves or others, alone

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<sup>3</sup> Vince, C. J., & Hamrick, K. R. (1990). Preventing youth suicide: what works? Program and policy choices for schools. In P. Cimboic & D. A. Jobes (Eds.), *Youth suicide: Issues, assessment and intervention* (pp.87-101). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

is a sign of mental illness. It may be one of a number of options considered in the face of a situation that generates overwhelming anxiety.

It is essential that students exposed to this curriculum understand that the commonly held notions that “people who talk about suicide do not commit suicide” or “talking about suicide increasing the risk of suicide” are, in fact, incorrect. These myths can interfere significantly with helping a suicidal peer<sup>4</sup>. It also is integral that suicide is not presented as a normal response to stress. This misrepresentation is inaccurate and potentially dangerous. Suicide is seen as less attractive and as a less viable option to problems when it is more accurately portrayed as a manifestation of a mental illness.<sup>5</sup> It is by its very nature an irrational act.

Presentations on suicide must be conducted with extreme sensitivity. It is essential that the teacher ensures that the climate of the classroom is conducive to such a discussion. The classroom environment must be a safe place for each and every one of the students in your classroom; a place where each student feels completely respected and listened to as they begin potentially vulnerable discussions. For this reason, it is an absolute requirement that a letter is sent home with the students at least a week prior to this unit informing parents of the unit’s content as well as the reminder that the school should be contacted with any concerns. In some cases, parents may ask for their students to be exempted from the unit; these wishes must be respected.

Classroom expectations need to be clear before commencing the unit. These would include attentive listening, optional oral responses, mutual respect and appreciation/no put downs. Students need to also be aware that if any of the conversations trigger the need to discuss personal issues; resources will be made available to them in order for them to do so.

**Should any disclosures arise in your classroom that are of a concern, it is essential that you advise your administrator immediately so that trained personnel in the mental health field can intervene appropriately.**

### **LEARNING EXPECTATIONS:**

The student will:

- explore some of the challenges in their lives (Theme 1: Created and Loved by God)
- deepen their understanding of the meaning of commitment (Theme 4: Growing in Commitment)
- explore the changing nature of commitment during adolescence (Theme 4: Growing in Commitment)

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<sup>2</sup> Kalafat, J., & Elias, M. (1994). An evaluation of a school-based suicide awareness intervention. *Suicide & Life Threatening Behaviour*, 24 (3), 224 – 233.

<sup>5</sup> Garland, A., Shaffer, D., & Whittle, B. (1989). A national survey of school-based adolescent suicide prevention programs. *Journal of the Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 28 (6), 931 – 934.

- use effective communication skills (e.g., refusal skills, active listening) to deal with various relationships and situations (OPHEA – Growth and Development)
- apply a decision making process to come to terms with the best way to approach a difficult situation (New)

## CATHOLIC GRADUATE EXPECTATIONS

- develops attitudes and values founded on Catholic **social teaching** and acts to promote social responsibility, human solidarity and the common good (CGE1d)
- presents information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others (CGE2c)
- thinks reflectively and creatively to evaluate situations and solve problems (CGE3c)

## ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

**Suicide Prevention: Warning Signs** – Students will be introduced to the concept of Warning Signs of Suicide. They will then use this knowledge to sort and classify various warning signs exhibited by Daniel and Corey via class handouts. Communications through classroom discussion and personal journaling can be assessed. The steps in decision making worksheet as well as the role play can also be assessed.

## TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES –Day One

- 1) Revisit/Review – At this time, you should introduce the unit topic – suicide. Ask students if they feel that there is any connection between the lesson entitled *Can You Keep a Secret* and the topic of suicide.
  - a) The following should be touched upon in the discussion:
    - i) *Students will understand the strong influence of friendships and of the commitment involved in being a true friend.*
    - ii) *The student will recognize that in order to be a good friend, you sometimes must break a secret held between two friends because the nature of the secret could be harmful to the well being or life of their friend.*
    - iii) *Adolescents need to recognize the importance of reaching out and communicating their thoughts and feelings during times of difficulty. They also need to learn to recognize the key role that they themselves play in overcoming difficulties in their lives as well as the lives of their close friends.*
    - iv) *A number of research studies have demonstrated that adolescents are more likely to turn to their own peers when facing suicidal thoughts than they are to turn to an adult.*

- 2) Following this brief discussion, the lesson will start by reviewing the knowledge that they gained from the Grade 7 unit. Students should brainstorm/review what suicide is and what risk and protective factors exist for suicidal individuals.

*Suicide is defined as intentional, self-inflicted death.*

*Risk Factors - A risk factor can be defined as anything that increases the likelihood that a behaviour/act will take place. For example, a risk factor of suicide is a factor that increases the likelihood that a person will be involved in suicidal behaviour. Risk factors are not necessarily the cause of suicide, however, they can alert others to the increased risk of suicide following a significant stressful life event or during the recurrence of a mental health disorder.*

*Examples of risk factors include: mental disorders, alcohol and substance abuse disorders, a previous suicide attempt, consistent sense of isolation and hopelessness, and loss (social, relational or financial).*

*Protective Factors - A protective factor is anything that decreases the likelihood that a behaviour/act will take place. For example, a protective factor of suicide reduces the likelihood that a person will be involved in suicidal behaviour.*

*Protective factors enhance the ability of an individual to bounce back and may serve as a buffer to risk factors. Protective factors are quite varied and can include an individual's attitude, behavioral characteristics, environmental characteristics and cultural characteristics. Examples of protective factors include: effective coping skills, good physical and mental health, a sense of connectedness to school or community, strong religious faith, and strong family support network.*

- 3) Introduction/Developing Understanding – The teacher will introduce the term ‘Warning Signs’ to the class.
- a) Brainstorming/Classroom Discussion – The class will be divided in two. One half of the class will be given a copy of Appendix One: Shane’s Dilemma and the second half of the class will be given a copy of Appendix Two: Kelly’s Dilemma. Once both groups have read over the dilemmas, students will be asked to list potential warning signs of suicide exhibited by Corey and Daniel on chart paper. They will then present their findings to their classmates.
  - b) Note Taking – Using the lists generated by both groups, students can then write their class definition of warning signs into their religion book as well as a list of potential warning signs of suicide. See Appendix Three for an example of the potential list that your students may come up with.
  - c) Conclusion of Lesson/Summing It Up – The classroom teacher will then start a classroom discussion/brainstorming session as to why suicide is being taught in the curriculum.

Students need to be able to recognize that:

- suicide is not a normal response to stress – rather it is an attempt for suicide victims to end their pain, a pain for which they often cannot perceive an end. It is not necessarily an attempt for the suicide victim to end their lives. Our job is to assist individuals who are in crisis to connect with resources available in the community to ensure that they get the professional help necessary which will allow them to deal with their pain in an appropriate manner
  
- talking about suicide may save a life – as students become more aware of what suicide is and what warning signs exist for someone contemplating suicide, they are more likely to act in a proactive manner and seek the professional help necessary
  
- learning and talking about suicide – creates communication avenues for individuals struggling with mental health issues to recognize that they are not alone. One in every five children/youth in Ontario struggles with a diagnosable mental health problem – and there is help available – so, it is essential that we take signs seriously and seek help quickly so that the suffering individuals can get the help that they need to overcome their difficulties

### **TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES – Day Two**

- i) Students will revisit the scenarios provided in yesterday's lesson *Kelly's Dilemma* and *Shane's Dilemma*
  
- ii) Hand out Appendix D from Unit 1 (Healthy Living – Personal Safety and Injury Prevention) from the Grade 8 OPHEA binder. As a class, review the five steps in the decision making model. Be sure to also review the comments listed at the bottom of the page *About Decision*
  
- iii) Think/Pair/Share – using the decision making model, students will get together with a partner and begin to brainstorm potential options that Kelly and Shane can take in order to assist Corey and Daniel in recognizing that they may need help to work through their current difficulties. Students will complete worksheets in pairs and submit for assessment.
  
- iv) Role Play – Students will create a role play scenario illustrating how Kelly or Shane confront their friends regarding the warning signs their friends are exhibiting. They will offer suggestions/direction to Daniel and Corey with regard to what they could do in order to assist them through this difficult time.

**BLACK LINE MASTERS**

BLM 3 *Shane's Dilemma* Worksheet

BLM 4 *Kelly's Dilemma* Worksheet

BLM 5 Teacher Resource - potential list of Warning Signs of Suicide

**BLM 3**

## Shane's Dilemma

Daniel is a grade ten student who has a solid group of friends; he has always enjoyed high school. Daniel was brought up in a family that strongly valued education and hence, he has always been a diligent student. He always has needed to put a great deal of energy and focus into his academics to maintain a B average in school.

Daniel plays guitar in the school band and is involved in a number of extracurricular school activities. He is a member of the school's Drama Club and plays on the school's hockey and baseball teams. Daniel has one brother, Shane, whom he considers to be his best friend. Shane is a grade eleven student, and the two boys have always been extremely close.

Earlier in Daniel's grade ten year, it was becoming more and more apparent that his mother and father were experiencing difficulties in their marital relationship. It seemed like the two parents were always fighting and the peaceful, calm home that Daniel grew up in was no longer. Around two months ago, Daniel and Shane's parents sat the boys down and explained to them that they would be getting a divorce. Daniel had a hard time accepting the news and could not understand why his parents could not work out their differences. The following day, Daniel's Dad moved out of the family home.

At home, Daniel has become very withdrawn. He doesn't like to play the games that he used to play with Shane. Recently, he actually gave away his Xbox2, one of his most prized possessions, to one of his good friends. Instead of playing games, Daniel has developed an interest in art. Shane has found a number of disturbing pictures that Daniel has drawn around the house. A lot of the pictures include pictures of guns, knives, and rope. Most appear to have some symbolic representation of death.

Shane also has noticed that Daniel takes much less of an interest in his looks lately. He always used to be in the bathroom they shared for at least an hour prior to school getting ready. These days, it would be surprising to see Daniel in the bathroom at all before school. Lately, he rarely showers and he shows no interest at all in his appearance. As well, he has lost a lot of weight lately, which makes him look very drawn.

Shane also has noticed that when Daniel does go out with his friends, he tends to drink a lot of alcohol. Until recently, Daniel was dead set against drinking. Now it seems second nature to him. He never can drink just one beer. Instead, every time they are out, Daniel gets out of control drunk. On a number of occasions when Daniel has been drunk, he has stated openly feelings of despair that has really concerned Shane. He has voiced that "sometimes he wishes this all could be over" and "life is just not worth living anymore". Shane knows that he needs to take these comments seriously. He is deeply concerned for his brother. The changes in Daniel's behaviour are so out of character for him. Shane knows that he has to do something.

What are his possible options? What do you think Shane should do?

**BLM 4**

## Kelly's Dilemma

Corey is a grade eleven student who has always been very popular and well-liked among her peers. She is a member of the Student Parliament and is a starter on the school's soccer and basketball teams. Corey seems to get along with everyone at school and has very little difficulty making new friends. Academically, she is an extremely motivated student who, with hard work and effort, is able to maintain an A average. Corey lives with her two siblings and both parents in a comfortable and happy home.

Recently, Corey's boyfriend of two years, Richard, broke up with her. Richard is one year older than Corey and is getting ready to head off to an American university on a football scholarship. Though he still had strong feelings for Corey, he felt that a long distance relationship would be difficult to maintain. He wanted to be able to focus primarily on his academics and football at university. He felt that breaking up with Corey before heading off to university was the fairest thing to do for Corey and would assist her in getting used to being 'just friends'.

Since the break up, Corey's best friend, Kelly, has noticed that Corey has been struggling. Lately, she always seems to look sad and doesn't appear to have an appetite for food or life. Corey has expressed to Kelly on a number of occasions her feelings of hopelessness and helplessness now that Richard is no longer in her life. In confidence, she told Kelly that 'she was unsure whether or not she could live without the love of her life, Richard.

Corey also has really withdrawn from her group of friends in recent weeks. She never goes out with her friends anymore and would prefer to sit at home alone doing nothing. Actually, she would prefer to sit at home and sleep her nights and weekends away. A number of her friends have tried calling her to persuade her into going out; however, Corey shows no interest at all.

Kelly has three of four classes at school with Corey. Lately, she has noticed that Corey is taking no interest in school whatsoever. This is highly unlike Corey, as it has always been a goal of Corey's to maintain an overall A average. This week, Corey skipped a number of classes, which is basically unheard of for Corey. She has also failed three of her last tests and had not handed in two major assignments. Her marks have dropped significantly in the past month as a result.

Kelly is deeply concerned for her friend. She recognizes that it takes time to heal a broken heart, however, she feels that this process make be taking longer than it should. The changes in Corey's behaviour are so out of character for her. She knows that she has to do something.

What are her possible options? What do you think Kelly should do?

**BLM 5**

**Potential Warning Signs of Suicide**

Kelly’s Dilemma	Shane’s Dilemma
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recent breakup with a serious girlfriend or boyfriend</li> <li>- Comments made about feeling hopeless, worthless, or helpless</li> <li>- Changes in eating patterns (eating excessively and gaining weight – or eating next to nothing and losing weight)</li> <li>- Depression (deep sadness, loss of interest, trouble sleeping and eating) that gets worse</li> <li>- Losing interest in most activities and becoming withdrawn from family and friends</li> <li>- neglect or lack of interest in academic work</li> <li>- Skipping classes from school</li> <li>- Losing interest in things one used to care about</li> <li>- Change in sleeping pattern – sleeping too much or too little</li> <li>- Unusual sadness, discouragement and loneliness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family disruptions - divorce, trauma, losing loved one</li> <li>- Significant changes in personality (outgoing and social to quiet and withdrawn)</li> <li>- Losing interest in things that one used to care about</li> <li>- Giving away prized possessions</li> <li>- Abusing drugs and/or alcohol</li> <li>- Journal entries or pictures that have to do with death or dying</li> <li>- Sudden change in appearance (lack of interest in personal care)</li> <li>- Gaining or losing a <i>significant amount of weight</i></li> <li>- Unwillingness or inability to communicate</li> <li>- Depression (deep sadness, loss of interest, trouble sleeping and eating)</li> <li>- Talk of wanting to die</li> <li>- Withdrawing from family/friends or activities they love</li> </ul>

**Other Potential Warning Signs**

- Appears depressed or sad most of the time (Untreated depression is the number one cause for suicide.)
- Chronic Pain, Panic or Anxiety
- Rebelliousness - reckless behavior
- Perfectionism
- Restlessness
- Writing a will.
- No sense of humor.
- Feeling excessive guilt or shame
- Being preoccupied with death or dying.
- Behaving recklessly
- Irritability
- Frequently complaining about headaches, stomachaches, etc.
- Inability to concentrate
- Always talking or thinking about death
- A sudden, unexpected switch from being very sad to being very calm or appearing to be happy

- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye

## Suicide Prevention Grade Eight

### Lesson Three

#### REACHING OUT

[top](#)

**DESCRIPTION: *Reaching Out*** – Students will begin to understand the importance of accessing resources within the school or the greater community when an individual is finding life's challenges overwhelming. Students will investigate various local support groups and community organizations (e.g. public health offices) that provide information and/or services related to health, well being and mental health issues. These groups or organizations would be considered valuable contact numbers for a teenager in crisis such as a suicidal teenager or a teenager struggling with mental health issues. Students will then create a community resource guide outlining a list of crisis intervention services and resources available in the greater community with applicable numbers and background information that one can call in a crisis situation. A teacher may wish to consider inviting a member from such a community group to the classroom.

#### MATERIALS

- computer lab with access to the internet.
- access to local yellow pages on line.

#### NOTES TO TEACHERS

By this stage of the unit, students should recognize that adolescence is a time when teenagers will experience a great deal of change and confusion. All students need to be encouraged to realize that many of the difficult problems that they encounter can be overcome with God's guidance and the support of knowledgeable and educated adults. The first step in changing a problem is talking to a sympathetic and knowledgeable adult about what is going on in their lives. It is essential that the students recognize that they cannot make appropriate decisions if the problem is beyond their competence level. For this reason, the students need to recognize how essential it is to ask for help or seek help for others when the problem is bigger than they can handle.

#### LEARNING EXPECTATIONS:

The student will:

- identify people and resources available within the school and community that can support someone who is experiencing suicidal ideations or mental health issues (New – modified from OPHEA's Personal Injury and Prevention expectations)
- identify local support groups and community organizations (e.g. public health offices) that provide information or services related to health and well being

- identify sources of support with regard to issues related to feelings of despair and hopelessness

### **CATHOLIC GRADUATE EXPECTATIONS**

- use and integrate the Catholic faith tradition, in the critical analysis of the arts, media, technology and information systems to enhance the quality of life (CGE2e)

### **ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Students will be asked to submit their Community Resource Guide of local support groups and community organizations that provide information or services related to health, well being and mental health issues. These groups or organizations would be considered valuable contact numbers for an adolescent in crisis such as a suicidal teenager or a teenager struggling with mental health issues. This culminating task will be assessed using the rubric found in Appendix Five.

### **TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES**

- 1) Introduction – Students will be introduced to the culminating project.
  - a) Each student will be creating their own personal community resource access guide.
  - b) Each student will be required to investigate various resources available in the community for adolescents in crisis such as suicidal teenagers or teenagers struggling with mental health issues.
  - c) They will then create a community resource guide outlining a list of crisis intervention services and resources available in the community with applicable numbers and background information that one can call in a crisis situation.
- 2) Brainstorming Session – As a class, students should brainstorm the various items that should be included as part of the community resource program guide.
  - a) For example, items to be included are: organization’s name, contact number, address, description of services provided, hours of operation, confidentiality issues, other pertinent information, etc.
- 3) Research – Provide students with a period to conduct research on available resources within community.

### **BLACK LINE MASTERS**

BLM 6 Pamphlet Rubric

**BLM 6**

Community Resource Guide Rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Categories and Criteria	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
<b>Required Elements</b>	* provides a thorough description of the services provided as well as all of the required elements (company name, address, phone number and hours).	* provides an adequate description of the services provided as well as most of the required elements (company name, address, phone number and hours).	* provides a simple description of the services provided as well as some of the required elements (company name, address, phone number and hours).	* provides a limited description of the services provided as well as few of the required elements (company name, address, phone number and hours).
<b>Purpose and Audience</b>	* communicates information with a strong sense of audience and purpose	* communicates information with a clear sense of audience and purpose	* communicates information with some sense of audience and purpose	* communicates information with a limited sense of audience and purpose
<b>Attractiveness</b>	* pamphlet is esthetically pleasing and presented in an organized and structured manner in terms of design, layout, and neatness	* pamphlet is appealing and most of the information is presented in an organized and structured manner in terms of design, layout, and neatness	* pamphlet is somewhat appealing and information is presented in a somewhat organized and structured manner in terms of design, layout, and neatness	* pamphlet lacks appeal as information is presented in a limited organized format in terms of design, layout, and neatness
<b>Creativity/Originality</b>	* graphics used in the pamphlet reflect an exceptional degree of student creativity in their creation and/or display.	* graphics used in the pamphlet reflect an effective degree of student creativity in their creation and/or display.	* graphics used in the pamphlet reflect some degree of student creativity in their creation and/or display.	* graphics used in the pamphlet reflect a limited degree of student creativity in their creation and/or display.
<b>Language Conventions</b>	* uses grammar, spelling and punctuation with a high degree of accuracy and effectiveness	* uses grammar, spelling and punctuation with a considerable degree of accuracy and effectiveness	* uses grammar, spelling and punctuation with some degree of accuracy and effectiveness	* uses grammar, spelling and punctuation with a limited degree of accuracy and effectiveness

[top](#)