



Discussion Guide for

BACKSTROKE

Objectives

To empower suicidal adolescents to seek appropriate help.

To empower peers of a potentially suicidal adolescent to seek appropriate help.

To empower adolescents to go to clinics or doctors to be tested for life-threatening conditions, such as AIDS.

To present some of the primary warning signs of suicidal behavior in adolescents.

To stop the conspiracy of silence and denial that often surrounds a suicidal person.

Synopsis

The issue of adolescent suicide is a sensitive but crucial one in modern society. Backstroke explores and dramatizes many of the symptoms of suicidal adolescents, as well as demonstrating ways for peers to effectively and authentically intervene with someone they feel might be about to take their own life. Another serious issue, the profound conflict many people confront about going to a clinic to see if they have a life threatening condition such as AIDS, is presented as a co-theme in Backstroke. Danny, a high school student, has been acting really weird lately. Sometimes he is depressed and just wants to be alone. Other times he is Mr. Social, a regular stand-up comedian with friends.

His peers can't figure him out, but their English teacher, Mr. Gray, is very concerned. Mr. Gray sees signs of suicidal ideation and behavior in Danny, and decides to intervene. We learn with Danny's friends some of the danger signs of a potentially suicidal person, and what to do about them. We learn to avoid silence—the silence of not wanting or daring to be involved, the silence of promising a friend not to say anything—when confronted with a person who may be contemplating ending his or her life.

Questions To Ask Before Viewing

1. Discuss: Kids my age who talk about suicide are just looking for attention. It's better to ignore them.
2. If a friend of yours was suicidal and asked you to keep it a secret, what would you do?
3. What clues might indicate a friend or peer is suicidal if he or she didn't tell you?
4. If kids your age thought they might be HIV positive, would they go to a clinic to find out? Why or why not?
5. If a friend or peer kept joking about death and suicide might that be a sign that he or she was suicidal? Explain.
6. What are some ways to get appropriate help if someone you know seems to be suicidal?

7. Discuss: You think a friend might be suicidal. You get some help and find out you were wrong. What do you think your friend's reaction to you might be? Why?

8. Discuss: If you think you might be HIV positive, you don't need to go to a clinic because AIDS is fatal, so there's nothing you can do about it.

Time Out Exploring Possibilities

Angel: "Really Mr. Gray, what if you're wrong about this whole thing?"

Toshi: "So what, Angel. The point is, what if we're right!"

1. Do you agree with Mr. Gray that Danny might be suicidal? Why or why not?
2. What are some options available to Danny's friends at this point?
3. What are some positive and negative consequences of each option? 4. What would you do if you were Danny's friend?

Questions To Ask After Viewing

1. How does Mr. Gray sense that Danny might be suicidal? (Danny had been up and down for a long time in class and Mr. Gray is worried. When he reads Danny's poem about death, *The Flies*, he suddenly realizes that Danny might be suicidal.)
2. What help does Danny have at the end of the video? (Danny has a family, a teacher, counselors, a friend on the Internet, and lots of peers who are aware and concerned.)

3. Why hasn't Danny gone to a clinic? (Danny hasn't gone to a clinic because he's afraid of hearing the worst. He mistakenly thinks AIDS is simply fatal and that there's nothing that can be done.)

4. Why does Danny give away his baseball card collection? (Danny is preparing to commit suicide, and his giving away the collection is like a deathbed wish.)

5. Who was Danny talking to on the Internet, and what were they talking about? (Danny was talking to Zorro X. someone he met on the net who is HIV positive and learning to deal with it.)

6. Discuss: Even if you think someone is suicidal, you should mind your own business and not get involved. (There is no right or wrong answer. However, the best advice is to take every suicidal indication very seriously.)

7. Discuss abstinence. (Abstinence is a choice some individuals make not to be sexually active until they get married, or in rare cases, even after marriage. Besides the ethical and religious value of abstinence, it is a very practical approach to avoiding lethal STDs that abound in our culture.)



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8. Discuss: If you need help for someone who you think is suicidal, you should get the help of a responsible adult such as a parent, teacher, guidance counselor, religious leader, etc. rather than try to solve the problem yourself (Suicide is a very serious issue. Too often friends and lovers of suicidal peers are convinced that their friendship, understanding and love will be enough. Those qualities are helpful, but the roots of suicide are deeper than that, and it takes professionals to successfully deal with the situation.)

9. Discuss: If someone talks about suicide, you should take them seriously and have the courage to act. (Absolutely. Even if your friend gets angry with you, he or she will eventually understand that you acted for the person's own good, and that you were genuinely concerned.)

Additional inquiry

If a doctor could give a quick test for AIDS, would everyone want to know? Explain. Where you live, what are 5 resources- individuals, agencies, clinics, etc.-where you could get help for someone you suspect is suicidal? How can AIDS be transmitted sexually? What is a new drug therapy that is effective in creating AIDS?

Programs Details

Length:

18 minutes

Subject Areas:

Health & Guidance

Audience Levels:

Junior-Senior High

Order Number:

1-9111SG

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