

FINDING A WAY FORWARD



1 hour

Create a safe and positive learning environment by agreeing ground rules for the lesson.

In this lesson we will learn:

- how talking about feelings can help
- that there is always hope
- where to get support if needed
- how to support a friend.

Note

Suicidal thoughts and feelings are difficult to talk about. This is a sensitive area. Research shows us that talking about difficult feelings and suicidal thoughts can reduce these feelings and help people to begin to feel more able to cope. A Samaritans volunteer from a local branch may be able to offer support for this session if needed.

Resources

- Statement cards
- Sticky notes
- “Hope” discussion points handout
- Reaction cards
- Balloons

Digital resources to support this session

- “Hope” film
- “Tangled” film
- “Feeling free to talk” film
- “U can cope” film
- “Moving on” film
- “My story: Danny” film

Activity

We are going to talk today about times when things can feel so awful and overwhelming that someone might not know what to do. Remember from earlier sessions that we all feel differently about different challenges and things we face in life.

This lesson is to help us think about how we can recognise if we are ever having those feelings and what we can do to help ourselves and each other if we are finding it hard to cope. This lesson was developed by Samaritans who know a lot about supporting people and how talking can help someone work through a really difficult time.

When people feel really low, desperate or scared, they may think that they can't cope any longer and don't know what to do. We are going to look at what that person can do to help them to cope with these feelings, and what you can do if it's your friend who feels this way.

If the lesson brings up difficult feelings for you, please talk to someone – tell the students who they can talk to and where they can go – or talk to an organisation such as Samaritans where you can get help and support with how you are feeling right now.



DEAL

Developing Emotional Awareness and Listening



SAMARITANS



Fact or fiction

Put students in small groups or pairs. Hand out one statement card to each group. Ask them to consider if they feel the statement is true or not and why.

Statement 1: People who talk about suicide don't take their own lives

Fiction: Some people who take their own lives have given some warnings of their intentions. They talk about it, and will often give other indications through their actions. But it is not always easy to identify these signs. If someone does talk about wanting to die it REALLY important that we take it seriously and find them help.

Statement 2: Having suicidal feelings is a sign of mental ill health

Fiction: Suicidal behaviour indicates deep unhappiness but not necessarily mental ill health.

Statement 3: You either are a suicidal type of person or you aren't

Fiction: Any one of us can have suicidal thoughts – it doesn't just happen to certain types of people.

Statement 4: Most teenagers who think about suicide do not want to die

Fact: Some young people who have shared their suicidal thoughts and feelings say that they didn't really want to die, they just wanted the pain, hurt or panic they were feeling to stop. They didn't want to leave their family and friends, or miss out on the good things in life – they just couldn't see beyond the pain. Sometimes when something awful happens it is hard for someone to see past the desperation they might feel. But with support, it is possible for them to find a way through the difficult times. Suicide takes away any option for things to get better and these options always exist, even though we sometimes need help to see them.

Statement 5: Talking about suicide or suicidal thoughts and feelings makes people want to take their own lives.

Fiction: In fact, the opposite is true. Talking openly about how we are feeling, learning to accept how we feel and exploring these thoughts can help us feel more positively about ourselves and our ability to cope.

Warning signs

1. Ask groups to think about possible warning signs that someone is overwhelmed or unable to cope. What might we see and hear that indicates this? Talk about these warning signs in small groups. Make notes of the discussion and feed back to the class. Ask the class if there is anything else they would need to consider, e.g. what if someone says or does something that worries you but it only happens once? Discuss.
2. Ask the students what they could do if they were worried about a friend. As before when we have discussed emotional health, emphasise that talking about difficult feelings can help someone feel more able to cope with what they are going through. List ideas as a class and discuss which ideas were most helpful, as well as easiest and most practical to do.
3. Hand out reaction cards. Ask students to sort these into helpful or unhelpful things you could say to Sam who has just told you he cannot see a way out of his problems and is having suicidal thoughts. Ask the class to share their thoughts and give feedback. Emphasise that judging someone or making light of their feelings is always unhelpful. Sharing how you would feel in that situation also takes the focus away from them and is unhelpful.





4. Explain: Asking someone if they really want to die can seem like a really scary thing to do but people often tell Samaritans that it's a relief to be able to say how awful they're feeling and say those thoughts out loud. Why might that be? Ask for ideas. By helping someone be honest about how they are feeling and share how low they are, we can also help them start to seek the support they need to help them cope with these feelings. Showing someone that you care can help them feel valued and heard and make them confident enough to express themselves honestly.
5. Ask the students to question and reflect on what 'hope' means to them. In small groups, pairs or individually, draw or write words and pictures to describe what the word means to them. Ask students to think about what makes them feel hope (eg future dreams or supportive friends) to create their own person definition of hope.

Watch the film "Hope".

Ask students in pairs or small groups to reflect on what they have seen and heard. How did the film make them feel? What did they think about it?

Give each group the discussion point handout (or divide the questions between groups) some of the discussion points to stimulate discussion about the film.

6. Ask the students to list some things that may feel, in the moment, overwhelming or like they will never get better (coming back to the list of difficult emotions). What can we do to help ourselves when we are experiencing those overwhelming feelings? Discuss a list of strategies that might help in the immediate moment. These may be different from things that will help in the long term, but can help keep you safe. These could include thing like "I text my best friend a signal that she needs to come round", "I tell myself it will pass and breathe with my eyes closed for 10 minutes" or "I go to bed for an hour".
7. What is a safety plan? Often people who are struggling with their feelings and are experiencing suicidal thoughts and feelings find that it can be helpful to put together a safety plan of things to do when they are feeling overwhelmed, to help them stay safe. Show the class an example of a safety plan. Many people find this really helpful. Ask the class to discuss and create an imaginary safety plan for someone together on a board, gathering good ideas of things that may help.

For more information you can go to:

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/feelingoverwhelmed.aspx>

http://www.prevent-suicide.org.uk/stay_alive_suicide_prevention_mobile_phone_application.html

Optional extra: Finding help

Watch the video clip 'U can cope'. Allow time for students to discuss how the person felt when they were feeling low and how they found a way forward. Allow students to ask questions and think about what helped this person. What is the message they are sharing?

Closing: Hand out balloons. Imagine this is someone at their lowest, and we need to think of ways to uplift and inflate them to be able to cope with each day. Ask students to call out any ideas for coping – things that can help. Every time they hear a good idea they blow some air into their balloon. When their balloons are inflated they can all let them go. Make sure answers include seeking help, talking to someone and giving suggestions of where to go for help.



DEAL

Developing Emotional Awareness and Listening



SAMARITANS



It's really important to end this session with some hopeful, positive thoughts and to remind students who they can go to for support – their support network.

Remind students that if they are looking for more information they may come across unhelpful sites. It's vital they talk to someone if they see anything that concerns them or stirs up difficult feelings. This could include posts on social media.

Links to: Positive thinking | Building resilience | My support network | Talking about depression | Who are Samaritans? | Coping with changes

Make sure young people know what support is available and how to access this support.

