

Q: When it comes to the discussion of mental health and suicide prevention in public school districts in our county, what do you think would be vital to talk about?

First off, these are my personal ideas as to what info should be shared or what should be communicated.

- Chemical imbalances and how they can factor in to someone having issues with their mental health.
- Reassurance that it is completely normal to have a chemical imbalance and that medication is simply a means to stabilize and regulate the things that may be imbalanced in your body.
- Other factors that can weigh in when it comes to struggling with a mental health problem such as genetics and how intensely your genes can affect your susceptibility to mental health problems. Also stressful or traumatic life events. Communication that there are many causes and reasons for different mental health issues.
 - Symptoms of depression
 - How a peer can help someone they know might be struggling.
 - Signs as to when a friend or peer may be struggling.
- A lot of reassurances such as how it is okay to feel the way they do and that it is okay to reach out
 - How struggling with mental health should not be looked down upon or joked about but rather shown compassion and sympathy.
 - How devaluing can make it so much harder for someone to seek help
- How to cope with having friends struggle with mental health problems and how to deal with it in a productive and healthy manner.

Secondly, I took to social media and asked my ^{peers} peers what they believe would be beneficial to hear about and things that should be noted if there were to be an informational program or assembly regarding mental health awareness and suicide prevention. Here is what they had to add.

- Statistics of how many teens on average struggle with mental health problems and suicidal ideation
- Resources that can be used in the community as well as informational background on those resources to help teens clarify which option might be best for them. (Clarification as to which hotlines come to the person calling or if they just talk on the phone, who might be able to help teens make decisions regarding their mental health ie guidance counselors, school social workers, case managers, teachers etc.)
- The importance of taking someone seriously with their claims or threats to take their own life, as well as possibly how to tell if there is a difference between a joke of taking one's life versus a reality of it.
 - How serious threatening to take your own life is and how it is neglectful and not in anyone's best interest to joke about it. If you feel as though you genuinely want to end your life, it should not be said lightly or joked about. Communication that no one should just say stuff like that, because doing so makes it normalized and more difficult to tell reality from the distasteful humor.
- How today's media and society has glamorized and romanticized suicidal ideation and mental health problems, and ways to destigmatize, and reverse what today's media has done.
- Warning signs such as body language, social cues, or behaviors that could indicate someone might be struggling.

- Speakers that have learned to live deal and cope with their mental health struggle, and how things could have changed or start looking up for them. Testimony from real people who got better.
 - The importance of small acts of kindness.
 - How mental illness is not always easy to spot.
- Making sure that the people who would be presenting the assembly actually cared about the information they were giving and felt compassion for the cause. Making it so it comes off that it is a desire to talk about the subject rather than a requirement. While also being able to communicate the urgency of the information as it is very relevant in our community.
- Possibly organizing a group or encouraging schools to have groups that teens can sign up for that are directed toward and for teens to talk amongst themselves about their struggles and what they have found helps them. Basically a support group for teens struggling with mental health problems in which they don't have to feel obligated to talk to an adult or feel pressured to censor themselves completely. An outlet and way to find others in your community going through similar things.
- Signs that might not be identified as easily as others, such as neglecting personal hygiene or not participating or investing themselves into much.
- Healthy coping mechanisms and the importance of self exploration to help you find what you like to do and utilize that as a coping skill.
- A discussion about how many teens use or abuse drugs as unhealthy coping mechanisms and how many teens who struggle with mental illness also tend to use or abuse substances.
 - Resources and ways to help them find a way out of using.
 - Ways to help someone suffering from an anxiety or panic attack.
- What to do when a friend is oversharing about their suicidal ideation on social media, how to handle someone oversharing or how to direct them toward resources they can use in healthy and beneficial ways.
 - The importance of self harm being taken seriously and how it should always be reported regardless of whether you are close to the person or not. But also informing the professionals that they should not take every threat to the same degree of intensity. Some people really just need someone to talk to and a solid medication or psych eval.
- How hospitalization is necessary to some but over all a last resort, and something to be used when one feels there is no other way. Making sure not to normalize hospitalization but also taking it seriously and not joking about it or making fun of someone for having been through it.
 - Advice to give someone who is afraid to ask for help or reach out.
- Ways to communicate that suicidal ideation and mental health issues can debilitate anyone, and no one is 'safe' from being affected by these things.
 - How many people are affected by mental health problems and how real the struggle is.
 - Ways to help someone you know is struggling, good things to say, how to treat them
- How important it is to be nice and try to better someone else's day, how much compassion and empathy can impact anyone. How incredibly important it is to be aware of what you say, and how you come off to others. Treat everyone nicely.
 - That it is never too late to reach out or get help
- Ways teachers can accommodate students going through a lot, like deadline extensions or smaller rooms/groups for testing, alternate places they can go to take their test.
- It is not a shameful thing to ask for help, and it is always the best possible thing you can do for yourself. It can open you up to being able to heal and find yourself. That reaching out is not something to be looked down upon and how it can really help those who do reach out.
 - It is not weak to ask for help, and being able to say you need help is admirable