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Enhanced Evaluation and Actionable Knowledge for Suicide Prevention Series

Preventing Suicide through Connectedness

The Enhanced Evaluation and Actionable Knowledge project is part of an intra-agency agreement between CDC and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The purpose of this project was to engage three [Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act](#) grantees in a process to create products that apply evaluation findings to strengthen suicide prevention practice.*

Suicide prevention is an important public health strategy. There are a number of factors that put people at higher or lower risk for suicide, many of which are related to the concept of connectedness. Connectedness is the degree to which an individual or group is socially close, interrelated, or shares resources with other individuals or groups. Connectedness occurs within and between multiple levels of the social ecology, that is between individuals, families, schools and other organizations, neighborhoods, cultural groups, and society as a whole. For more information on the research behind connectedness as a protective factor for suicide prevention, see [CDC's Strategic Direction for Suicide Prevention](#) (CDC, 2011).

Connectedness:

The degree to which a person or group is socially close, interrelated or shares resources with other persons or groups.

Can Connectedness ever be Harmful?

Overall, studies show that connectedness is an important protective factor for suicide. Research tells us, however, that youths' connectedness to negative peer groups may increase their risk for suicidal behavior.

Connectedness Between Individuals

Strong, positive relationships with others can be protective and prevent against suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Connectedness between individuals can lead to increased frequency of social contact, lowered levels of social isolation or loneliness, and an increased number of positive relationships.

What does this look like?

The Tennessee Lives Count youth suicide prevention initiative found that the relationship between youth and gatekeepers (positive adults in their lives, such as teachers, coaches, activity leaders, etc.) mattered. Gatekeepers who reported a stronger connection to youth in their program were almost twice as likely to accurately identify suicidal youth.

* The three Enhanced Evaluation Actionable Knowledge grantees were 1) Tennessee Lives Count 2) Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program and 3) the Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest (NARA-NW).

Connectedness of Individuals and Their Families

Positive attachments between youth, their families and organizations in their community are important and can increase youth's feelings of belonging, strengthen their sense of identity and personal worth, and provide access to larger sources of support. Community organizations may include schools, and other youth-serving, Tribal, and faith-based organizations.

What does this look like?

The Native American Rehabilitative Association of the Northwest (NARA) developed the Oregon Native Youth Survey specifically to provide information to Oregon Tribes that could be used to improve their programmatic activities, identify the community-level risk and protective factors for suicide, and inform future programming efforts. NARA administered the Oregon Native Youth Survey to 233 Tribal youth from four tribal communities and found that American Indian/Alaska Native youth involvement in Tribal/ Native community cultural activities and connection to traditional beliefs and values protected against risks for suicidal behavior. Youth surveyed who endorsed traditional beliefs and values had on average six more protective factors (e.g., feeling positive about the future, perceiving that teachers notice when they do a good job, feeling their community is "safe") than youth who did not report feeling connected to traditional beliefs and values.

Connectedness Among Community Organizations and Social Institutions

Strong formal relationships between organizations and support services can help better ensure that services are delivered and promote a client's sense of well-being.

What does this look like?

The Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program found that a formal referral network connecting organizations with service providers was important for the success of a comprehensive school-based suicide prevention program. The network includes the school, the local crisis response agency, community mental health providers, substance abuse treatment providers, and hospitals. Connecting these organizations through this formal referral network has made it easier for organizations to share information and access services for youth at risk for suicide.

What Can You Do to Promote Connectedness Within Your Community or Organization?

The table to the right may be helpful as a conversation starter with others who share an interest in preventing suicide. Connectedness at the individual, relationship, and community/organizational level of the social ecology are described. Think about what your community is already doing that increases connectedness for youth at each level. Then, brainstorm ideas for what can be added to existing programs or activities in schools, faith organizations, youth serving organizations, or other organizations that have influence with youth and their families.

Reference

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Connectedness as a strategic direction for the prevention of suicidal behavior. Retrieved September 27, 2011 from http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/Suicide_Strategic_Direction_Full_Version-a.pdf

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Connectedness between

individuals. Greater degrees of social integration (e.g., number of prosocial friends, contact with trusted, caring adults, low levels of social isolation or loneliness) serve as protective factors against suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

What current programs or activities are currently offered in our community/organization?

(For example: Afterschool programs that allow youth to positively and constructively interact with one another on a regular basis)

What can be added to existing programs or activities?**Connectedness of individuals and their families to community organizations.**

Positive attachments to community organizations like schools and faith-based organizations can increase an individual's sense of belonging.

What is currently available in our community/organization?

(For example: Regular "family nights" at school that provide parents with the opportunity to visit their child's school, and interact with teachers and other parents)

What can be added to existing programs or activities?**Connectedness among community organizations and social institutions.**

Formal relationships between support services and referring organizations help ensure that services are appropriately delivered and promote a clients' well-being—as in the case of the primary care system and the mental health system.

What is currently available in our community/organization?

(For example: Formal referral network that meets on a regular basis and includes both referring organizations (e.g., schools) and service providers (e.g., mental health providers))

What can be added to existing programs or activities?

To learn more about connectedness and prevention of self-directed violence, please visit www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/Suicide_Strategic_Direction_Full_Version-a.pdf

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