



SCHOOL NURSE DISCUSSION GUIDE

Understanding and Responding to Suicidal Ideation

This discussion guide supports school nurses in reflecting on and discussing how to respond effectively and compassionately to students showing signs of suicidal ideation—either in a group setting or for individual reflection. Facilitators may choose the questions most relevant to their group.

Icebreaker Questions

- What are your initial instincts when a student shares something that feels serious or concerning?

Recognizing Risk and Responding with Care

- What physical, emotional, or academic changes have you noticed that made you concerned enough to ask about suicidal thoughts?
- How do students express distress differently based on age, culture, or identity?
- What does “approaching with curiosity, not judgment” look like in a real conversation with a student?
- How do you balance validating a student’s pain while offering hope and emphasizing safety?
- How might stigma, family beliefs, or fear of consequences prevent students from speaking up or seeking help?

System and Supports

- What does your school’s suicide prevention protocol look like in action? Who is on the response team? What’s your role?
- How do you help a student feel safe while waiting for next steps (e.g., crisis team, caregiver, follow up care)?
- How do you follow up with students after a suicide risk referral so they continue receiving care?
- What tools or protocols have you used (e.g., ASQ screening, Stanley Brown Safety Plan)? What’s worked well?
- What’s your role in supporting the development of a safety plan with students and families?
- How can we better collaborate with caregivers about reducing access to lethal means at home (e.g., firearms, medications)?
- What are barriers to safety planning and communication at school or at home, and how have you worked through them?

Personal Reflection and Wellness

- What part of suicide prevention work feels most challenging or emotionally heavy for you?
- What supports do you need to feel prepared and confident in these conversations?

Conclusion

- What’s one thing you might approach differently after viewing the module and participating in today’s discussion?