

# Complicated Death, Complicated Grief

## Helping a Community Heal Presentation Summary



[ 1 ]

## Your Speakers



### **Susan Tellone, MSN**

- Clinical Director, The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide
- National consultant on suicide prevention



### **Wendy Sefcik**

- Chair, NJ Youth Suicide Prevention Advisory Council
- NJ Chapter Board Member for AFSP
- Founder, Remembering T.J.

[ 2 ]

## *And the work has already begun:*

- The Mendhams Stigma Free Task Force
- School response – Traumatic Loss Coalition
- Key stakeholder community meeting
- Mendham Community Information Board
- Community Mental Health Needs Survey
- “Raising Resilient Teens” Parent Panel presentation – Black River Middle School on February 19<sup>th</sup>
- Morris County Youth Wellness Summit

3

## *The Value of Community Mourning*



*“Community gathers as an effective group to do the work for each other that would take a lot longer for an individual to do alone”*

- John O’Donohue

4

# Healing After Traumatic Death

Helping Parents  
Help Their Kids



[ 5 ]

## *Start With Yourself: What are Your Reactions ?*

- **Our tendency as adults is to focus first on helping our children, not ourselves**
- **Whether we tell them or not, our kids can figure out how we feel**
- **If you expect your kids to be honest and open with you, you have to be honest and open with yourself**

[ 6 ]

## *Why Grief of Children Is Different than Adults*

- Lack of experience with death
- Immature cognitive development or understanding of death
- Limited ability to verbalize feelings
- Perception of time is different from adults: focus on proximal past & future

[ 7 ]

## *Steps To Help You Deal With Your Child's Reactions....*

1. Understand that there are no answers - don't feel pressured to have the 'right answer'
2. Realize you may not understand your child's reactions
3. Some children will show their sadness, others will have no reaction, don't talk them out of their feelings – we need to allow them to feel what they feel
4. Understand that reaction may not surface for a while- kids have grief closets, too!

[ 8 ]

## *How To Help Your Child*

- **Avoid gossip about the cause of the death**
- **Remain nonjudgmental about the deceased**
- **Share your reactions with your child**
- **Validate his/her response**
- **Ask them to “ tell me more”**
- **Acknowledge rumors & put into context**

[ 9 ]

## *What to Say...*

- **Acknowledge that sometimes the death of another person can make us think about death ourselves**
- **Validate that these thoughts can be upsetting/scary – don’t try to make them go away!**
- **Reinforce the importance of sharing these thoughts with a trusted adult**

[ 10 ]

## *What to Say...*

- **Remind kids about the importance of caring for each other. If they hear a friend or peer talk about suicide, they need to immediately inform a trusted adult.**
- **Ask them to think about the people they consider to be ‘trusted adults’**
- **Encourage them to add names to that list overtime**
- **Remind them about in-school resources**

[ 11 ]

## *What to Say...*

- **Discuss “curriculum reminders” and empower them to address concerns with you or with faculty**
  - **“Sometimes classroom content will remind you of upsetting things in your life, like this event. If that happens, approach your teacher and explain your reactions. If necessary, ask for an alternate assignment.”**

[ 12 ]

## *If You're Worried About Your Child...*

- **ASK** your child about your concerns.
- **BE SPECIFIC** with the reasons for your concern
- **LISTEN** to the answer
- **PARAPHRASE** what you hear your child say
- **OFFER TO HELP** and follow through
- **ASK ABOUT SUICIDE DIRECTLY**
- **DON'T MINIMIZE**

{ 13 }

## *If You're Worried...*

- **ACT IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT SUICIDE OR YOUR CHILD TALKS ABOUT SUICIDE!**
  - **Call your local hospital emergency room**
  - **If your local hospital can't help, call the National Suicide Crisis Line...1-800-273-8255**
  - **Look in your phone book for local hotlines**

{ 14 }

## Warning Signs

### Feelings

Hopelessness, anxiety, desperation

### Actions

Aggression, risky behavior, online suicide searches

### Changes

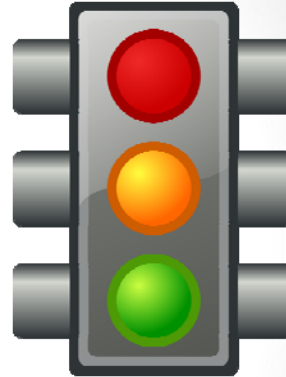
Observable changes in behavior, withdrawal from friends or changes in social activity; anger or hostility, changes in sleep

### Threats

Talking about, writing about or making plans for suicide

### Situations

Stressful situations including loss, change, humiliation, trouble at home or legal troubles are triggers for suicide



{ 15 }

## Fostering Protective Factors

- **Teach your children it is okay to ask for help**
- **Give children permission to talk about traumatic events like suicide**
- **Help children identify trusted adults**
- **Encourage participation in school & community activities**
- **Acknowledge your child's efforts**
- **Be a good listener, as often as you can**
- **Encourage problem solving skills**
- **Get a mental health evaluation if you need it**

{ 16 }



## *How To Help Your Child?*

- Introduce topic of help-seeking
- Encourage peer responsibility
- Discourage secret-keeping
- Review adult resources
- Keep channels of communication open

[ 17 ]

## *What can we do next?*

- Community Educational Workshops
- Suicide Prevention Curriculum
  - *Lifelines* Suicide Prevention Trilogy
- Suicide Awareness Events
  - Continue the conversation about mental health and suicide
  - Connect community members and youth with local resources
- Adopt the competent community model as outlined in *Lifelines*

[ 18 ]

## *Additional Resources*

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Youth Helpline (New Jersey Only)**

- Call or Text 888-222-2228
- [www.2ndfloor.org](http://www.2ndfloor.org)

### **Crisis Text Line**

- Text "Home" to 741-741
- [www.crisistextline.org](http://www.crisistextline.org)

### **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

- 1-800-273-8255
- [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

### **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**

- [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

[ 19 ]



**WWW.SPTSUSA.ORG**  
**www.sptsusa.org/mendham**

[ 20 ]