


Life Is Sacred Native Youth Suicide Prevention Materials

Talking Points for the Family Brochure

The research that was used to create this brochure was conducted by NPC Research with the collaboration of prevention staff from Oregon Tribes and through funding from the Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest (NARA), with federal grants from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The research involved two different sources of information, the statewide Oregon Healthy Teens survey data on 8th and 11th graders in Oregon from 2006, and Oregon Native Youth Survey data on 12 to 19 year olds from four Oregon Tribal communities, from 2009. The survey data included descriptive information about the youth (age, gender, race), questions about risk behaviors and protective factors, and the youths' self-reported suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts.

The following talking points were developed to serve as conversation starters between parents and those who interact with them (and their children) in various roles.

 *Please note that actions parents/family members can take are in red font and guidelines for staff are in green font.*

In general, the suggested guidelines for **staff** are as follows:

- Share the brochure with parents/family members of teens (bring to events, display in offices, hand out to families receiving services or where the youth is participating in activities).
- Highlight interesting items, such as how important but easy some of the steps are to help protect their children (e.g., making sure the youth eats breakfast).
- Try to start a casual conversation and open the door to more extensive discussion, particularly with families who have not identified any particular challenges, especially if you feel they could benefit from this information.
- For parents who come to you asking for support or information, provide the resources and tips listed in this document.
- Continually reinforce the message of how important parents/family members/positive adults are in helping keep teens safe and healthy. Family support is a traditional Native value and well documented in research.

There was a positive relationship between youth **valuing AI/AN traditional values/practices** and these other factors that **protect** youth from considering or attempting suicide:

- Eats breakfast 5-7 days per week
- I help make decisions with my family
- Very good or excellent general physical health
- I can work out my problems
- Grades mostly As or Bs

- **Youth with 4 or 5 of the protective factors listed above were significantly less likely to attempt suicide.** Note that for AI/AN youth, not having at least 4 protective factors is associated with higher proportions of attempts.
- **Each additional protective factor decreases the likelihood of a suicide attempt by 50%.**

For more information or to see the survey questions, feel free to contact Juliette Mackin (Mackin@npcresearch.com) or Tamara Perkins (Perkins@npcresearch.com) at NPC Research at 503-243-2436 or visit these links on line:

OHT:

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/BirthDeathCertificates/Surveys/OregonHealthyTeens/Pages/index.aspx>

“The power of protection: A population-based comparison of Native and non-Native youth suicide attempters” is an article based on AI/AN data from OHT. The article will be posted in late 2012 or early 2013 on the Website for the *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research: The Journal of the National Center*:

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/research/centers/CAIANH/journal/Pages/journal.aspx>

ONYS:

http://www.npcresearch.com/Files/ONYS_NEW.pdf

Overview:

To keep our youth safe, it is important to know what influences are most positive and will keep them most healthy. It is also important to be able to recognize the risks, that is, the behaviors or circumstances that might lead to the youth feeling suicidal thoughts, making a suicide attempt, or having other serious difficulties, such as using drugs or alcohol.

The positive things help protect youth against the negative influences and decisions in their lives. They are even more important for youth who are already having trouble or who have experienced difficulties in their lives.

Parents of teenagers often believe their children are grown up enough not to need supervision or much attention. Teens tend to pull away from authority figures, like parents, and want autonomy, and this makes parents feel even more that they should let go. However, while teenagers need opportunities to be independent, they still need supervision, love and encouragement, someone to talk to, and structure to develop into healthy adults.¹

¹ Jenkins R. R. (2007). The epidemiology of adolescent health problems. In: Kliegman, R. M., Behrman, R. E., Jenson, H. B., & Stanton, B. F., eds. *Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics*. 18th Ed. Philadelphia, Pa: Saunders Elsevier; Chapter 110. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002003.htm>

Why family support is so important

Youth face many challenges that can leave them feeling hopeless:

- Negative influences at home, at school, with friends, and in the community;
- The lack of someone they can talk to;
- A sense that they have no control over what happens to them;
- No feeling of connectedness to their past or their future; and
- No safe emotional and physical space.

Few supports and many risks can lead to suicidal thoughts and behaviors:

- In the U.S., between 1 in 9 and 1 in 5 Native youth report attempting suicide each year.
- In Oregon, 1 in 10 Native youth surveyed in 2009 reported a suicide attempt in the past year.
- One in 9 youth in a sample of 233 from four Oregon Tribes reported a suicide attempt in the past year.
- One in 6 Oregon Tribal youth reported considering suicide.

Challenges and risks shown to be linked to suicidal thoughts and behaviors:

- Having an emotional condition such as anxiety or depression;
- Use of inhalants (breathing in chemicals to get high, like air freshener, glue, paint, etc.);
- Being intentionally hit or physically hurt by an adult—ever;
- Having had sexual contact with an adult—ever;
- Availability of drugs in the community; and
- Having many risk factors.
 - Youth who report being suspended, carrying a handgun, selling drugs, stealing a motor vehicle, being arrested, bullying other youth, or being involved with gangs were more likely to consider or attempt suicide.
 - Youth who were physically abused were more likely to consider or attempt suicide.

For our children to thrive, they must grow up with:

- Support at home, at school, with friends, and in the community;
- Adults at home, at school, and in the community who are positive role models;
- Adults at home, at school, and in the community that youth can talk to; and
- Opportunities to learn from Elders and other keepers of Tribal traditions and practices that keep youth rooted emotionally and culturally.

Below you can find a table with practical steps parents, guardians and other loved ones can take to help support teens.

Steps parents can take

Supports that are linked to fewer suicidal thoughts and behaviors:	Steps parents can take:
Eats breakfast—at least 5 out of 7 days a week	Make sure your child eats breakfast every day. If possible, eat together.
Makes decisions with family	Include your child in family decisions when possible. Ask for your child’s thoughts about family-related topics and issues.
Can share thoughts and feelings with family members	<p>Spend time with your child (provide opportunity for sharing) and encourage her/him to share thoughts and feelings with you. Pay attention when he/she is talking to you. When possible, set up dedicated time just the two of you. Try not to be doing other things (texting, parenting other children, etc.) at that time.</p> <p>When a youth is sharing concerns with you, especially if they seem like “teen type concerns” that you may know or believe aren’t as serious as the youth thinks they are, be very careful NOT to let the youth perceive that you are making a judgment or minimizing their feelings.</p> <p>Encourage your child to talk to other trusted adults, especially if you are worried that he/she won’t talk to you.</p> <p>Be supportive of the youth [give attention and praise for] attending school, doing well in school, participating in positive activities, achieving a success, choosing positive friends, helping someone else, making a good decision, setting and meeting a goal, trying hard at something.</p>
Asks family members for help with a problem	<p>Provide support when your child asks for help.</p> <p>Listen carefully and attentively when your child talks about problems he/she is addressing, even if he/she doesn’t ask for help directly. If he/she does ask for help, make sure to take her/him seriously and do what you can to provide support.</p>
Feels safe in their home	Talk to your child about personal safety.
Earns good grades at school (A’s and B’s)	Help your child with schoolwork or arrange for someone else to help. Show interest in schoolwork that he/she is doing. Check in with your child regularly about his/her progress and contact your child’s teacher(s) if needed.
Has supportive teachers	Check in with your child regularly about his/her progress and contact your child’s teacher(s) if needed. Attend parent/teacher conferences to make sure teachers know you are interested in your child’s education. Encourage the teacher(s) to contact you if they have any concerns or questions.
Has very good or excellent physical health	Take your child to the doctor for check-ups each year to make sure they are in good health. Make sure that your child gets treatment for any health problem or gets advice about any medical concern.

Supports that are linked to fewer suicidal thoughts and behaviors:	Steps parents can take:
Has confidence in being able to work out problems	Provide opportunities for your child to practice decision-making and problem-solving, such as helping to decide what to make for a family meal. Encourage your child to practice solving problems, such as talking to a teacher to obtain information about an assignment, or planning the pros and cons of making a particular decision.
Has other supportive adults at school	Encourage your child to get to know and talk with adults at school, such as coaches, librarians, lunchroom staff, or custodial staff. The more positive adults that support your child, even those who only offer a friendly face and “hello” can make a difference. Encourage your child to talk to other trusted adults, especially if you are worried that he/she won’t talk to you.
Is involved in school activities	Whenever possible, allow and encourage your child to participate in school sponsored activities, such as sports, clubs, fundraisers, and social events. These activities help develop your child’s healthy identity, connection to the community, leadership skills, physical health, and associations with other positive youth and adults. They also help fill your child’s time with healthy activities and prevent them from becoming involved in unhealthy ones.
Has Native values and beliefs, and participate in Native cultural activities	Encourage your child to participate in Tribal programs, activities, ceremonies, and events. Make sure your child is connected to elders and other community leaders.
Has many protective factors	Follow as many of these guidelines as you can, and have other adults that you trust help too. The more support your child gets, the better!

Parents need to assume that their children won’t come to them with a problem. They need to go to the youth.

These steps can be especially difficult if the parent is facing lots of challenges herself/himself, but they are worth the effort and practice.

Here are some **parenting resources** that might be useful:

- <http://www.nayapdx.org/services/family-services/positive-indian-parenting.php>
- <http://www.healthychildren.org/english/ages-stages/teen/Pages/default.aspx>
- <http://www.webmd.com/parenting/features/10-parenting-tips-for-raising-teenagers>

Tips for connecting with teens:

In a series of in-depth interviews with teenage youth, teens themselves said that they wanted adults to pay attention to them. The top 10 suggestions for adults were:²

1. Look at us.
2. Spend time talking with us.
3. Listen.
4. Be dependable.
5. Show appreciation for what we do.
6. Relax.
7. Show that you're interested.
8. Laugh with us (and at yourself).
9. Ask us to help you.
10. Challenge us.

There is also a resource online that shares results from a Native Teen Survey about how teens (urban youth in Minnesota) feel about a variety of topics affecting adolescents. <http://www.ntv.umn.edu/>

² <http://blog.reclaimingfutures.org/?q=juvenile-justice-system-what-teens-need-Search>