Important safety considerations for engaging youth in community-wide youth suicide prevention initiatives

When working with youth in any capacity it is crucial to make their safety and comfort a number one priority. To manage safety risks for youth who may be involved in your suicide prevention initiatives, it is important to consider: risks in the context of the environment in which you are meeting with youth, the clinical safety implications of working with youth who may have lived experience, as well as the concerns and facts around contagion following a suicide in the community.

Environmental considerations for creating positive spaces for youth

It’s important to develop spaces that promote protective factors and are built on positive relationships and interactions. Your coalition and its members should work towards co-creating spaces with youth that are safe from physical, emotional and psychological harm. Youth should be free to express themselves openly and authentically without fear of discrimination based on their gender, sex, sexual orientation, race, class, appearance, or other identifying factors. Here are some important factors to consider in creating a positive and safe space for youth engaged in your coalition’s work:

- Identify core values to be upheld in the space
- Set group norms and expectations
- Adopt an anti-discriminatory policy
- Implement a conflict resolution process
- Adopt a trauma-informed lens
- Offer clinical support
- Put safety first and prevent harm
- Set the context to be accepting and developing mechanisms to address discrimination and stigma
- Provide safe transportation

Visit the Centre’s YE toolkit for more details on creating safer spaces for youth.

Considerations for clinical safety

Clinical safety needs to be kept top of mind when engaging youth in community-wide suicide prevention initiatives. Accessible clinical support across youth engagement activities is essential, particularly when
youth (and adults) are asked to draw on lived experience while engaging in your coalition’s activities. Here are some things to consider:

- **Be aware of triggers**: Although it’s important to have youth with lived experience help guide your organization or coalition’s initiatives, depending on where they are in their journey of recovery, talking about suicide in any capacity may be triggering.
- **Natural supports**: When working with youth it’s important to offer formal clinical supports, but it’s also helpful to identify natural supports youth can turn to outside of working with your organization or coalition.
- **Confidentiality**: If you’re gathering youth together to discuss initiatives and there’s potential for discussion around personal mental health experiences, make sure to remind the group about the importance of confidentiality.
- **Peer supports**: Research shows that in times of need, youth prefer to talk to peers rather than a professional. Once you begin working with youth it is important to make them aware of who they can turn to for advice and support if a peer shares a mental health concern with them. Visit Together to Live’s peer to peer support page for more information.

### Considerations around Contagion

Contagion is a phenomenon whereby susceptible individuals are influenced towards suicidal behaviour through the knowledge of another person’s suicidal behaviour. To support youth engaged in your coalition and who may be affected by a recent suicide you can:

- Provide clear and accurate information to youth immediately. Don’t provide unnecessary detail and ensure information is age and culturally appropriate.
- Identify and monitor youth at increased risk, which could include those:
  - with a history of suicidal behaviour
  - experiencing depression
  - who have a history of tragic loss or suicide in their family
  - who identify with the deceased (regardless of whether they had a close relationship)
  - who may have felt responsible for contributing to or who felt they could have prevented the suicide
- Provide appropriate support and treatment for those at risk.
- Provide a safe space for the youth to speak freely about their feelings, and discuss helpful coping strategies. Have healthy and appropriate discussions around suicide and mental health with youth as this can reduce the risk of suicide contagion.

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