

# YOU OKAY?

## Suicide Prevention in the Workplace

Toolbox Talks and Facilitator Guide



**HEALTHIER WORKFORCE**  
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Thank you for choosing to participate in the Healthier Workforce Center's "You Okay?" Suicide Prevention Campaign. As a leader, you play an important role in creating a safe and open atmosphere where employees can feel comfortable talking about sensitive topics such as suicide and mental health.

This packet contains materials to help promote mental health in the workplace.

- **Facilitator Guide**

Information on how to deliver the toolbox talks including questions to ask during the presentation.

- **Toolbox Talks**

Brief one-pagers to start the conversation about suicide in the workplace: *State of Industry, Reduce the Stigma, Recognizing Warning Signs, Starting a Conversation*, and a *Summary*.

- **Breakroom poster**

A large poster to be put in public gathering spaces with resources.

- **Poster sticker**

A smaller, water-proof poster to be put in private spaces such as a porta-john or bathroom stall.

- **You Are Not Alone medallions**

Small medallions to be distributed among workers. These are designed as an unobtrusive way to share the Suicide Hotline number with someone who may be in need. They can be directly handed to someone or left in a visible area.

- **You Are Not Alone stickers**

Sturdy stickers to be distributed among workers to promote mental health. They can be applied to hard hats, water bottles, name tags, etc.

- **Take Away Sheets**

Half-sheet pages summarizing the information in each toolbox talk.

These materials are also downloadable at: <https://hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/suicide-prevention-campaign-employer-resources/>

At the end of the Suicide Prevention Campaign, you will receive a follow-up email survey that will be used for evaluation.

A special thanks to everyone involved, including the Associated General Contractors of Missouri for developing the original materials.



# Suicide Prevention Campaign Facilitator's Guide

## Facilitator Tasks before the Toolbox Talk (TBT)

1. Read through the TBT informational sheet and the facilitator guide below.
2. Think of your own discussion questions to add. For example, you may want to include examples or resources from your workplace.
3. Before starting each TBT, set the expectations with the group out loud.
  - Brief the topic: This week will be focused on suicide prevention. Ask that everyone is respectful since this can be a very personal and sensitive topic for a lot of people. There will be opportunities to share, but it's not required.
  - Remind the group how to get help if they want to talk to someone (trusted supervisor, MAP/EAP, or the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline 988).
  - Point out that each take away sheet has a QR code that links to resources and where they can access the TBT. *[To use a QR code, open the camera on your phone and hover over the image, it will pop up a link for you to click and take you to the website].*
4. Each TBT has a paired Take Away Sheet available online. You can print these and hand them out during the meeting.

## Example Conversation Starters for each TBT

### **Day 1: Suicide and the Workplace**

- Suicide rates are increasing.  
*What do you think are some reasons for this?*
- Suicide rates are higher in the specific industries.  
*Is that surprising to you?*  
*What can we do about it in our industry?*
- Mental health impacts all parts of our lives.  
*How can we make mental health a part of the safety conversation?*

### **Day 2: Reduce the Stigma**

- There are many factors that contribute to suicide.  
*What are other factors in our workplace (or construction) not listed that put someone at risk?*
- There is a lot of stigma associated with suicide.  
*How does the language we use contribute to stigma? Example: How do we talk about a person with cancer (fighter, strong, survivor...) versus a person with depression (crazy, moody, lazy...)?*  
*What are some ways we can combat the stigma that prevents people from seeking help?*

### **Day 3: Recognize the Warning Signs**

- People often show they are struggling in subtle ways.  
*Describe examples of something you might hear from a coworker that could be a warning sign? What are some examples of things that may be taken as "just talk?"*
- There are different ways to approach someone who needs help.  
*What are the ways we can step in and help a coworker who is showing warning signs? What is something we can say?*

#### **Day 4: Start a Conversation**

- It can be uncomfortable to discuss the topic of suicide.  
*What are some ways you could make it more comfortable?*
- There are 4 key points to help you through the conversation: Ask, Be There, Keep Them Safe, and Help Them Connect.  
*What are examples of how you can do this?*

#### **Day 5: Summary**

- We have talked about a lot over the past week.  
*What stuck with you the most from the other TBTs?*
- Suicide is an important topic in our industry.  
*How can we keep this conversation going after this week?*



# LET'S TALK

## SUICIDE PREVENTION



### Suicide and the Workplace

One person dies of suicide every 11 minutes.

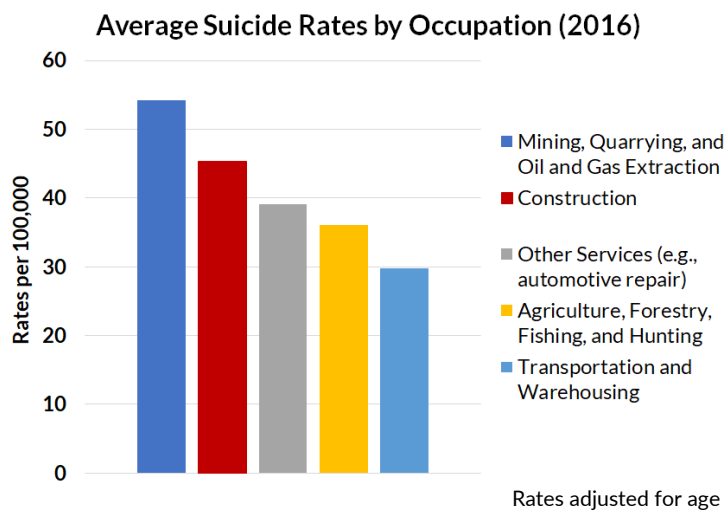
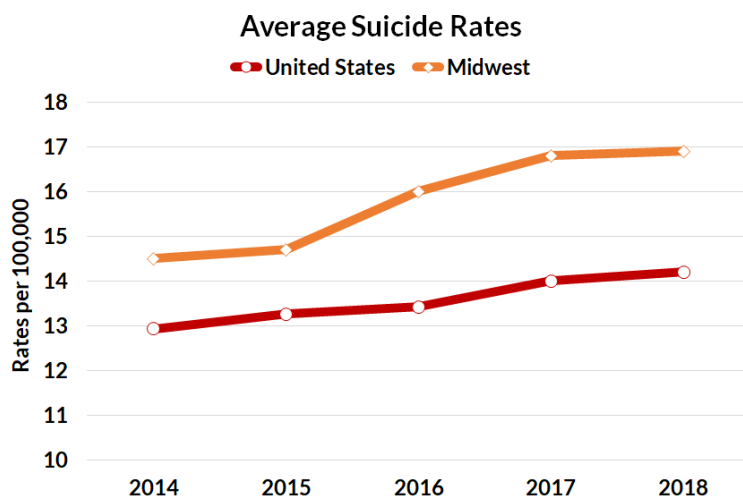
One person attempts suicide every 26 seconds.



#### How big is the suicide problem?

- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the US, and the rate is increasing.
- More people die by suicide than motor vehicle crashes.
- In 2015, 575,000 people visited the hospital due to self-harm injuries.
- Half of all people know someone that has died by suicide.

**Mental health is a personal issue, a family issue, a society issue and a WORK issue. That is why mental health should be part of the SAFETY CONVERSATION**



#### What can we do?

- Talk about it! Make it part of the safety conversation.
- Learn to recognize the warning signs in yourself and others.
- Seek help from national and local resources.



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# LET'S TALK

## SUICIDE PREVENTION



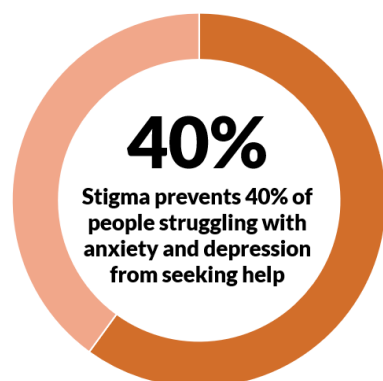
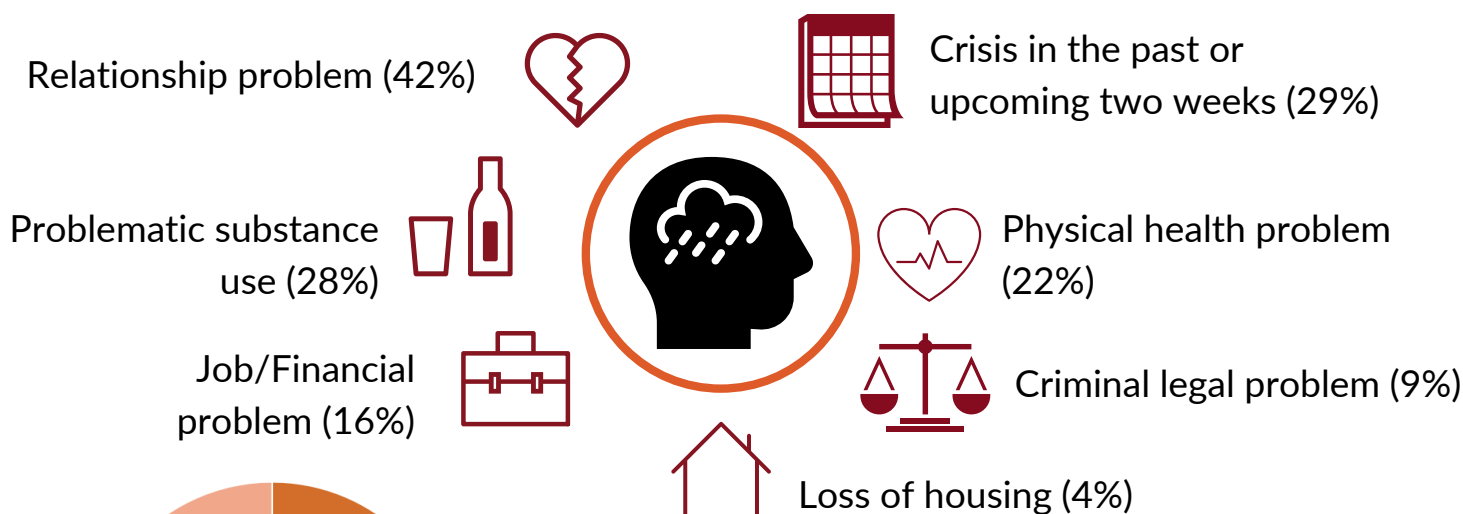
### Reduce the Stigma

Stigma can cause people to feel ashamed of something out of their control and, at its worst, prevent someone from seeking help.



Suicide doesn't only occur in people with mental illness.

Many factors contribute to suicide:



**Normalizing conversations about suicide and mental health reduces stigma, making it easier for people to reach out for help.**

How do we fight stigma in the workplace?

- Talk openly about mental health
- Educate yourself and others on mental health issues
- Be conscious of hurtful language
- Treat physical and mental health as equally important



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# LET'S TALK

## SUICIDE PREVENTION



### Recognize the Warning Signs

**If you believe a coworker is in immediate danger or has already harmed themselves, you need to call emergency services at 911.**



*I had a student who was recently laid off, his family life was stressful, and he had only one more chance of passing a competency test before he was kicked out of the program. He called me one day very upset and repeatedly told me he was "just done." Picking up on several warning signs, I was worried about his safety. Keeping him calm, I talked to the student until I knew he was in a safe place with a family member and created a plan with the student to get help. We were able to help him get through the apprentice program and refer him to additional resources. -Apprentice Instructor*

It is not always obvious when a friend or coworker is struggling, but they often show signs of suicidal thoughts in subtle ways.

While these comments or threats may sound like "just talk," they can indicate a more serious problem.

It is important to step in or speak up if you see these warning signs...

If you see any of these warning signs:

- Bring it to the attention of your foreman or supervisor
- Start a conversation with your coworker about your concerns and help them contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or the Crisis Text Line



### SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS



American Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention



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# LET'S TALK

## SUICIDE PREVENTION



### Start a Conversation

#### ASK - Start the Conversation

- **Prepare:** Practice what you will say, plan for a time when you won't be rushed, and come with crisis resources on hand
- Use **non-judgmental language**. Don't dismiss them as attention-seeking.
- **Ask directly about suicide.** Mention the warning signs you saw to make clear you aren't asking "out of the blue." **If they answer YES to your direct question about suicide**, stay calm and don't leave the person alone until further help is obtained.

It is not always easy to talk about suicide, but when someone's life is at risk, it is more important to ensure their safety than to avoid the topic.

**TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE DOES NOT PUT THE IDEA IN SOMEONE'S HEAD. IT GIVES THEM PERMISSION TO TALK ABOUT IT AND THEY ARE USUALLY RELIEVED.**

#### BE THERE - Listen, Express Concern, Reassure

- Listen to your coworker and validate their feelings, let the person know you are genuinely concerned, and that you take their situation seriously.

#### KEEP THEM SAFE - Create a Safety Plan

- Ask what will help keep them safe, make sure they do not have access to any lethal means, and ask if they will refrain from using drugs or alcohol.
- Get a verbal commitment that the person will not act upon thoughts of suicide until they have met with a professional.

#### HELP THEM CONNECT - Get Help

- Help them call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, text the Crisis Line, or connect them with a mental health professional. Stay connected.
- If you feel the situation is critical, take the person to a nearby Emergency Room or call 911.



#### YOU OKAY? Thing to say:

You are not alone.      How long have you been feeling this way?  
I'm here to listen.      Have you thought about how you would kill yourself?  
Thank you for telling me I know talking about this is difficult.



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# LET'S TALK

## SUICIDE PREVENTION



### Suicide Prevention Summary

**You are NOT alone: We are in this together!**



Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. Some industries (construction, agriculture and transportation) have higher rates than others.



Suicide doesn't only occur in people who have mental health illness. Stigma can prevent someone from seeking help. Mental health is a personal issue and a work issue. It needs to be a part of the safety conversation.



Recognize the warning signs (comments of hopelessness, disinterest, reckless behavior) and speak up. Some behaviors require immediate action and may require you to call 911.



When someone is at risk, it's important to start a conversation. Ask directly about the issue, listen to them, use non-judgmental language, and create a safety plan together. Don't be afraid to seek outside help from a suicide hotline or supervisor.

**Look out for your coworkers - suicide is a serious issue.  
Mental health needs to be a part of the safety conversation.**



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# Suicide Prevention Week – Day 1

## **Suicide and the Workplace**

- Suicide in the 10th leading cause of death in the United States.
- There are now more deaths from suicide each year than from car accidents.
- One person dies of suicide every 11 minutes. One person attempts suicide every 26 seconds.
- The Midwest has a higher rate of suicide than the national average.
- More than half of the population knows someone that has died by suicide.

**Mental health is part of the safety conversation**



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# Suicide Prevention Week – Day 2

## Reduce the Stigma

- Many factors contribute to suicide such as relationship problems, a past or upcoming crisis, substance use issues and/or physical health problems.
- Stigma can cause people to feel ashamed of something out of their control and **may prevent someone from seeking help.**
- Normalizing conversations about suicide and mental health helps reduce the stigma, making it easier for people to reach out for help.
- We can fight stigma by viewing mental health as equally important as physical health.

**We need to talk about it.**



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# Suicide Prevention Week – Day 3

## **Recognize the Warning Signs**

Be aware of and pay attention for these **warning signs**:

- **Talk of** feeling trapped, being a burden to others, having no reason to live, unbearable pain, killing themselves.
- **Moods like** depression, rage, anxiety, humiliation, irritability, loss of interest.
- **Behavior such as** acting recklessly, isolating from others, saying goodbye, giving away possession, changes in sleep, looking for means to kill themselves.

**If you see these signs in a coworker, step in or speak up.**



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# Suicide Prevention Week – Day 4

## Start a Conversation

If you suspect your coworker is in trouble:

- **ASK** - Using non-judgmental language, ask directly about suicide.
- **BE THERE** - Listen to your coworker, let them know you are genuinely concerned and take them seriously.
- **KEEP THEM SAFE** - Create a safety plan together.
- **HELP THEM CONNECT** - Provide a hand off to a professional who can help, such as the National Suicide Prevention Hotline or emergency personnel.

**Assure them you care and are here to help them.**



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# Suicide Prevention Week – Day 5

## Summary

- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. Some industries (construction, agriculture and transportation) have higher rates than others.
- We must confront the stigma associated with mental health and suicide by including it in our safety conversations.
- Recognize the warning signs of suicide and step in (start a conversation) or speak up (report it to supervision).

**Remember: talking about suicide does NOT put the idea in someone's head.**

**You are not alone: we are in this together.**



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