



# SOURCES OF STRENGTH

## PEER LEADER MEETING AGENDA:

Risk Factors , Warning Signs , & Connecting to Help

TIME: 60 MINUTES

### Overview

Sources of Strength focuses suicide upstream prevention efforts and growing Strengths with messages of Hope, Help and Strength. This Peer Leader meeting agenda focuses on intervention, covering risk factors and warning signs for suicide in teens and young adults. Peer Leaders are equipped with tangible ways to be Agents of Change and Connectors to Help within their peer networks.

The meeting begins with a game about noticing changes in others that sparks a conversation about changes Peer Leaders might see in a friend who is struggling or suicidal. The meeting then covers the risk factors and warning signs for suicide, and Peer Leaders will brainstorm ways to help others belong at school. Peer Leaders finish the meeting by creating their own wellness plans.

The topic of suicide can be sensitive. Please read this meeting agenda in its entirety and prepare before leading. If you'd like extra support, invite your school or community's mental health professional to join the meeting.

#### Materials/Prep:

- Peer Leader Guides
- Peer Leader Wellness Plans
- Poster or Handout Highlighting Local Mental Health Resources

### Welcome (1-2 minutes)

Thank all the Adult Advisors and Peer Leaders for joining the meeting. Reaffirm to Peer Leaders that their voices and actions have the ability to create change in their school and community.

### One Part Fun: Quick Change Game & Conversation (15-20 minutes)

#### Set up Quick Change Game:

- Ask participants to find a partner and form two parallel lines facing each other.
- Once the lines are formed, have participants take a quick look at their partner, noticing their shoes, hair, if they have jewelry on, etc. Keep this very brief to avoid feeling awkward.
- Ask everyone to turn and face away from their partner.
- While facing away, prompt both lines to change three things about their physical appearance (ex. Hair, shoes, jackets, etc.)
- After they have had 60 seconds to change their appearance, have players turn and face their partners and try to find the three changes they made.
- Once both partners have guessed all three changes correctly, they can give each other a high five and sit down

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where they are in their lines. Invite players to change back to their “normal” appearance when the game has finished!

Ask the question: “Do you think people are more likely to notice positive changes or negative changes in the world around us?”

Most people will say 'Negative.' Affirm this and explain: “It is negative! We are more likely to notice the negative in our environments because our brains are wired to protect us. If we were early humans constantly afraid of being eaten by a lion, we might assume any change in the environment, like a rustle of leaves, could be a predator! The good news is that we can rewire our brains, and one of the missions of Peer Leaders is to be Agents of Change. This means that as Peer Leaders, you can change the culture in school and your communities by committing to noticing and naming the good things around you. If we’re going to be honest, some things in school culture probably have to change so that more people can feel like they belong. The students here have the power to make this school a place where more people feel like they belong.”

Then ask, “By a show of hands, is there anyone here who has ever felt like they didn’t belong somewhere? Maybe you were new to a group or somewhere you’ve never been before. Thinking about our school community, what might be some of the reasons students may not feel like they belong at our school?” Call on a few individuals to share perspective on this topic, keeping the tone light while acknowledging these responses.

Next, have Peer Leaders reflect, then turn to their partner and share on the following prompt: “Who is a person, place, or thing that helps you feel like you belong?”

Gather a few large group shares, then tell the Peer Leaders that in a few minutes we will be brainstorming things we can do as individuals and as a team to increase belonging in school.

## **One Part Sharing: Risk Factors & Warning Signs** (10 minutes)

“We just played a game noticing some of the changes in our partner, and we also named some barriers to belonging. What might be some of the physical or emotional changes we would see in a friend who was feeling depressed or even suicidal?”

Gather about 3-4 shares to this question. Thank and validate participants after each share, working to keep the tone balanced and sharing brief to provide structure.

Have the Peer Leaders return to their seats and open up their Peer Leader Guides to the section titled Suicide Risk Factors and Warning Signs for Youth and Young Adults. Explain the four circles and highlight a few examples from the list below:

“Let’s take a few minutes to highlight the four circles at the top of the page. These are all considered risk factors for suicide. Experiencing these things doesn’t necessarily mean someone will become suicidal, but they can increase risk and are things we want to pay attention to.”

### **Substance Abuse**

“Research shows that approximately 60-65% of teen suicide attempts happen when they are using drugs or alcohol. Sometimes people make jokes about suicide when they are drunk or high. Their friends might think, ‘they’re just drunk, they don’t really mean that.’ However, drugs and alcohol lower inhibition and increase impulsivity, meaning people may finally be giving voice to thoughts they have had for some time. If someone is making jokes or comments



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about suicide while under the influence, we want to take that situation really seriously, and there are two things we want to do, 1) Stay with them to make sure they are safe, and 2) invite someone else into that situation, which could be getting a Trusted Adult involved, calling the 988 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, or calling 911 if they're in immediate danger."

## Trauma

"Another risk factor is trauma. A trauma could be an accident or loss, or it could be exposure to harassment, violence, or abuse. It could sometimes look like a traumatic injury that leads to serious mood swings and abnormal behavior.

"When we have a friend that we know has experienced trauma, we want to make sure we are checking in on them and how they are doing. A trauma might be something that doesn't go away very easily, often takes time to heal from traumatic events, so it is important to keep checking in and making sure that our friend is getting the help they need and deserve.

"It can also be traumatic if you come to school feeling like you don't belong, especially when people are being harassed for their gender, sexuality, race, or culture. Part of your mission is to help more students feel accepted and safe. You can use your voice and actions to create the kind of culture in your school and community where everyone is safe, and where everyone belongs."

## Aggressive/Impulsive

"Aggressive and impulsive behavior actually more common in people with thoughts of suicide than isolating or withdrawing. Getting into fights, risky driving, punching holes in a wall, inappropriate use and display of weapons, dating violence, and other dangerous behavior are all signs that someone might be struggling and could potentially be feeling suicidal. Again, we want to make sure we are checking in on friends if they display these behaviors and connecting them to the help."

## Depression

"The last circle is depression. It's important to note that people might experience depression in a variety of ways. We are all likely to find ourselves feeling pretty sad or depressed at some point in our lives, but we can often put our finger on a cause. It's common to experience sadness after the loss of a loved one or relationship.

"There's a common form of depression amongst youth called Persistent Depressive Disorder and often people don't even realize they have it! They'll sometimes self-diagnose, thinking they're just lazy or stupid, when what's true is they're experiencing a form of depression. It's really important that if things ever just feel "too hard" to seek help from a counselor or therapist when we notice changes in ourselves or others."

## Other Risk Factors

If time, briefly cover a few items on the list of other risk factors at the bottom of the page, highlighting break-ups and previous attempts.

"Let's touch on break-ups. I want to make it clear that we would never say a break-up causes someone to be suicidal. However, it can be an activating event for someone. A break-up can be so painful, but it's almost inevitable, so it's important to talk about healthy ways to heal from these kinds of losses. And if we have a friend who has recently experienced a break-up, it can be really important and helpful to continue to check in with them to see how they are doing."

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Ask: “What’s something you have learned that helps people heal as they move through the loss of a friend or loved one?” Gather a few answers.

“Let’s talk about what we can do to connect someone to help if we see any of these risk factors or warning signs. Let’s look at the section next to the four circles, *Breaking the Silence and Connecting to Help*.” Turn participant attention to the bottom left inside panel of their Peer Leader Guide.

## Examples of Connecting to Help

“**988 is the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**. You can call that number 24/7, 365 days a year, and get help for you or a friend. A trained person will be able to talk with you and help you figure out what to do. You can also text **HOME to 741-741** and someone will text you back. If the concern is not about suicide risk specifically, they will still be able to connect you to the best resources for your situation.

“Getting help is important, and getting competent help is equally important, so I want to highlight **The Trevor Project** and **The Steve Fund**. **The Trevor Project** offers culturally competent support services and crisis care for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults. Calling this number at **1.866.488.7386** or texting **START to 678-678** can connect people in the LGBTQ+ community with competent care.

“The Steve Fund promotes mental health and emotional wellbeing for young people of color by providing culturally competent care. You can text **STEVE to 741-741** to get support.”

Highlight any local or state specific crisis resources, as well as resources within your school.

“You can also connect to a *Trusted Adult* in your school and community or connect with the school counselor. You can either go with your friend to talk to someone, or you can reach out and say, 'I'm worried about so-and-so, but I don't want them to know it is me who told you. Will you check on them?' If you feel comfortable, then gather any questions from participants.”

## Game or Grounding Exercise (5-7 minutes)

Here, we recommend refreshing brains and bodies with a game, breathwork, or energizing activity of your choice. Consider one of these Breathing Exercises or Rock Paper Scissors Tournament.

## One Part Planning: Peer Leader Wellness Plans (10-12 minutes)

Pass out Peer Leader Wellness Plans. Invite the team to take 10 minutes to fill out their wellness plans independently, then take a few minutes to discuss any questions or thoughts that might have come up. Feel free to play music while they are writing!

## Closing (1-2 minutes)

“Thank you for reflecting and sharing with us today. You can be *Agents of Change and Connectors to Help* in your school community, and today’s conversation helps us learn more about how we can all get connected to the help we need and deserve. Connecting to help is one way to use your voice and actions to create positive change.”