

# Activity Tip Sheet: Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Activities for Young People

The **Directing Change Program and Film Contest** runs film and art contests where youth learn about suicide prevention, mental health, and other health topics, apply their knowledge, and share their voice in their community. Youth between ages 12-25 can submit to the annual Directing Change Film Contest or the monthly Hope and Justice Contest. **Encourage youth to submit their work and learn how to get started by visiting: [gallery.directingchange.org/contest/](https://gallery.directingchange.org/contest/)**



The Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet is intended to help individuals and organizations working with youth across California with planning and implementing mental health and suicide prevention activities. For technical assistance or support with any of these activities, [Contact Us](#).

## Planning Tip:

As part of your event, have a mental health professional available in case any of the activities unearth strong emotions. Share the National Lifeline at 988 or [other crisis resources](#) and suicide prevention information at the beginning or during your event.

## Mental Health Thrival Kit:

The [Mental Health Thrival Kit](#) includes downloadable resources including journaling prompts, coloring pages, journal pages, and coping techniques including deep breathing and grounding exercises.



## Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet



### Engage Your School with a Door Decorating Activity!

Create a visual representation of resources, strategies, and positive messaging around help-seeking through a door decorating contest.



**1. EDUCATE:** Share information about mental health or suicide prevention by screening and discussing youth-created PSAs. Films, free lessons plans, and other resources can be downloaded on the Directing Change Program's website.



**2. DISCUSS:** Ask students to discuss ideas that were covered in the lessons and films, and to ask any questions they still have. Then have students brainstorm what theme they want to cover in a visual art piece for their classrooms. Some topics they might want to cover include: different coping strategies they have when they're overwhelmed, resources that are available on their campus, words of support for those dealing with mental health challenges, or ways to reduce stigma.



**3. CREATE:** Once the class has decided on a theme, the class should decide how to visually represent that theme in a way that can showcase everyone's contributions – are the individual art pieces all petals on flowers? Fish in a pond? Once the class has decided on a design, have each student write out a response to your theme and decorate their art piece!



**4. DISPLAY:** Use large sheets of paper to fully cover one side of the door. Then each student should put their individual art pieces together on the door. Make sure to use lots of color and write out a big title on the display!



**5. CELEBRATE:** Have the school vote on which class's door decoration is the most creative or helpful! Or plan an event at the end of the week for parents and community members to come onto campus and see the art while receiving resources and information about suicide prevention. Set aside time during the week for students to walk around and view all of the door decorations too, so they can both learn from other groups' designs as well as appreciate the art that their peers created.



#### Case Study: Ready Springs Elementary School County: Nevada

All grades at this K-8 school received weekly lessons on mental health and suicide prevention over the course of the month. Their month culminated in a door decorating contest, in which each classroom created a design around suicide prevention, mental health, or coping skills and every student contributed a piece to their door. Every classroom then had strategies, resources, and messages of hope for students, teachers, and parents to look at as they walked around campus.



## Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet



### Organize a Screening of Youth-Produced Films



Screen films about suicide prevention created by youth, for youth, to encourage discussion in your community. The Directing Change Program has hundreds of 30-second and 60-second films, suitable for ages 12+ that can be screened for free. To plan your screening, select 4-10 films and find a location that can accommodate easy viewing for your audience: an auditorium, an outside area with a projector, or even a Zoom event.

**View and download films here:** [www.DirectingChangeCA.org/films](http://www.DirectingChangeCA.org/films)

#### Additional Ideas:



Let your audience vote for their favorite film and announce the winner at the end of the event!



Invite youth to speak on a panel or lead small-group breakout conversations. Some questions may include: *What did you learn from the films? How do you think this film might change conversations or actions you take in the future?*



Have a speaker from your community or school's mental health department share about the topics covered in the films. Have them bring materials that youth and parents can take home!

#### Useful Materials:

Suicide prevention resources in different languages can be downloaded [here](#).



#### Case Study: Hale Charter Academy County: Los Angeles

Hale Charter Academy planned an outdoor film screening of Directing Change films for their entire school, complete with a red carpet and emcees who introduced each film. The audience rated each film and chose a winning film for the end of the event. After each film was screened, the student filmmakers walked onstage and answered questions about the process, what they learned, and resources.

[Find more information on the Know the Signs website.](#)



# Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet



## Promote Self-Care Through Journaling

Empower youth to take charge of their own self-care through journaling. Journaling allows youth to express their feelings in a safe, private place. Setting up regular times to journal can help individuals feel more grounded and encourage reflection. To incorporate journaling as an activity, first set a time for youth to journal, such as every Monday, or the first 10 minutes of each class session. Make sure that all students bring a journal or are provided one. Then, share a prompt with the class, such as:

- ♥ What are three things that make you feel better when you are feeling down?
- ♥ How are you feeling in this current moment? Try to be as specific as possible
- ♥ Who do you talk to when you have a problem? How do they help?



### Additional Ideas:

- ♥ Have youth write their own suggestions for future writing prompts and select a new one to share with the group each journal session.
- ♥ Play instrumental music during journaling time to create a calming environment, which may help signal when youth should be focusing on their writing.
- ♥ For more journal prompt ideas, check out this [bookmark with prompts](#).

# Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet



## Hope and Justice Art Showcase

Encourage youth to creatively express their emotions and share their thoughts by developing an art gallery of pieces created throughout a unit, semester, or school year! This will allow youth to share their voice, as well as for families and the community to see what youth have created.

First, decide what kind of art pieces you want to create. What mediums do you have, or would you like the youth to learn more about? For example, do you have access to paint, clay, or digital software? Next, give your students their prompts and share sample pieces, if available. Some prompts that can tie into suicide prevention and mental health include:

- ♥ Emotions: How can you artistically represent an emotion you felt this past week?
- ♥ Identity: What makes you, you? What do you wish others knew about you?
- ♥ How does art help you understand yourself? How can art help us find hope?
- ♥ Make a piece of art that shows how you can help someone who is going through a tough time.

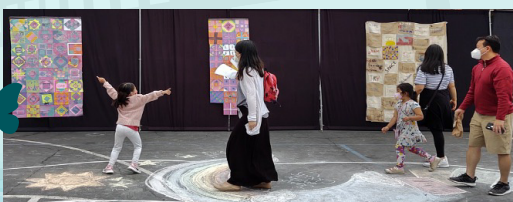
Youth should create at least one piece for the gallery, preferably more. Have youth participate in the creation of the gallery by helping organize the layout, as well as writing the title cards with an explanation of their pieces. Check out the [Directing Change Art Gallery](https://www.directingchange.org/gallery) for inspiration.



Submit art, written works, music, film and more to the Hope and Justice monthly art contest. Win up to \$300 in Amazon gift cards. Submissions are due the last day of the month. To learn more visit: [gallery.DirectingChange.org/contest](https://www.directingchange.org/contest)

**Case Study:** All Souls World Language Catholic School  
**County:** Los Angeles

The school hosted an on-campus, outdoor art gallery titled "Hope, Help, Heal" that students, their families, and community members could walk through for one afternoon. Art pieces created by 6-8th grade students included painted works about expressing emotions, screenings of short films about mental health, chalk artwork with positive affirmations and recreations of famous paintings, musical performances, and a large centerpiece installation with masks that each student created earlier in the school year. Art pieces throughout the gallery included QR codes that visitors could scan to watch videos of the students explaining their art. Throughout the outdoor gallery space were tables with resources about mental health and suicide prevention as well as areas for self-care, including a yoga station, a sensory garden, and a green ribbon tree activity. Students could win bracelets by completing a scavenger hunt in the gallery. Hear directly from the team who put on the event here: <https://vimeo.com/853463723>





# Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet



## Host a Post-It Note Event

Create a visual representation of support for suicide prevention by building a “Post-It Note” installation in a shared space.

To create the installation, first identify or build a suitable wall or space – try to find one that is painted so the sticky notes will stick throughout the week. Be sure to post a crisis resource! Next, ask people to answer one or several prompts on a sticky note:

- ♥ Leave a positive message to brighten someone’s day.
- ♥ What is the best thing someone could say to you when you need support?
- ♥ What is something that is important to you and worth living for?

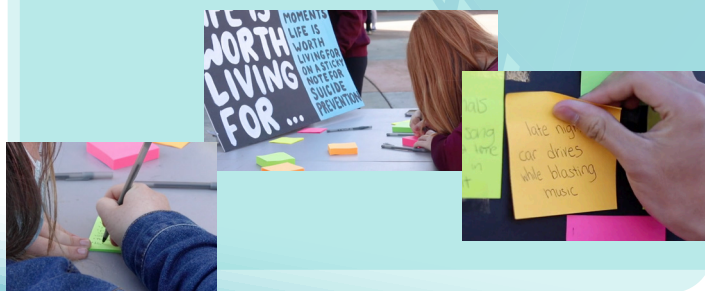


For additional tips download a "Heart Wall Post-It Note" Activity Tip Sheet [here](#).

### Case Study: Whitney High School

County: Placer

Students organized an on-campus suicide prevention activity at lunchtime where they asked their classmates to write what makes “life worth living” on post-it notes, which they added to a public poster board. Students were also video interviewed to talk about their answer and how it related to suicide prevention. The event encouraged students to reflect on positive experiences when life is difficult, and let students know that these experiences are important. You can watch a video about the event here: [vimeo.com/518453296](https://vimeo.com/518453296)



### Case Study: Oakdale Junior High School Alliance Club

County: Stanislaus

Oakdale Junior High School Alliance Club held a Mental Health Awareness Day on campus that they called “Celebrate Your Reasons for Living.” The event included an interactive post-it note mural project, an art show, face painting, screenings of student suicide prevention films, and games. The interactive mural asked youth to write down their reasons for living on post-it notes and create a mural out of the different colored post-its. In addition, community organizations and their local high school joined the event and provided resources for students. At the end of the



month, the Alliance Club also painted a permanent mural on their campus to share a message of inclusion and connection for future students.

# Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet



## Host a Library Event

Looking for an activity for readers? Host an event with your library! There are great stories for all ages that talk about expressing emotions, dealing with difficult feelings, and helping friends. Here are several recommendations for younger kids:

- ♥ A Terrible Thing Happened (grades 2-4)
- ♥ In My Heart: A Book of Feelings (grades K-3)
- ♥ Listening to My Body/Escuchando a mi Cuerpo (grades 2-4)
- ♥ Listening with My Heart/Escuchando con Mi Corazón (grades 2-4)
- ♥ Mindful Mantras: I Will Be Okay! (grades K-3)
- ♥ Worry Says What? (grades 2-5)
- ♥ Tea With Milk (grades K-4)
- ♥ The Hero Next Door (grades 3-6)

Plan a time for a read-aloud in your local or school library. Come up with discussion questions that kids can answer as they read the story or use the facilitation guides provided [here](#). End the event with youth sharing their own ideas via an art project or a short written reflection piece. These can be displayed at the library following the event.

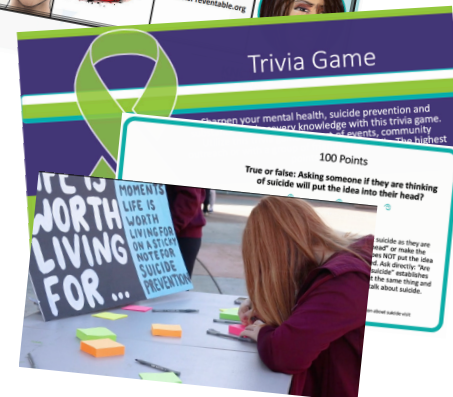


## Plan a Community Game Night

Want to get more parents and community members involved in your event? Host a game night! Incorporating useful knowledge into a low-stakes competition lets families engage with important information while still having fun. Here are some games you can include:

- ♥ **Lotería (Bingo):** Use this bilingual kit to host a Bingo Game to increase knowledge around resources and suicide prevention.
- ♥ **Trivia:** Play trivia focused on suicide prevention, mental health, and substance use. Activity tips, cards, and slides are provided to play the game virtually or in-person.

Both of these activities and associated materials can be fully downloaded from the [Suicide is Preventable website](#).





## Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet



### Create a Lime Green Ribbon Campaign

**Distribute green ribbons** to all participating classes and encourage students to wear the ribbon throughout the week and beyond. When students are asked about the ribbon, make sure they know the lime green ribbon is a symbol of hope and wearing it shows that they are willing to talk openly about mental health, suicide prevention, and difficult things that others may be going through, especially those who are thinking about suicide.

Print out templates of green ribbons that students can decorate, label with their name, and write one thing they can do to support suicide prevention at your school. Post the green ribbons in a central location to show how many students have made the pledge.

#### Case Study: Santiago Charter Middle School County: Orange



Santiago held a campus-wide event as part of their larger Mental Health Matters Month activities. All students received a Take Action for Mental Health green wristband. Students "spotted" wearing the wristbands were given small prizes throughout the week. The campus was decorated with green ribbons and signs featuring positive messages. Each day during the week, the morning announcements included a strategy students could use to relax and manage stress. Different activities were offered to students during lunch including gratitude journals, bracelet making, coloring, music, and mental health trivia. Students who participated received tickets for a raffle to win mental health related prizes such as journals and stress balls. Students showed gratitude to their teachers by delivering snacks to them in the morning. Students were encouraged to wear green shirts, and the cheer team made green bows to match. Students cheered at a staff versus student Mental Health Awareness Basketball game hosted in May. During homeroom, they screened the three videos their video production class created for the Directing Change film contest. Mental health resource posters were provided to each teacher so their students would know where they could find someone to talk to if they needed. Mental health bookmarks were available in the school library.



#### Case Study: Rio Vista Middle School County: Fresno



Students hosted an awareness week which included screening of youth films in classrooms, decorating fences at school with green ribbons, distributing bracelets with positive affirmations attached, and organizing a "Feelings Jenga" activity encouraging conversations about mental health and stigma. Feelings Jenga works like this: each Jenga block had an emotion word written on it, so when a student successfully pulled it from the tower, they would have to read the word out loud and share a time in their life that they felt that emotion.





## Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet



### Plan and Implement a *What I Wish My Parents Knew* Event on Campus

Engage parents and the larger school community as partners in suicide prevention! The What I Wish My Parents Knew events, which originated from the community serviced by the Poway Unified School District in San Diego County, have proven to be a successful way to engage parents and the entire community around mental health topics. The goal of these events is to reduce risk, including risk of suicide, among youth by providing parents with knowledge and skills around a variety of mental health-related topics.

#### What I Wish My Parents Knew Agenda:

- ♥ Resource fair for parents featuring local community resources (30 min, optional)
- ♥ Brief welcome/keynote remarks (10-30 min)
- ♥ Two break-out sessions featuring workshops on a variety of topics (60 min each)

The most important piece that has led to the success of the program is the utilization of the youth voice. As the title suggests, a primary piece of the event is to allow youth to share what they wish their parents knew." To get started, have youth provide input on the topics they would like to see covered at the event. Typical responses from youth cover a variety of topics related to mental health, including suicide prevention, academic pressure, and bullying. Second, invite youth and young adults to co-present with subject matter experts during the breakout sessions.

#### Planning Tip:

Want to use a great film about a parent's role in youth suicide prevention? Check out "Dad's Best Friend" here: [vimeo.com/518484030](https://vimeo.com/518484030)

Download a Step-by-Step Guide [here](#). Visit the [Contact Us](#) page on the Directing Change website for support with implementing a What I Wish My Parents Knew Event.

For additional suicide prevention resources for parents visit the ["For Parents"](#) page on the Directing Change website.



## Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet

### Organize a Screening of Suicide Prevention-Focused Films

Raise awareness for suicide prevention by organizing a screening of suicide-prevention focused feature films. There are a variety of different opportunities to host this event, such as during the week in the auditorium while students are in school, after school when parents and other community members can attend, during homerooms, incorporated into lunchtime fairs and activities or as part of end of the year events. You can also share the events with neighborhood members at community meetings. Films can also be shared via a virtual platform!

If you have time to show a full feature film, we recommend screening a film that includes outstanding messaging around suicide prevention. Recommendations are included below. Film facilitation guides for some of these films are available here: [directingchange.org/mental-health-film-facilitation-guides/](https://directingchange.org/mental-health-film-facilitation-guides/)

♥ **According to Greta:** A young, suicidal and rebellious teen gets sent to her grandparents by the coast for the summer where life takes an unexpected turn. (PG-13)

♥ **Angst:** This documentary helps normalize the discussion of mental health among young people – all the while demystifying anxiety, a common mental health condition, and teaching that there is hope for those who suffer from it.

♥ **Inside Out:** Riley is an 11-year-old who has felt a lot of Joy in her life until her family moves away from their hometown. Her emotions are characters who reveal the Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust that she sometimes feels as she grieves the life she knew before and struggles to adapt to the new life she must come to know. (PG)

♥ **A Trusted Space:** Redirecting Grief to Growth: This documentary and accompanying curriculum provide tools meant to help students and teachers navigate and better respond to grief, trauma, and anxiety. The film reminds viewers of the power of human connection, all the while reassuring them that it's normal to struggle with negative emotions, particularly when living through unprecedented circumstances.

♥ **The S-Word (Documentary):** A survivor of a suicide attempt embarks on a mission to document the stories of fellow survivors. [theswordmovie.com/host-a-screening/](https://theswordmovie.com/host-a-screening/)

♥ **Hiding in Plain Sight:** Hiding in Plain Sight: Youth Mental Illness: This film provides an honest look into what it's like for youth to live with mental illness, as well as the experience of those trying to provide help. In doing so, the film encourages the normalization of seeking help for mental health conditions and shows that those who are struggling are not alone.

### Planning Tip:

For all film screenings, be sure to leave time afterwards to discuss the film and allow participants to share their thoughts.

Additional resources including discussion guides, lesson plans, and suggested activities for the films Angst and A Trusted Space are available through the CalHOPE Schools initiative: <https://www.calhopeschools.org/>

*Note that individual screenings are free, but group screenings may require a license.*

#### Case Study: Rio Vista Middle School County: Fresno

Rio Vista planned an event that tied into the film "Inside Out." Students were invited to participate in "Inside Out" Day by wearing a color that represents an emotion. Their mental health team set up a Mental Health Matters booth during lunch where they distributed mental health goodies including bracelets, stickers, pens, "Thrival Kits" and sweet treats to any students who wore a color and explained how it connected with an emotion from the movie.

## Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet






### Lead Youth in Self-Affirmation Activities

We all want to make others proud of us, but navigating pressures from family members, cultural expectations, and societal norms can wear us down. When this happens, it's important that we build ourselves back up. Self-affirmations remind us of our worth, defend against stress, and can help us weather difficult circumstances.

#### STEP ONE. Write Self-Affirmations.

Invite youth to develop their own self-affirmations or use some of the ones below. These statements should remind youth of their strengths as well as what they are grateful for or working towards. Self-affirmations should be authentic to each person and their beliefs.

Example self-affirmations:

-  *I am enough and am loved by friends and family. I believe in myself and will reach my goals.*
-  *I have come so far already and will keep improving myself each day.*
-  *My life is full of potential, and I am grateful for the opportunities in front of me.*

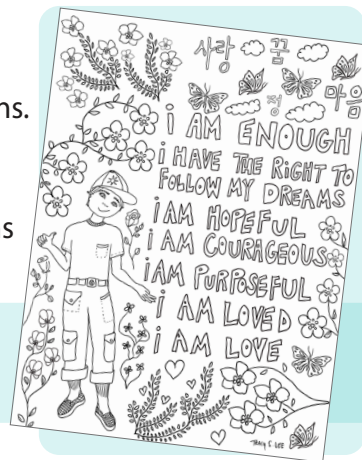
#### STEP TWO. Use the affirmations.

Discuss the importance of using these personal affirmations. Some people like to speak self-affirmations aloud and hear the statements in their own voice. Other people feel more comfortable reading these statements to themselves silently or repeating them in their minds. Regardless of how you use these self-affirmations, it is important to focus on them regularly. Make a group goal of practicing these affirmations throughout your week at a set time, such as in the first few minutes of class each day, before bed each night, or when you need to shift your mindset.

#### STEP THREE. Create something with these affirmations!

Have youth create an art piece with one or more of their self-affirmations. These pieces can be displayed in the classroom or taken home for personal use. One large piece (like a mural or joint digital art piece) can also be created by the whole group to signal a shared set of affirmations that speak to your group's strengths, beliefs, and goals.

[Print out this coloring page for youth to fill in and use as a model for their own affirmations.](#)



#### Case Study: Countryside High School County: Tulare

Countryside created a Mental Health "Affirmation Wall". Student handprints on the wall represent that their hands will always be working diligently to engage in activities that promote better understanding and the acknowledgement that we all matter and are all affected by mental health!



## Suicide Prevention Activity Tip Sheet



### Host a Mental Health Resource Fair

Invite local community organizations that provide mental health, wellness, or suicide prevention services to your school for a resource fair. If you have any mental health or leadership clubs or classes on campus, invite them to host an informational table too!

Make sure the fair is easily accessible to students; this might look like hosting the event during lunch time when students can walk around, immediately after school, or connecting it with other activities like a rally or assembly.

#### Case Study: Life Learning Academy County: San Francisco

Life Learning Academy hosted a "Self-Care Fair" for their school. The event included a painting and coloring activity, tea time and snacks, therapy dogs, a fidget and stress-management activity, and a resource table with Directing Change flyers, pamphlets, journals, as well as health booklets and self-care kits created by students. They also invited community organizations that support youth mental health to table the event, where they shared information on their services and resources."



#### Case Study: Canyon Hills High School County: San Diego

Canyon Hills High School hosted a community resource fair for Mental Health Week. As classes entered the resource fair, each student was given a passport card containing 4 different "real life" scenarios. The students' task was to find the appropriate community resource to solve their scenario. Once all scenarios were solved, they turned in their passport card for an opportunity to win a prize. Resources included mental health providers, substance abuse treatment/prevention providers, the local parks and recreation department, and other local youth services.

#### Eagle Rock Jr. High School Event Flyer



**TIP:** We highly encourage you to speak to your students about what they would like to do and see if they can take on some of the responsibility of planning and implementing the events. Regardless of the type of event you plan, make sure to talk about suicide prevention as an action that anyone can take, and to leave time for debriefing afterwards. Have at least one counselor available for students and/or community members to connect with in case any of the activities unearth strong emotions. Be sure to share this tip sheet with youth as a starting point!