

For Staff: Group Activities for Youth

Digging Deep, So You Can Change

Read the Story: 10 minutes

As a group, read “I Had to Dig Up My Buried Emotions to Save My Life” (p. 4), taking turns. Let teens pass if they don’t want to read.

Discussion: 40 minutes

Draw three columns on the board or chart paper. Label the first column **Hurtful Behaviors**. Ask the group to name behaviors that the writer describes that hurt others or himself [played the “bad boy”; skipped class; hid his feelings; hurt people with sarcastic comments; tried to keep his girlfriend Marline from going to class; almost killed himself]. List these behaviors in the first column.

Label the second column **What Caused Them?** Then, ask the teens to find the author’s explanation or diagnosis of any of these behaviors [played the “bad boy” to hide that he felt lonely and abandoned and depressed; was mean to people instead of “dealing with his issues”; stopped Marline from going to class because of his fear of abandonment; tried to kill himself because his unexamined feelings piled up into depression and hopelessness]. Add these responses to the second column.

Discuss these two columns with the group. Do the writer’s “bad” behaviors make more sense when you know what feelings are behind them? Ask why they think he wants to change [not dealing with his feelings has not made them go away and is holding him back from a lot of good things, and even endangering his life. He doesn’t like who he’s become].

Finally, label the third column **What Helped?** and ask teens to name things the author did to dig up his feelings and stop hiding [shares his story with other patients; starts therapy and sticks with it; opens up to other people; controls his temper better through mindfulness (watching his own responses); is patient with himself and others, understands that change is slow]. Write these responses in the third column.

Ask teens to think about and then write down in their notebooks a behavior they do that holds them back. Next, ask teens to think about and write down what past experience or hurt might be behind that behavior, using the same column format.

Finally, ask teens to write down some things they might try that could help. Then invite them to share. Add new strategies to the third column of the board and discuss. Were any of the things the writer did things they have also tried? Was

it hard to confront their emotions and try to change? Remind everyone that thinking and talking about how to make changes is the first step in steering their lives in the direction they want. ■

How to Talk to Someone Suicidal

Tell the group that you’ll be discussing suicide and ask everyone to be sensitive, because people in the group may have some experience with suicide. Tell them that they are free to leave the room if they get upset.

Discussion: 20 minutes

Tell the group that mental health professionals generally agree on a few things that can be helpful if you’re talking to someone who may be suicidal. Then say and write the following on the board:

If you think your friend may be in immediate danger, call 911. But if you can get them talking:

ASK (AND LISTEN)

“Are you suicidal?” (Asking this directly shows you are willing to talk in a non-judgmental way.)

“When did you start feeling this way?”

“Did something happen to make you feel like this?”

“How can I best support you?”

“Have you thought about getting professional help?” (If possible, end your conversation with getting them to call a therapist or the suicide hotline at 800-273-TALK.)

SAY

“You’re not alone. I’m here for you.”

“You will not always feel this bad.”

“I don’t understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help.”

DO NOT

Assume the person is not serious about suicide.

Act shocked.

Guilt-trip them (“Think of how you’ll hurt people”).

Argue or judge.

DO

Call the suicide hotline yourself if you’re unsure what to do.

Find a trusted adult to help.

Stay with the person or find a trusted adult to stay with the person, until the immediate threat of suicide has passed. ■