



A M E R I C A N

ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY

Suicide is a very serious issue, and an especially challenging conversation to approach with youth. It is understandable (and commendable) that the community stakeholders in your community are exercising due diligence with regarding an upcoming presentation by Kevin Hines regarding his suicide attempt survival, and ongoing pursuit of wellness. As a mother of two teenagers, the wife of a middle school principal, licensed psychologist, and expert about Suicidology and messaging, I am so heartened to hear that your school district is approaching this topic with the care it deserves. In that spirit, I would like to offer a brief review.

The research is clear: You cannot plant the idea of suicide into someone's mind if they are not already considering it, just by talking about suicide. In fact, for youth who are not experiencing suicidal thoughts, it is valuable to learn how to understand suicidal feelings, and how to reach out to others non-judgmentally. For people who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts and feelings, the latest and best research continues to support the power of the "[Papageno Effect](#)." Some portrayals of suicide depict a suicide death as the inevitable outcome of painful life circumstances, ones that many people survive (such as 13 Reasons Why). While such depictions or conversations can increase suicide risk for people who are already suffering, other kinds of conversations can do the opposite. The Papageno Effect, well demonstrated by research, has shown that depictions of a suicidal person receiving support, using coping skills, and eventually recovering, can reduce suicide risk for those who are experiencing real life suicidal thoughts and feelings.

Why is this important for your community? Suicide is a leading cause of youth death nearly everywhere in the US, and this has been the case for a long time. Suicide has been a leading killer of youth long before 13 Reasons Why, social media, or even Dungeons & Dragons (if you're like me and remember the scares from the 1980s). Suicide was certainly a leading cause of death for youth when you were a teen. For

a very long time, suicide has been a taboo subject of discussion, but that did not prevent anyone from feeling suicidal, or taking steps to end their life.

However, as we fight prejudice and discrimination against mental illness and suicide, we have an opportunity to harness the Papageno Effect, in the service of preventing suicide attempts and death, and encouraging recovery. Kevin Hines' story focuses on how he copes with daily mental health challenges and lives well. It is positive, demonstrates coping and insight, and initial data suggests that it may help destigmatize the topic of suicide, increasing the chance that youth at risk will come forward and seek help.

Talking with youth about suicidal feelings in an open and non-judgemental way is a caring thing to do to make your community suicide safer, and is considered a best practice. Discussing the fact that suicidal feelings are usually temporary, and that people who seek help go on to recover is one of the most important health messages your child can learn.

Warmly,

Dr. April C. Foreman

Executive Board Member of the American Association of Suicidology