The Alternatives to Suicide Approach

Paradigm Shifts Rooted in Peer Support
Introductions
“Alternatives to Suicide” Approach

An Alternative to:
• Risk Assessment
• Diagnostics/Individual Pathology Framework
• Force / Coercion

Focuses on:
• Validation
• Curiosity
• Vulnerability
• Community
Clinical Risk Assessment tools can cause uncomfortable power dynamic and threaten authentic connection (i.e. people just give the answers that will avoid consequences they don’t)

Peer Roles are Rooted in Dialogue Over Assessment
Instead of focusing on the unpredictable “IF” (and putting people in risk categories)

We get farther with exploring

WHY?
Instead of...

• Do you have a plan?
• Do you have means to carry it out?
• Are they lethal means?

Try...

• Do you want to talk about what’s making life hard right now?
• Did something painful happen recently?
• Are you wanting to escape something in this world?
• Is there something you need to make life more liveable?
Peer Support is Non-Medical
PRESSURE TO BE “SUCCESSFUL”
GENDER ROLES
HOUSING STRUGGLES

STUDENT DEBT
SEXUAL ABUSE
SHAME
**Instead of...**

- Did you take your meds today?
- It sounds like you are in a manic state right now.
- You have to remember that you are just like a diabetic.
- I am bipolar, too, so you should do what I did.

**Try...**

- What are you feeling right now?
- It makes sense that you are feeling angry, sad, isolated.
- Are there times when this feels less heavy?
- I am here. I am listening. We can just sit in silence and cry if you need to.
Peer Support is Non-Coercive and Avoids Force

• We acknowledge institutional trauma and elevated suicide rates post-hospitalization.

• We let go of trying to control behavior and focus on creating connection.
Instead of...

- If you are feeling this way I need to call crisis.
- It sounds like you are unsafe and need to go to the hospital.
- Sounds like you are really overwhelmed. I am going to take over now.

Try...

- Is there anyone we could reach out to together that would feel supportive?
- What do you need to get through this?
- I am feeling overwhelmed by a desire to fix this. How can I best be supportive for you right now?
Role Play
If CONNECTION is the DESTINATION… What is our Road Map?

- Validation
- Curiosity
- Vulnerability
- Community
Validation Builds Connection

• “That sounds really hard…”
• “It makes sense you are angry…”
• “I can see why you feel that way…”
• “I am so sorry that happened to you…”
• “Thanks so much for sharing that experience with me…”
• “I have gone through something that sounds like that”.
• “It must be incredibly difficult to live in those circumstances”
Examples of Invalidating Responses

• “You’re being selfish.”
• “At least you are not….”
  • “That’s crazy.”
• “You have so much to live for.”
• “I know exactly how you feel”
• “But you were doing so well”
• “Did you take your meds today?”
• “You should try a raw food diet”
“What’s going on?”

“How long have you felt this way?”

“What are the things that have kept you going for so long?”

“What has given your life meaning in the past?”

“Do you have any spiritual practices or cultural traditions that have helped you feel inspired or connected?”

“What makes you feel strong?”

“What would you like your life to look like?”

“Can you name what you are feeling? Sad, fearful, angry?”

“Is there something you need to let go of… that needs to end in your life?”

“What would you like your life to look like?”

“Are there any people or animals in your life you still feel close to?”
Just a handful of the many reasons and meanings...

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Vulnerability

- Sharing some of your own experience… “I have felt really angry at the world too sometimes… it has made me want to end my life.”

- Being open and honest about your own emotional state… “I would feel sad if I never saw you again…” “I don’t know what to say right now… but I am here to listen.”

- This includes being honest about limitations … “I want to be supportive but I will need to leave in half an hour… is there another person you trust to talk about this with?”
“Are there ever times when you don’t feel like dying? What are you doing in those moments?”

“Are there people in your life you still feel connected to? Is there anything that gives you a sense of purpose?”

- Possibilities extend beyond “Alternatives to Suicide” groups: spiritual communities, social justice organizations, reading groups, listening to and/or making music, martial arts, yoga, etc.

“Are there things that you want to do before your life ends?”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VALIDATION</th>
<th>CURIOSITY</th>
<th>VULNERABILITY</th>
<th>COMMUNITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It makes sense that…</td>
<td>What does that mean to you?</td>
<td>When something like that happened to me…</td>
<td>Do you know other people who’ve struggled with…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for trusting me…</td>
<td>What has kept you alive so far?</td>
<td>When I have felt really angry like that, I…</td>
<td>Have you asked anyone else about…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d be [feeling] too…</td>
<td>What happened around the time you started feeling that way?</td>
<td>I’m feeling afraid, but I want to be here with you…</td>
<td>Who are the people in your life that have helped in the past…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s so wrong that… I am sorry that happened to you.</td>
<td>Are there things you want to do before you die?</td>
<td>I just want to be upfront that these limits exist…</td>
<td>Be a bridge, not a life raft…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I’m grateful you shared this with me. And, this is also hard for me to hold alone with you. Are there any other supports or people in your life you might also share these thoughts with too?”
IF WE WANT TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH, WE NEED TO DIG DEEPER.

PHARMA

MEDELICAL MODEL

DSM

PATHOLOGIZATION

INDIVIDUALISM

DEPRESSION

PTSD

MARIJUANA

ALCOHOL

DIABETES

OBESITY

WEALTH

POVERTY

INEQUALITY

DISABILITY

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

GENDER DISCRIMINATION

HOMOPHOBIA

XENOPHOBIA

TRANSPHOBIA

FOOD INSECURITY

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

DOMESTIC ABUSE

DOMESTIC neglect

SEXUAL ABUSE

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

MASS INCARCERATION

TRAUMA

DISABILITY

MENTAL HEALTH

ACCESS TO HOUSING & HEALTHCARE

SOCIETAL EXCLUSION

SOCIAL & LEGAL EXCLUSION

ANCIENTISM

ANTISEMITISM

RACISM

JUSTICE

TRAGEDY
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Alt2Su Training Menu:
http://www.westernmassrlc.org/alternatives-to-suicide