
Youth Experiences with Mental Health Resources in High Schools

— Focus Group Findings —

This PowerPoint

- Thoughts and ideas shared here are from youth and young adults that attended the focus groups
- Overall themes pulled from what youth shared
 - Some are word-for-word
 - Others are combined and summarized if multiple youth said the same thing

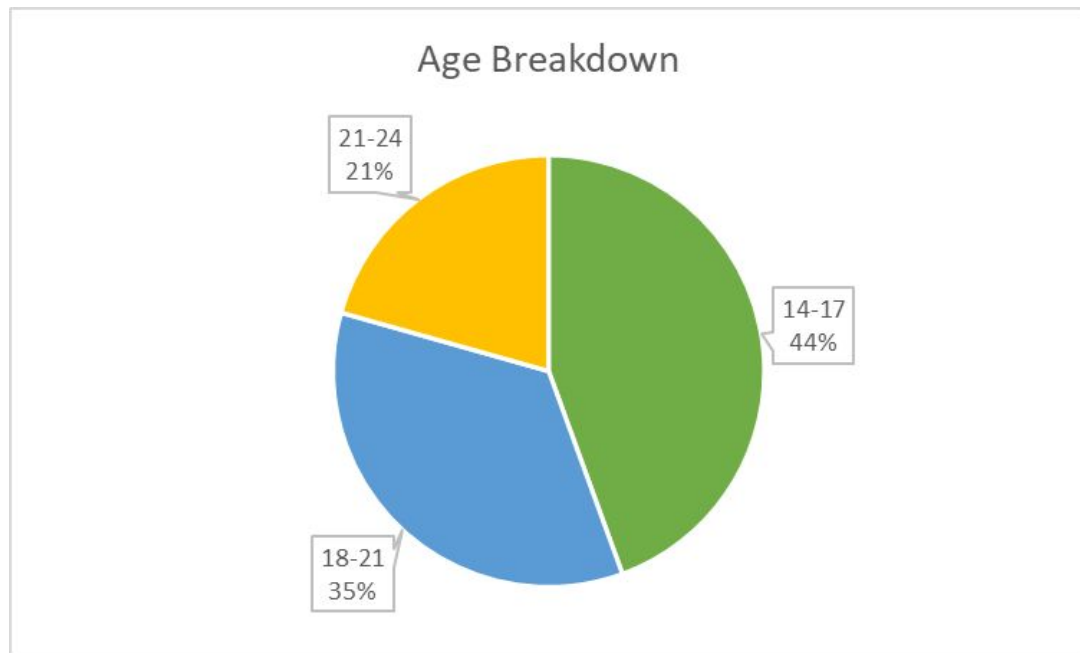
Attendees

We received 160 registrations. This was unexpected and we had to close registration early. Processes will be changed for next time to better account for this.

76 attendees.

4 meetings offered at varying days / times during the week.

This age breakdown is of those who attended focus groups.



Format of Meeting

Time	Topic	Additional Details
10 minutes	Welcome, Purpose of Meeting, Gift Card Reminder, Overview of Think Tank, Ice Breaker	What city do you live in? What's your favorite season?
5 minutes	Adi's Act Overview / Zoom Polls	School: Do you know if your school has a student suicide prevention policy? What do you think should be included in your school's policy? As far as you know, have you ever been a part of a survey or schoolwide event where every student was asked about their mental health or suicide?
10 minutes	Group Discussion / Jamboard	What are your thoughts on checking in with all students directly about their mental health and suicide? What would make that go well and what might make that not go well?
10 minutes	Group Word Cloud	In one word, how would you describe your school mental health resources? PollEv.com/jfraga000 Text JFRAGA000 to 22333
10 minutes	Group Discussion / Jamboard	Who do you feel safe going to when you are having a mental health crisis? Why? Who do you feel safe going to when your friend is having a mental health crisis? Why?
5 minute break		
10 minutes	Group Discussion / Poll Everywhere	What does help look like for you? PollEv.com/jfraga000 Text JFRAGA000 to 22333
10 minutes	Group Discussion / Jamboard	What kind of support do you want when you are experiencing a mental health crisis? What do you wish was available?
10 minutes	Group Discussion / Jamboard	What do you want your teachers, school staff to know about mental health crises?
5 minutes	Closing, Gift Card Reminder	

Purpose of Focus Groups

Gauge student awareness of their school's suicide prevention plans / policy to gather anecdotal information about Adi's Act implementation

Student Self-Reported Awareness Levels

Out of the 76 attendees, 37 completed the initial Zoom poll that asked about their school's suicide prevention policy.

38% were aware that their school had a suicide prevention policy / plan in place

57% of those that were aware that their school had a policy reported seeing the plan

50% of those who were aware that their school had a policy and saw the plan reported that the plan was explained to them

Overall Themes

- When students have positive relationships with teachers, they feel safer and identify them as people they can talk to in crisis
 - The opposite is true when students have negative relationships with teachers, they have a difficult time at school and feel isolated
- Students believe that having a safe, quiet place to go when they are escalated or having a crisis would be beneficial and help them to manage their crisis
- Students want their teachers and their peers to receive trainings on suicide prevention and intervention
 - There were differences in how they think this could be accomplished
- Students don't believe that resources are easily and readily available both at schools and for ongoing supports
- Universal screenings about mental health would be helpful

What does effective suicide prevention / mental health supports look like in schools?

- Safe spaces / mindfulness rooms for students to use when experiencing a crisis
 - Often times, students are sent to on-campus suspension or specific places on campus that serve as 'punishment'
 - Instead of having those types of rooms, giving students access to 'quiet spaces' where they can take time to regulate and talk with someone if they want to would help students learn and use any coping skills or grounding techniques to help with their crisis
 - Having people to talk to as an option is important because not everyone finds it helpful to talk with people during a crisis

Ideas for what to have available in quiet spaces / mindfulness rooms and how to increase accessibility

Peer supports (something that students can do after being trained and can count for volunteer hours)	Resources for how to find ongoing counseling / mental health supports	Available a little before school starts, during the school day, and a little after school ends
Trained staff to talk to with walk-in availability	Safety planning resources	Comfortable chairs / couch
Activities - coloring, a space to write or draw, fidget toys	Crisis lines and other resources for crisis supports	Safety cards - wallet sized cards with information like warning signs and easy coping skills to try
Students shouldn't need a 504 or IEP plan to access this space	A pass system of sorts where students shouldn't have to explain what's going on in the moment as that may worsen the crisis	Training for teachers on mental health (more information on this in future slides)

What kind of support do you want when you are experiencing a mental health crisis? What do you wish was available?

A quiet room to step into

I would want a safe place to go -- and to feel like the school felt like my mental health mattered more than my school work

i just want a space where i can process my thoughts without judgement

Maybe like the room to go to? Maybe adults that you trust

A safe room, more people to talk to

A safe place to talk to someone, with the option to be anonymous

a quiet space to be alone with a comforter like music or books

having built in mental health days or allowing mental health as a valid reason to have days off

Accessible mental health care or resources

Better social accommodations, workplaces and schools being more understanding about the accommodations we need.

I wish it was easier to get accommodations in class. If I miss class then it very stressful to deal with everything and get missing work in on time

long term free therapy

Destroying the stigma around high-achieving or high-functioning individuals and normalizing their mental health

Help getting connected to mental health resources for ppl with unsupportive parents

Being able to talk to counselor or teacher without worrying about them telling your parents (especially in unsupportive parent situations)

A safe person to sit with (I don't need someone to fix it, just be there)

the option not to talk to others

Something to write with so I can process my thoughts

Training Ideas - Adults

- All school staff should receive some kind of training on suicide prevention and intervention
 - Specifically, training on warning signs of a crisis was mentioned as a high priority
- It's important to train more than teachers and counselors
 - Any staff that has an interaction with a student should be trained because anyone can make a difference
 - Including, but not limited to, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, coaches, janitors, substitutes, administrative staff
- Training should be trauma informed, strengths-based and include anti-racist, liberatory practices, and cultural awareness
- A minimum amount of school counselors that is proportionate to the number of students
- Remove police involvement

What do you want your teachers, school staff to know about mental health crises?

It's different for everyone and not something that is being faked

Not everyone wants to be talked to right away. Sometimes people just need time to themselves.

I wish they would know that everyone experiences mental health differently and that not one specific method of help is beneficial for everyone.

It may not look like I'm trying but even showing up to class is sometimes all I can do.

It's not just for attention or to get out of class

i would like them to know that if i am coming to them its usually because i dont have anyone else to go to and/or i need advice

That telling others about mine or other students issues do spread. And that just because I'm gay does not mean you have to treat me differently

we know what we need most of the time, so don't tell us you know us more than we know ourselves/what we need.

One size does not fit all. Need to have responses that fit the individual and their life story and culture.

That all feeling and thoughts are valid and matter and that it can affect a person even to the point where waking up can even be difficult which is why classroom needs to be a more safer pla

I want them to know that sometimes it can be hard to spot and that it can be stressful to open up about it and so when going to them, it can be more last try to reach out

Kids being tired is not always a sign, but misbehaving is. With that being said its shown in many ways.

i just need someone to listen, not to "fix it" or make it "better"

That it's super important to keep things confidential and that mandatory reporting should not be the first reaction to issues.

Not everyone is in the same situation, or handles different levels of crisis the same

This is a REAL PROBLEM, it doesn't mean that they did something wrong, i can't control it and please don't make me feel even worse, everyone copes different

The struggle that everyone goes through and what is needed from them.

It can make it really hard to consistently go to school and get work done

It's oftentimes out of our control but it still impacts every part of our life

The response to them should be careful and methodical. Application: don't necessarily contact parents if a student communicates they are experiencing a depressive episode.

Others experience things differently and have different ways of coping

every single one is different, and there is not only one answer.

It is unique to each person. Being honest and open, non judgmental. Also just being like blunt and being straight up not sugar coating things

that we can't control it most of the time, and that it's important to know we're trying

Don't ignore them

Even when people have a good support system with family, but sometimes i need someone with a different position to talk to

Everybody's support looks different

theres no "one size fits all"

copng mechanisms can vary

Mental health can throw curve balls at us that can effect our ability to be present.

i dont decide when i am having a crisis

You don't have to tell everyone everything that is said to you.

What do you want your teachers, school staff to know about mental health crises?

That not every crisis needs to have an immediate response/action taken.

the difference between passive and active ideation

Teachers should check in with their students and be educated on the signs and symptoms

An understanding of what is going on and what is important.

A good teacher should be able to detect signs of mental health and respond accordingly.

people going through crisis don't need to be treated like they are dangerous or always about to break

Equity

recognizing the kind of mental health crisis and also if it's a mental health crisis or something else (mistake or a physical health condition)

Empathy. I know not everyone has the same experience but there is something they can tap into to connect with their students.

its ok not to be ok

Mental health issues requires special attention.

That students can really hide their mental health well than their physical health and to be aware of the signs like not coming too class, sleeping, too quiet than usual, etc

Even though some people say they're okay, they might be confronting mental health problems.

They should be aware of the signs of a crisis.

if teachers could be able to support you more than just "well let's see how we can do the assignment" they need to have more talking about it and less shutting down the conversatio

Training Ideas - Students

While they think it's good for students to be trained, they also want students to know they aren't responsible for others' mental health

- Provide certification opportunities in gatekeeper trainings
- Include more mental health information in existing curriculum
- Have a course only focused on mental health, which includes curriculum on suicide prevention
 - This would be a mandated course like health class
- Extracurricular activities / clubs focusing on mental health
- Opportunity for those trained to serve as peer supports in the mindfulness rooms
- Increase funding for schools to implement Sources of Strength

What do you want your peers to know about mental health crises?

If you look down on those who are going through it, you can only make it worse. So don't be a bully, don't preach your advice, and don't exclude

Mental health should be taken seriously and not joked about

Cultivate a culture of empathy

its difficult to put what im saying into words

Pay attention to how others are feeling and take them more seriously

sometimes advice is not the best answer, sometimes people just need to vent

That they are serious. I think there is a big thing where people say it's for attention and while that may be true that is no excuse to dismiss people experiences and feelings

Having a crisis or a mental breakdown is not something to joke about.

They are not something to joke about and are quite serious.

That tell an older person would solve a little issue

sometimes i just want to be left alone

To be more mature and serious. That it could happen to you when you're not even aware. Be there, not just for your friends but also your classmates.

It takes so many different forms because no one is exactly the same

That it does not mean that your "mentally ill"

Everyone experiences these issues differently

I will ask for help if i need help, if i dont ask for it, please dont bombard me, and please do not ask someone to come check on me

I wish they'd think before they speak before saying anything about what you're going through. Really assess if what they are saying is helpful or just hurtful

I want them to know that everyone experiences them differently and that they need to be helped in different ways than someone else might

Be open minded and not call others weird or being too much simply for having a mental illness.

Recognize that it's ok if your peer is going through something and that it's not your responsibility to fix it.

its not your business

ALL FEELINGS ARE VALID

that they do not make or shape a person

Having someone to talk with would also help.

Current Student Perception of Mental Health Resources in Schools



Thoughts on Universal Screening for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

- Overall mixed reactions and varying thoughts
- Pro
 - Help to decrease stigma and increase comfort with talking about these topics
 - Would provide a space for people to share what they are going through
 - Normalizes peoples' experiences
 - Bring awareness to schools on what students are experiencing to better shape resources
- Concerns
 - Students wouldn't be honest
 - Privacy - not being able to complete the screening in a private space and a peer seeing your answers
 - Could overwhelm students
 - Why ask about it if you don't have the resources to help?

What are your thoughts on checking in with all students directly about their mental health and suicide?

What would make that go well and what might make that not go well?

I think it's a good thing and can help the school understand what the students need. But it could also trigger people so opting out as an option is very important

i think there is a large population of students that will not take the survey seriously and/or will not feel comfortable revealing the truth

Anonymity is important for accurate answers, but for safety purposes that isn't plausible.

might be a good idea because it might start that thought for people that are just trying to avoid their mental health.

I think that anonymity within the check in would be helpful for making people feel safer while getting help. I also think mental health is very important and is not focused on enough.

might not work because people can lie on surveys, including me.

mental health being a taboo

Yes if it's in private and not like in the classroom

I think it is amazing! It normalizes mental health. I think that allowing students to opt out of it.

I feel like checking in directly might be helpful. If the student was anon to anyone but the person that was checking in with them, it could be good, however,

Being allowed to opt out of immediate action, or mark yourself as low-risk despite your answer is a good option to avoid this.

It would be super useful and would help students recognize that they need help

I think it matters. Sometimes it takes a while for people to talk about things like mental health, or feel comfortable with being open about issues like this

having access from all grade levels

Sooo needed and important to check in with students

i think it would think it's good because then you can get data about the mental health of students - similar to test scores they collect

that might get people help but there are many people who would lie about how they are doing

I think it would be helpful it allows the school to know what population of students need help and schools can use these resources to help that population

I feel like it would be very helpful. But at the same time, you HAVE to have a person who will understand and not invalidate your feelings, also it being anonyms would help

Universal screening may be useful, but individual pulling of students may cause them to feel poor about their public image if someone feels they needed to be checked on.

It would be good to do it weekly or semi-weekly. Some students might not want to do it but if every teacher weekly or bi-weekly was able to take every student aside for at least ten

i dont know if my school would have enough funding or staff to roll out screening like this, especially if in person vs. online

Not all students may have a person they feel safe/open being honest about their mental health with on campus

I think it's a good idea but in reality wouldn't be productive without the resources to connect each student to whatever support they need

ideally it would work, but with so much stigma attached to mental health i doubt there would be much honesty. maybe it would be worth it to help even one person

mandatory reporting could make a situation like that go south quickly

Checking in with students can encourage them to open up about what they're struggling with. However, some individuals wouldn't want to share their inner struggles.

It might overwhelm a lot of student that don't like to think about their feelings & to make it feel real. For some it might do more harm than good. some might help because they tru

Should be some kind of meditation or support for people if they get too overwhelmed by the survey. But I like that everyone would get the check in -- kind of normalizes asking

I think a lot of times if it isn't directly adressed then people won't talk about it. Making it common ground where everyone participates could help break those taboo views

A lot of students are struggling in silence but fear reaching out for help so I think screenings could help get them that support they need

I think there is a need for talking to students directly because some students will want someone old than them to interfere

What are your thoughts on checking in with all students directly about their mental health and suicide?

What would make that go well and what might make that not go well?

Personal interaction with each student.

I think a lot of the problem about this is that people are afraid to admit to people in the school their problems because lots of years of not being able to trust teachers and staff

I agree - but as a general starting point to help the majority this could be a good idea

Having people in the management from various races would help a lot. Most times, students find it easier to reach out and express themselves to staff from their own race.

I think not all students will be comfortable to talk to them directly if you are not friendly or close to them

There would need to be clarity around mandatory reporting and personal information being shared

I think it could work well depending on the situation. It could help someone in crisis, but some people might be wary because of stigma around mental health.

Summary

- Students want help and available resources
- There are some concerns around trust of teachers / staff due to previous personal experiences some have had or their friends have had
- Training would be beneficial for everyone - teachers, staff, students
- Students want to be:
 - Heard
 - Seen
 - Validated
 - Not minimized or written off

Questions?

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