

# SEIZE THE AWKWARD

## Campus Toolkit



American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Objective .....	3
The Issue .....	4
The Campaign .....	5
Two Powerful Sponsors .....	6
Organizing on Campus .....	7
Campus Activation Ideas .....	8–9
Facilitating the Conversation .....	10–11
Resources for Immediate Help .....	12
Actions You Can Take Right Now .....	13
Key Activation Periods .....	14
Resources .....	15
Appendix .....	16–19

## OBJECTIVE

We're up to something big that can really help others. Together, we can change the way we approach mental health issues. By introducing *Seize the Awkward* to your school and encouraging conversations between peers on your campus, you can help.

In this toolkit, we'll share tips on how to help young adults who may be struggling with their mental health, and best practices to have supportive conversations about everyday challenges with them. Help us bring the program to life through tools and resources that both students and administrators can use to *Seize the Awkward*.

## THE ISSUE

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young adults. Young adulthood is the time when mental health issues may first emerge. For many, it is a time of transition, when people may leave home and face unprecedented stress, change and pressure. Of course, effective treatment options for mental health are available, but often there are long delays between the emergence of symptoms and the reaching out for, or connection to, counseling and treatment.

What is a key factor in getting help? Friends; they can play a critical role in supporting those who may be struggling. It's reported that 76% of young adults will turn to a peer in a time of crisis for support. This is a generation that is ready to crack open the cultural conversation about mental health, they just need some support and guidance to do it, and *Seize the Awkward* can help.

## THE CAMPAIGN

The Jed Foundation (JED), the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), and the Ad Council have banded together to create *Seize the Awkward*, a campaign aimed at empowering young adults between 16 and 24 to reach out to a friend who may be struggling with mental health issues.

The campaign addresses the key insight that while nobody likes an awkward silence, taking advantage of the awkward moment can really help those struggling with their mental health. *Seize the Awkward* encourages teens and young adults to embrace awkward moments and use them as an opportunity to reach out to a friend and start a conversation about how they're feeling.

## TWO POWERFUL SPONSORS



The Jed Foundation (JED) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the emotional health of our nation's teens and young adults and preventing suicide. JED partners with high schools and colleges to strengthen mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention programs and systems. They equip teens and young adults with the skills and knowledge to help themselves and each other. And they encourage community awareness, understanding and action for young adult mental health.



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The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), the nation's largest suicide prevention organization, is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. AFSP creates a culture that's smart about mental health through education and community programs and develops suicide prevention through research and advocacy. AFSP is the largest private funder of suicide prevention research and provides support for those who struggle with thoughts of suicide or who have survived a suicide attempt.

## ORGANIZING ON CAMPUS

We're striving to change the culture around mental health and you're an important part of that. Organizing events on your campus is a great way to help create a safe space for students to feel more comfortable opening up about mental health. Here are some simple practices you can follow for hosting an event on your campus. As you review note that it's helpful to start planning and initiating the steps below at least 3–4 weeks in advance:

1

### Location

Find a good location on campus for your event. Consider a place that's convenient, easy to find and can maximize the amount of people you can reach. You also want to make sure you book the room and secure any audio or visual equipment you might need as soon as possible.

2

### Date and Time

When it comes to picking the right date and time for your event, don't be afraid to reach out to organizers of other campus events to plan in tandem with them. You'll be amazed how eager they may be to help. Keep holidays and popular campus events in mind when scheduling your event (you can leverage these existing events to reach more people).

3

### Permissions & Clearance

Make sure to get the necessary permissions and clearances before scheduling an event or posting any materials. Check in with Student Affairs, Health Services or the appropriate department(s) to confirm the process for coordinating an event.

4

### Format

Think about the most effective format for your event. Should it be a group discussion? An interactive activity? A display? Once you identify the format, you'll be able to enlist the appropriate resources, such as IT or AV support.

5

### People to Invite

Determine who should be invited to the event. You should always have a mental health professional readily available during and after any event you host, but also think about other faculty, school officials, students or perhaps a reporter from the school paper that you can invite.

6

### Outreach Plan

Start getting the word out about the events and activities at least 2-3 weeks in advance. Use all channels at your disposal including social media, campus TV, newspaper, flyers, email, word of mouth, etc. See the campaign resources section for links to template promotional materials to support outreach efforts, including invite templates.

7

### Social Media

Social media channels are a great place to get the word out. Post about your event on social, use the hashtag [#SeizeTheAwkward](#) and tag campaign sponsors [@jedfoundation](#) [@afspnational](#). You can also share suggested social posts and copy on personal and school-related social channels to promote the campaign within your school community.



## CAMPUS ACTIVATION IDEAS

DOWNLOAD OUR  
POSTERS [\(CLICK HERE\)](#)



1

### DISTRIBUTING POSTERS/FLYERS/SWAG

Posting flyers can be an effective way to promote the campaign and any events you have planned. It can be as easy as posting flyers in the student center and dorm hallways. In the campaign resources section you'll find postcards, posters and other branded materials to distribute around campus.

*Here are some places  
where you can distribute:*

#### CROSS-CAMPUS DISTRIBUTION

Hang posters/flyers across your campus, including common areas like dining halls, student centers, sports events, classrooms, and sorority/fraternity houses.

#### DORM FLOOR MEETINGS

Speak to your Residential Advisor or Residential Life team about sharing campaign materials at a scheduled floor meeting or distributing flyers and/or posters in each of the dorm rooms before move-in day.

#### WELCOME PACKETS

Reach out to your student government team about including campaign materials in the welcome packets provided to new students.

#### MENTAL HEALTH CENTERS

Display materials at the check in desk, on side tables or on the bulletin board in the mental health center.

Integrate *Seize the Awkward* into campus media channels and platforms including email marketing, newsletters and newspapers, intranet, radio and TV stations. Some of these communications are run by student organizations and others are run by campus administrators.





## CAMPUS ACTIVATION IDEAS (Continued)

### 2 POP UP GALLERY OR ARTISTS DISPLAY

Print the *Seize the Awkward* artwork and commission artists on campus to create their own *Seize the Awkward* poster using our brief. Host a “gallery opening” to highlight the art and inspire a conversation about mental health on campus.

### 3 OPEN MIC NIGHT

Encourage students to come and share their stories through art, song and spoken word. This can be a great way to create an open space and vulnerability amongst peers so that they can feel comfortable talking to each other about mental health.

### 4 OUT OF THE DARKNESS WALK

Reach out to your local AFSP Chapter at [afsp.org/](https://afsp.org/) chapter to learn how you can bring an Out of the Darkness Campus Walk to your college/university. These educational walks raise awareness for mental health and suicide prevention.

### 5 LIVE STREAMING

Consider live streaming an event or hosting a digital panel via Google Hangout, Skype or any other video conferencing platform.

### 6 BRING MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS TO YOUR CAMPUS

Talk to your School Counseling Center about bringing mental health programs (such as those offered by [JED](#) and/or [AFSP](#)) to your campus.

### 5 PSA SCREENING

Show the *Seize the Awkward* film/PSA to students before or after large group gatherings and events including guest lectures, conferences and in student unions to spur a conversation about mental health on campus.

Be sure to remind anyone who might want to discuss mental health with a professional of the campus and national support resources available to them (e.g., On-Campus Counseling Center, Crisis Text Line, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline).

## FACILITATING THE CONVERSATION

When gathering people to have a conversation around mental health issues, be sure to involve a mental health professional that can help facilitate the conversation. Here are some questions (and some notes to help guide the conversation) you can ask students that can spark a thoughtful discussion:

*Have you ever experienced an awkward moment of silence with a friend? Tell us about it.*

While the campaign focuses on the “awkward moment” of reaching out to a friend, the importance of having the helpful conversation - in spite of it being potentially awkward - should be the goal of this discussion.

*What's your favorite way to check in with a friend?*

There are a variety of ways one can check in, but simply having a caring conversation and “being there” is a great start. Ongoing communication can help to determine whether a friend is doing better or if the problem might require professional help.

On page 18 of this toolkit, we've provided a list of additional conversation starters that can be helpful to students.

*What are the benefits to reaching out to a friend or peer when they seem down or not themselves?*

Reaching out and spending time with a friend can create a feeling of connectedness and lower the risk of mental health problems or self-harm.

*Were you ever in a situation where you felt that you should reach out to a friend? Did you? Why or why not? If you did reach out, what did you say?*

When reaching out to a friend, it's important for students to express concern and be specific about why they're concerned (“you've been missing class a lot”, “you've been looking really sad and never go out with your friends anymore”). This makes it harder for the person to simply dismiss the concern with an “I'm ok”.

In this discussion, it's also important to not make anyone feel bad or guilty about not having reached out to their friend, but to explore why they may have been hesitant and what would have made it easier.

## FACILITATING THE CONVERSATION (Continued)

### Why do you think people don't reach out to their friends when they sense something could be wrong?

This conversation should be around fears of intrusion, making their friend angry or uncomfortable, making things worse or even not knowing what to do when they find out there is actually a problem.

Talking about mental health with friends can be a scary or intimidating thing for students to do, and that's why it's important for us to seize these awkward moments so that we can begin normalizing those conversations.

### What are some things you might say to continue the conversation after you've initially checked in with your friend?

We've found that it helps to ask open ended questions (as opposed to yes/no questions) and not trying to solve their problems. Just taking the time to listen feels comforting and will help them find out more about how their friend is feeling. If a student mentions that their friend does not want to talk and doesn't appear to be in danger, you can let them know that they shouldn't give up - all they need to do is offer to spend some time when they're ready and check in with them again soon after.

On page 19, we've provided some additional tips for students to utilize after they've had that initial conversation with their friend.

### Has someone ever reached out to you when you were down or not feeling your best? What did they say or do that was helpful?

This is a good opportunity to hear from the audience about their own experiences and build upon the conversation based on what is shared. While everyone's experience is unique, hearing what helped someone else could inspire the next person to have that conversation with their friend.

### When do you think it would be appropriate or necessary to get someone else involved (i.e., a professional on campus, trusted adult)?

Let participants know that they should never put themselves in a dangerous position. If a friend is experiencing any of the following issues it needs to be brought to the attention of a trusted adult\*:

- talking about self harm or harming others
- not functioning in school or basic life activities (eating, sleeping, self-care)
- seems really disorganized in thinking or behavior

Please see the next page for additional resources for when immediate help is needed.

\*A trusted adult can be a parent, school counselor or student affairs/residence life staffer. You can even submit a report to your school's student at risk team.



## RESOURCES FOR IMMEDIATE HELP

### IN AN EMERGENCY

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If you or your friend needs urgent help, call 911 right away. Or even take your friend to the emergency room for assistance. If you feel it's safe, stay with your friend or find someone to stay with them until help arrives.

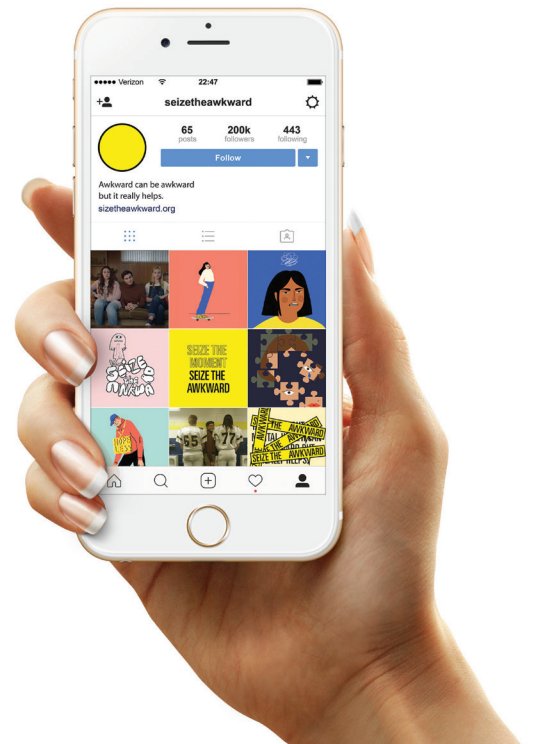
### IN A CRISIS

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Get immediate support 24/7 by calling [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255) or text [SEIZE to 741741](text:SEIZE%20to%20741741). It's free. They won't judge, and everything you tell them is confidential, unless it's essential to contact emergency services to keep you or your friend safe.

## ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE RIGHT NOW

- Support the campaign and learn more by following [@SeizeTheAwkward](#) on Instagram and the campaign sponsors [@jedfoundation](#) [@afspnational](#) on all social media channels.
- Share, share, share. Use the hashtag [#SeizeTheAwkward](#) to engage others. Encourage your followers to share the PSAs and the campaign website [seizetheawkward.org](http://seizetheawkward.org)
- Make the phrase “[Seize the Awkward](#)” your own. When you are unsure what to do if you are concerned about a friend – just remind yourself to *Seize the Awkward* and start a conversation.



**SEIZE THE AWKWARD**

## KEY ACTIVATION PERIODS

If you organize and activate events around certain recognized moments on the calendar, you can propel added attention to your movement and maximize the impact. Here are some of the best moments to activate around:

National Awkward Moments Day (MARCH)

Mental Health Awareness Month (MAY)

National Best Friends Day (JUNE)

Back-to-School (AUGUST/SEPTEMBER)

National Suicide Prevention Month (SEPTEMBER)

World Suicide Prevention Day (SEPTEMBER)

World Mental Health Day (OCTOBER)

## RESOURCES (Click on links below)

[Campaign Background](#)

[Campaign PSAs](#)

[Social Media Copy and Assets](#)

[Templates & Promotional Assets](#)

[SWAG](#)



# SEIZE THE AWKWARD

## Appendix



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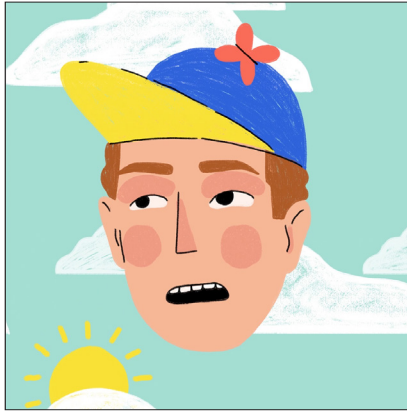


## KNOW THE SIGNS

**IS YOUR FRIEND GOING THROUGH A TOUGH TIME?** There's a number of signs to watch out for. But you know your friends best, so trust your gut. And if something seems wrong, ask.



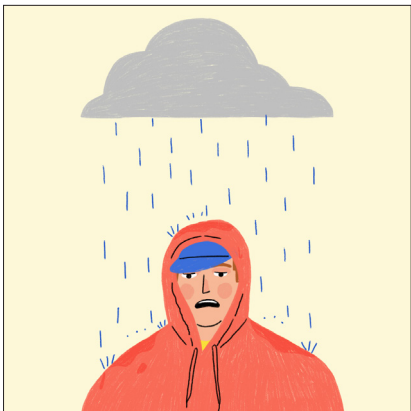
They don't feel like hanging out as much



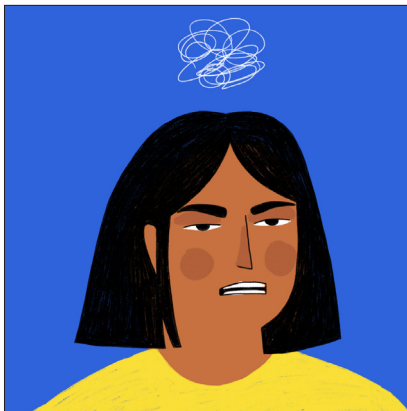
Their mind seems to be somewhere else



They're so anxious, they can't relax



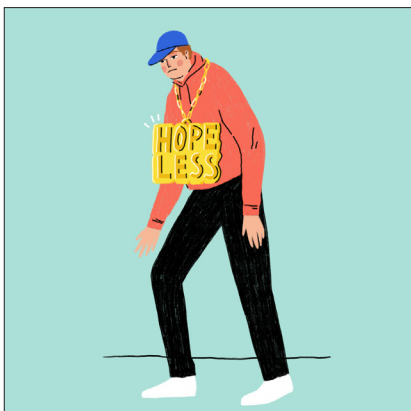
They've gotten negative about life



They're not acting like themselves and are more irritable than usual



They're taking more risks than usual



They talk about feeling hopeless



They're taking more drugs or drinking more



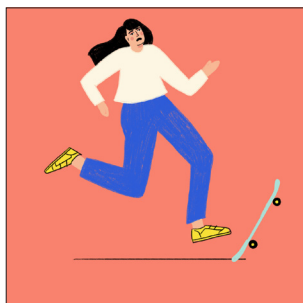
They're harming themselves

## STARTING A CONVERSATION

**NO NEED TO BE AN EXPERT. JUST BE A FRIEND.** These tips should make starting a conversation about mental health a lot less awkward.

- Keep it casual. Relax: think of it as a chill chat, not a therapy session.
- Listen up. Let them take the lead.
- Avoid offering advice or trying to fix their problems.
- Let them know it's OK to feel the way they do.
- Make yourself available. Be the friend they can rely on.
- Ask open-ended questions. Help them to talk, not just say “yes” or “no”.
- Let them open up at their own speed.
- Don't demand answers or force them to say anything they're not ready to.
- Encourage them to talk to an expert.
- Tell them you won't ever judge them.
- Let them know that this won't change how you feel about them.
- Ask them if they have seen a doctor.

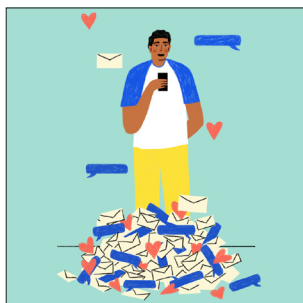
## AFTER THE CONVERSATION



**YOU SEIZED THE AWKWARD. WHAT NOW?** Keep checking in, and if you want to do more, there's a bunch of other ways to help your friend:

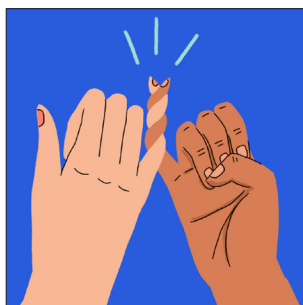
### Don't Give Up

Maybe the first attempt didn't go so well or maybe they just weren't ready to talk. Show your friend that you're there for them. Stay available and keep checking in.



### Keep Invitations Coming

Even if they don't accept, it's important to keep offering because it still helps. Rejection probably isn't personal. Let your friend know you're there for them.



### Handle Their Trust With Care

You may be the only person they talk to about this. Show you care and avoid gossiping about them or turning people against them.



### Get Some Outside Help

You don't have to do this on your own. If you need to talk to someone, that's fine. Don't be afraid to reach out for help from a parent, teacher, counselor or someone you trust.

If you're worried or not sleeping out of concern for a friend, it may also be a good idea to get some outside support. Even if you aren't sure that problem is serious, you should still ask for help.