

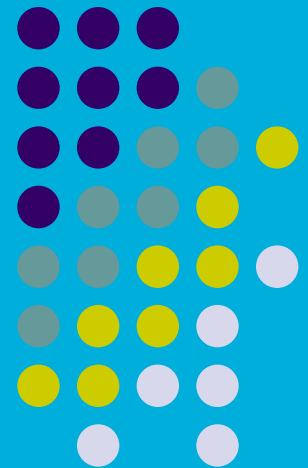


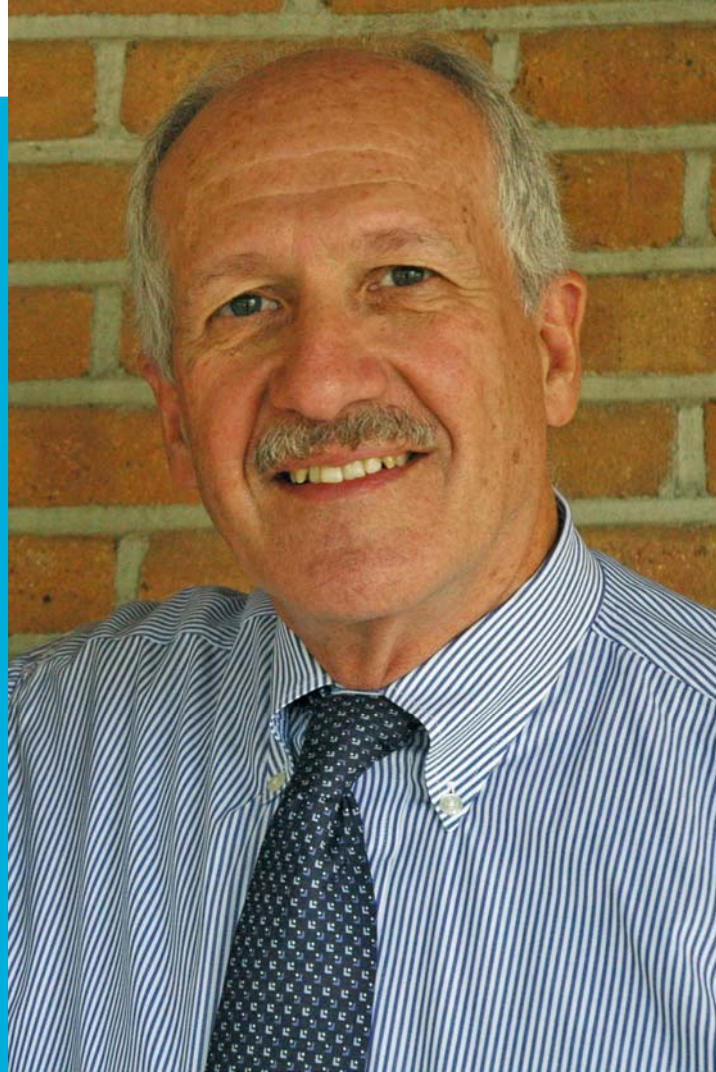
**SOCIETY** *for the*  
**PREVENTION** *of*  
**TEEN SUICIDE**

# CREATING COMPETENT COMMUNITIES FOR YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

**Maureen M. Underwood, LCSW, CGP**  
**Clinical Director**

*Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide*





**In memory of John Kalafat, Ph.D.**

# Instructional Objectives

- Review benefits of comprehensive school-based program- “the competent school community”
- Outline specific program components
- Provide ‘best practice’ example of faculty-staff intervention
- Review model for parent awareness training & student curriculum

# Primary Sources

- “Making Educators Partners in Youth Suicide Prevention”-[www.sptsnj.org](http://www.sptsnj.org)
- *Lifelines: A School-Based Approach to Youth Suicide Prevention*- Prevention Program- [Istrapon@hazleden.org](mailto:Istrapon@hazleden.org)
- Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program- [www.maine.gov/suicide/](http://www.maine.gov/suicide/)

# Context for Prevention: A “Competent School Community”

- Over-arching goal of the school is the prevention of self-destructive behavior
- All members are concerned about each other’s welfare
- Everyone knows where to get help for themselves and each other and are consistently inclined to do so

# Assumptions About Competent Community

## Administration

- Are concerned about welfare & safety of school community
- Recognize that proactive approach can forestall problems
- Support 'zero tolerance' for violence which includes self-violence

## Faculty

- Are committed to provision of knowledge and enhancing life- skills
- Are receptive to self- learning that facilitates teaching and supports classroom learning environment

## Students

- Are developmentally reliant upon peers
- Respond to practical, action-oriented behavior alternatives
- Will use adult support if they perceive it as helpful

## Parents

- Are generally unaware of dimensions of youth suicide
- Require & appreciate accurate information to facilitate effective decision-making about their children

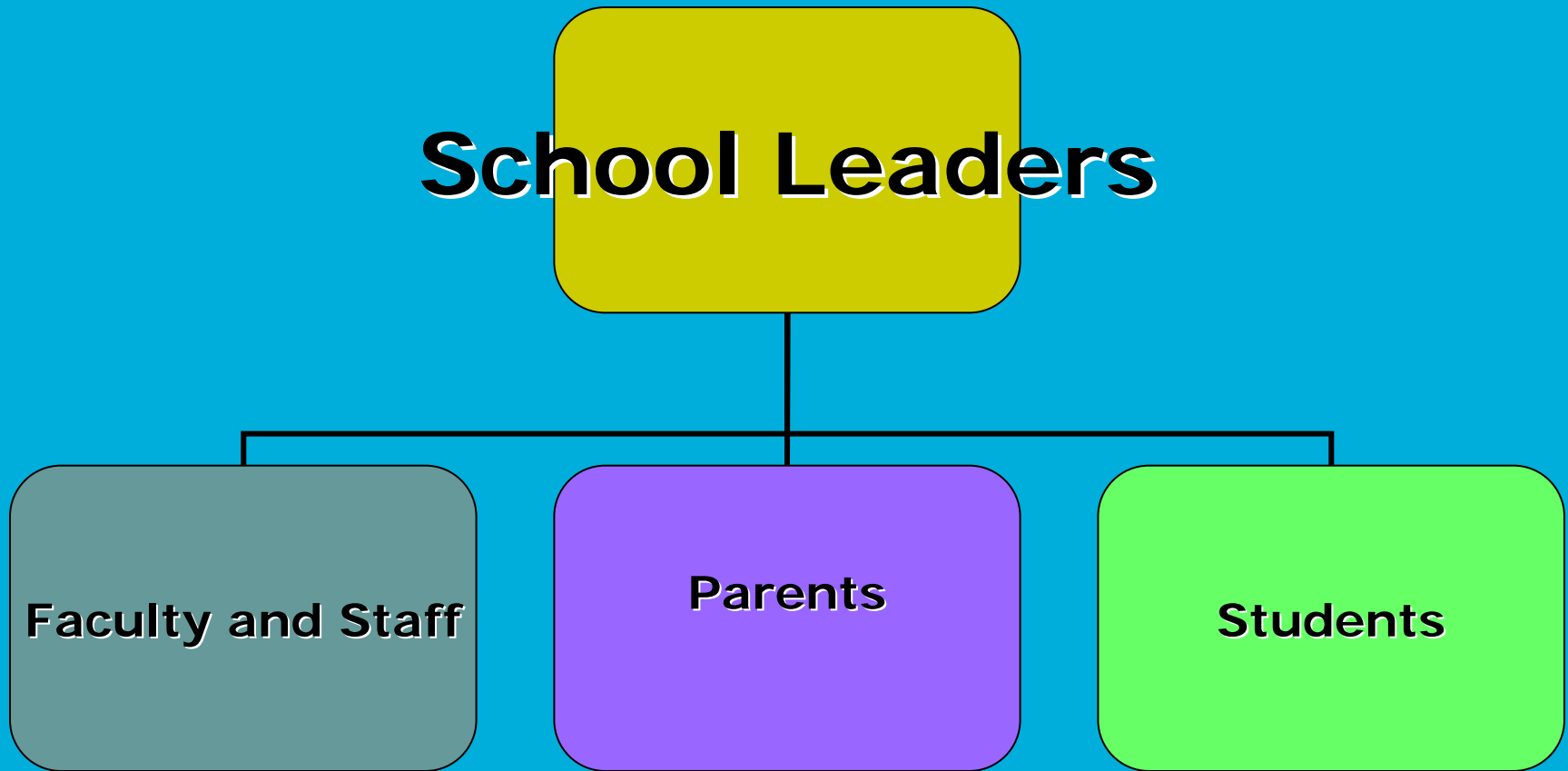
# Role of the School in Suicide Prevention

- Critical
- Limited
- Falls under the mandate to provide students with safe environment where the primary focus is on learning

# Role of Mental Health in School Suicide Prevention

- Provide programs, technical assistance & consultation that reflect & respect the realities of school function & resources
- Avoid mental health jargon

# A Competent School Community:



# Role of School Leaders

- To be committed to suicide prevention and engaged in activities that support this goal
- To be active in the development and dissemination of policies and procedures that deal with at-risk youth
- To ensure that school staff are:
  - ◆ knowledgeable about the warning signs for suicide and
  - ◆ informed about guidelines for reporting concerns about students

cont

# Role of School Leaders

- To connect the school with suicide prevention resources in the larger community
- To offer consistent support to all school staff in suicide prevention activities

# The School Leader's First Step

## ***POLICIES & PROCEDURES***

- Provide the guidelines for crisis response of support, control & structure
- Demonstrate administrative commitment and support
- Outline a prepared and planned response



# School Readiness Survey

- Provides specific questions that address prevention, intervention & postvention for all components of competent community to assist in the development of comprehensive policies and procedures

# Administrative Readiness Survey

- 1. Does your school have an up-to-date crisis response plan?:
- 2. Does the crisis response plan have solid administrative support?
- 3. Does the crisis plan have written protocols on how to manage suicidal (student and/or staff) behavior? Attempt on campus? Attempt off campus?
- 4. Have crisis team members been identified? Are individuals from both the school and the community involved on the crisis team?
- 5. Are crisis team members provided with training?

# Administrative Readiness Survey

- 6. Are substitute crisis team members identified in case regular members are not available due to absence, conference attendance, vacation, etc.?
- 7. Would the crisis team be able to support multiple schools in the event of a murder/suicide situation?
- 8. Do crisis team members have copies of school floor plans for their use and/or to provide to local law enforcement, if needed?
- 9. Does the crisis team meet and practice on a regular basis?
- 10. Are copies of the school crisis plan readily accessible to all school personnel?
- 11. Is there an established method for disseminating protocols that includes who should receive them? Is there a plan for providing new staff with protocols?

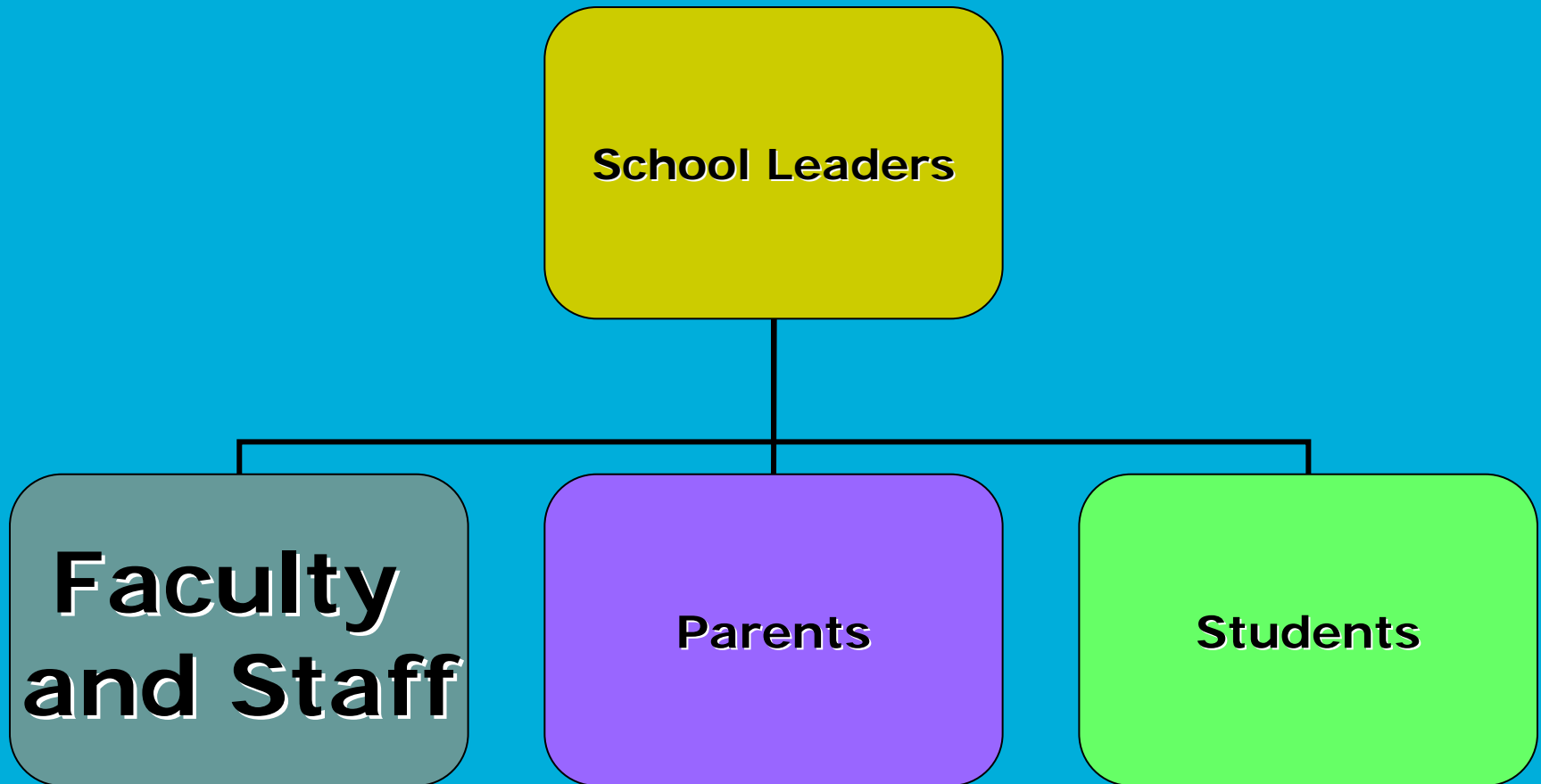
# Administrative Readiness Survey

- **12. Has school administration provided clear direction about legal rights and obligations of administrators, faculty, and staff in assisting with a suicidal student?**
- **13. Is someone designated to track the number of suicides, suicide attempts, and/or referrals for suicidal behavior?**
- **14. Has a policy for maintaining confidentiality of sensitive student information been created and disseminated to all school personnel?**

# Administrative Readiness Survey

- **15. Does the school have a formal Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the local crisis service provider(s) outlining the services to be provided to the school system such as risk assessments, crisis management, and/or debriefing school staff in the aftermath of a crisis? Does the agreement include debriefing parents and community members in the event of a suicide?**
- **16. Does the MOA include guidelines for how the school receives feedback on the outcome of the referrals that are made?**

# A Competent School Community:



# Why Educator Training is Important:

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*According to the Carnegie Task Force on Education:*

School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students, but when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.

# Role of Faculty and Staff

- To learn information that facilitates identification of at-risk students
- To listen to students, verbally and nonverbally for warning signs
- To identify those students who may be at elevated risk based on this identification
- To refer those students to designated school resources
- To be familiar with school policies & procedures

# Goals of Staff Suicide Awareness Training

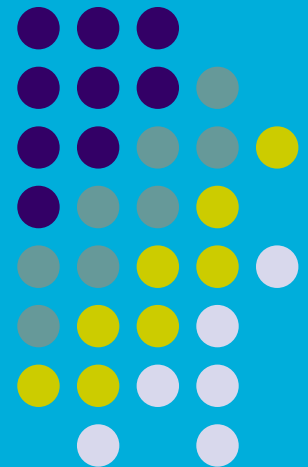
- Suicide awareness training provides teachers with a procedure which they can utilize when they are presented with suicidal statements or concerns.
- It also reinforces their natural strengths as good listeners and caring/competent professionals.

# MAKING EDUCATORS PARTNERS IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

## A Best-Practice School-Based Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative

John Kalafat, PhD

Maureen M. Underwood, LCSW



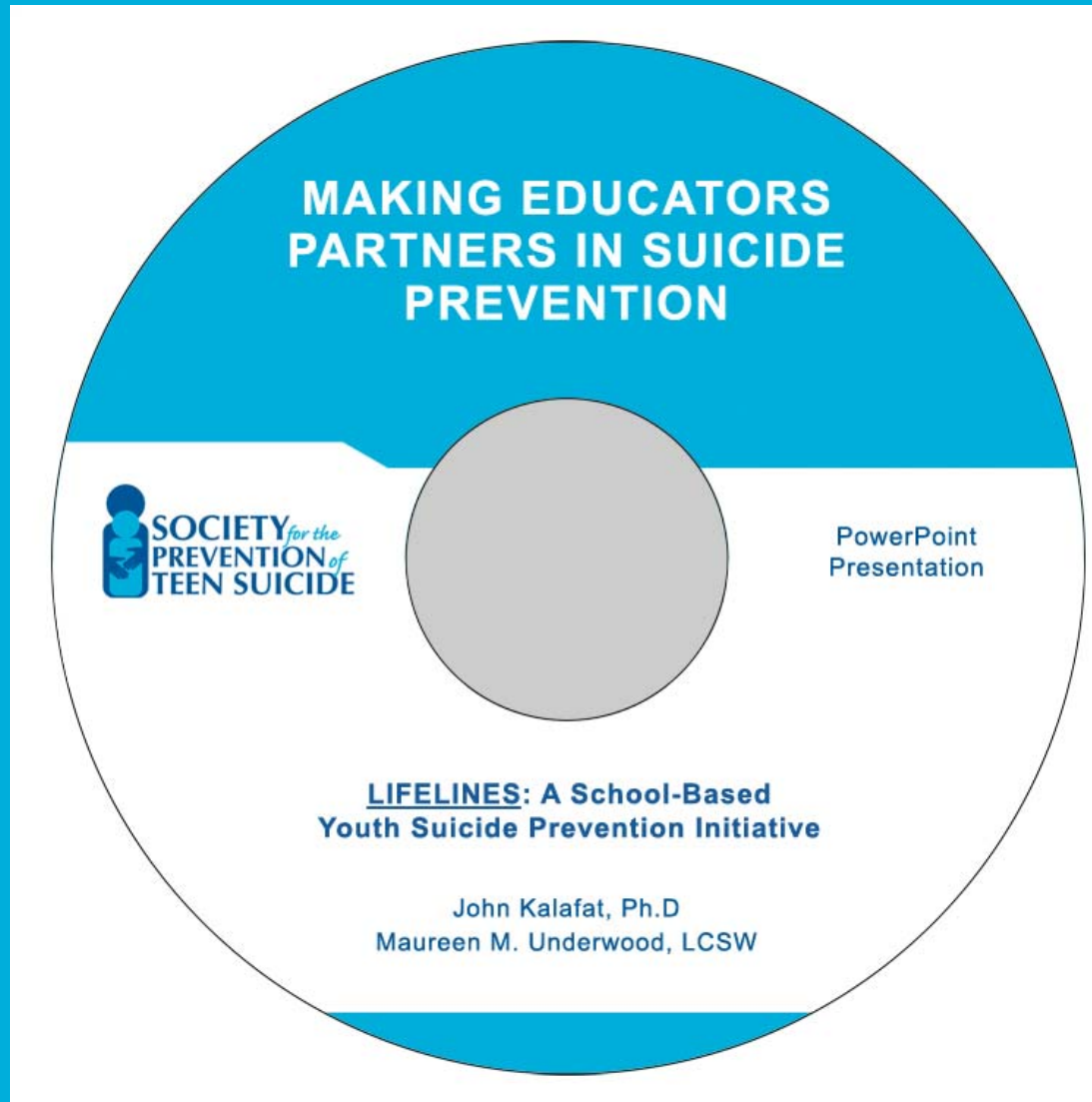
## 1. Anticipated resistance...

- ◆ “ A school is not a mental health clinic...”
- ◆ “Suicide is a rare event- it hasn’t happened in my school...”
- ◆ “We already have too many other responsibilities- we don’t have the time...”

## ... And addressed resistance specifically

- ◆ Program does not focus on diagnosing mental illness
- ◆ Uses survivor accounts to demonstrate reality of suicide & its impact
- ◆ Clarifies how program is relevant to generic teaching skills
- ◆ Designed as both “live” workshop and online program that can be taken at own pace

For more information, go to [www.sptsnj.org](http://www.sptsnj.org)



# Selecting Educational Objectives

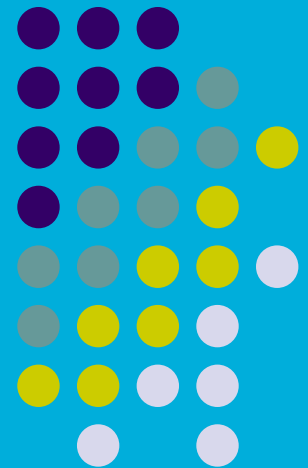
2. Recognized impact of personal values and attitudes on capacity to learn
3. Understood how misinformed people may be about suicide
4. Clarified limited faculty/staff role
5. Provided examples of interactions with students
6. Encouraged additional learning

# Course Participants

- **Online (to date)- 7193**
  - ◆ 81 % Teachers
  - ◆ 10 % Administrators & counseling staff
  - ◆ 9 % Support staff
- **Years of Experience**
  - ◆ 0-5 =47%
  - ◆ 6-10 =14%
  - ◆ Over 10 = 39%
- **No exposure to student suicide- 77%**
- **“Live” Workshop Format- 3752**

# Faculty/Staff Training

*Illustration of Program  
Content*



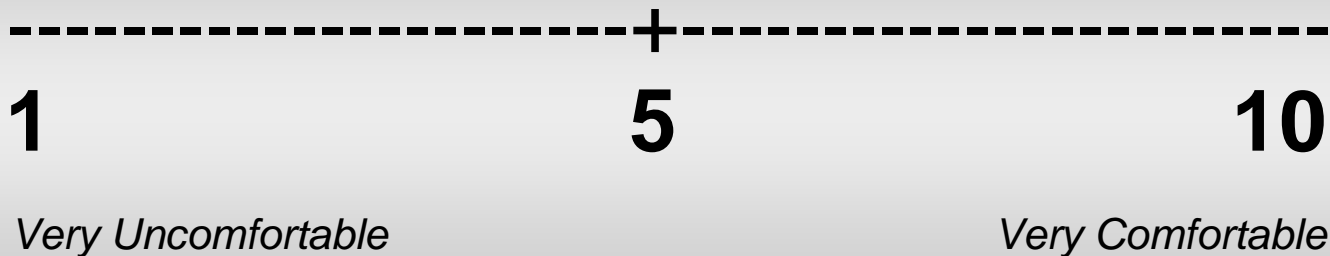
# Your Role Simplified:

- ***Learning***  
*signs of risk in students*
- ***Identifying***  
*at-risk students*
- ***Referring***  
*to appropriate resources*



# Talking About Suicide

On a 1 to 10 scale, rank how comfortable you are talking about suicide.



# Risk Factors / Warning Signs

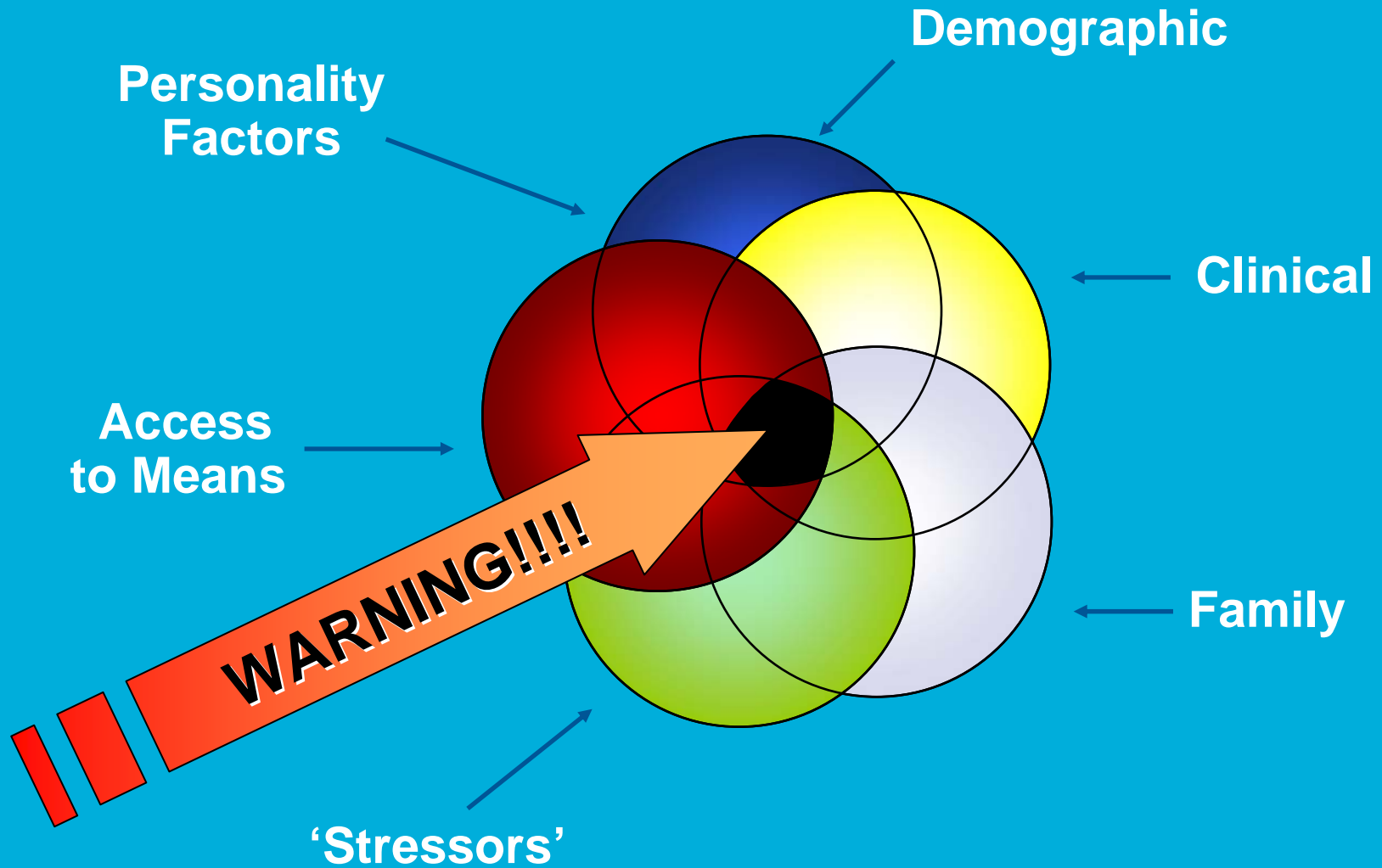
*Red - Warning Signs*

*Yellow - Risk Factors*

*Green - Protective Factors*



# Risk Factors for Youth Suicide



# Warning Signs



***F***eelings

***A***ctions

***C***hanges

***T***hreats

***S***ituations

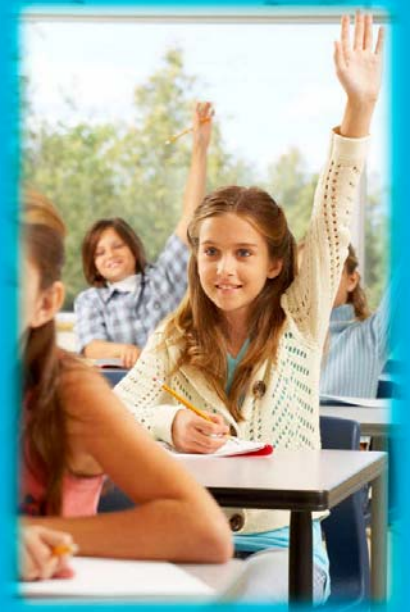
# Protective Factors

- Contact with a caring adult
- Sense of connection or participation in school
- Positive self-esteem and coping skills
- Access to and care for mental / physical / substance disorders



# Fostering Protective Factors

- Teach students it is okay to ask for help
- Give students permission to talk about traumatic events like suicide
- Help students identify trusted adults
- Encourage participation in school & community activities
- Acknowledge student efforts
- Be a good listener, as often as you can

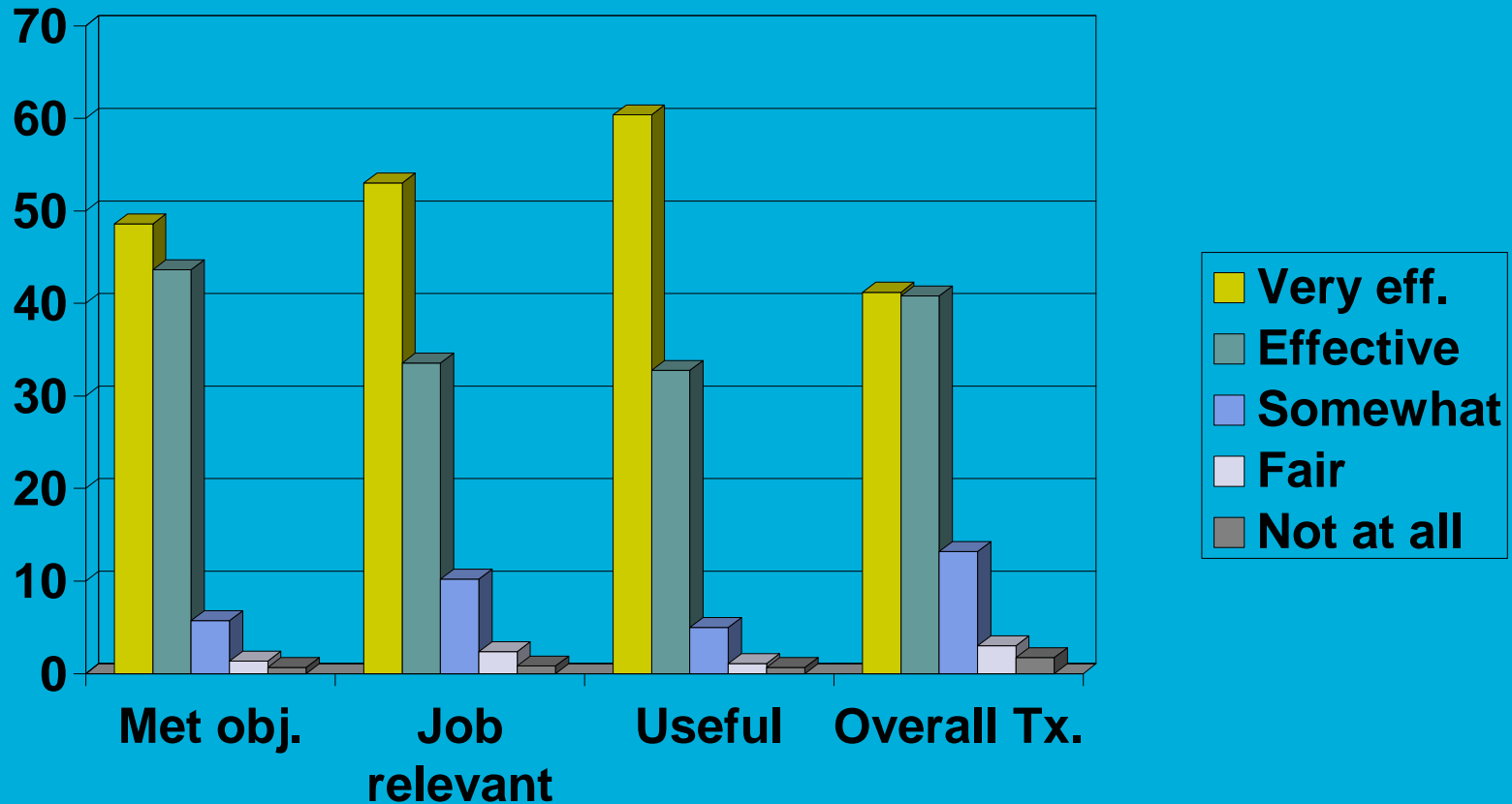


# So Here's Your Homework:

1. Review school policy & procedures
2. Examine personal attitudes and values
3. Consider data
4. Review curriculum for reminders and for ways in which you can foster protective factors (resiliency)
5. Remember your role:
  - **Identify**
  - **Listen**
  - **Refer**



# Online Evaluation of Teacher Training [N= 5959]



# Faculty Training Knowledge Gains

## Information about school's role in suicide prevention

- The reason for suicide awareness training for educators is to help them identify students who might need mental health assistance.

TRUE- **19.1% increase in correct answer**

- The primary characteristic of a competent school community is the availability of on-site mental health resources to deal with suicidal crisis -

FALSE- **16.7% increase in correct answer**

# Faculty Training Knowledge Gains

## Information about school's role in suicide prevention

- Thoughts or feelings about suicide are indicative of a serious mental health problem and should therefore only be addressed by a mental health professional.

FALSE- **20.1% increase in correct answer**

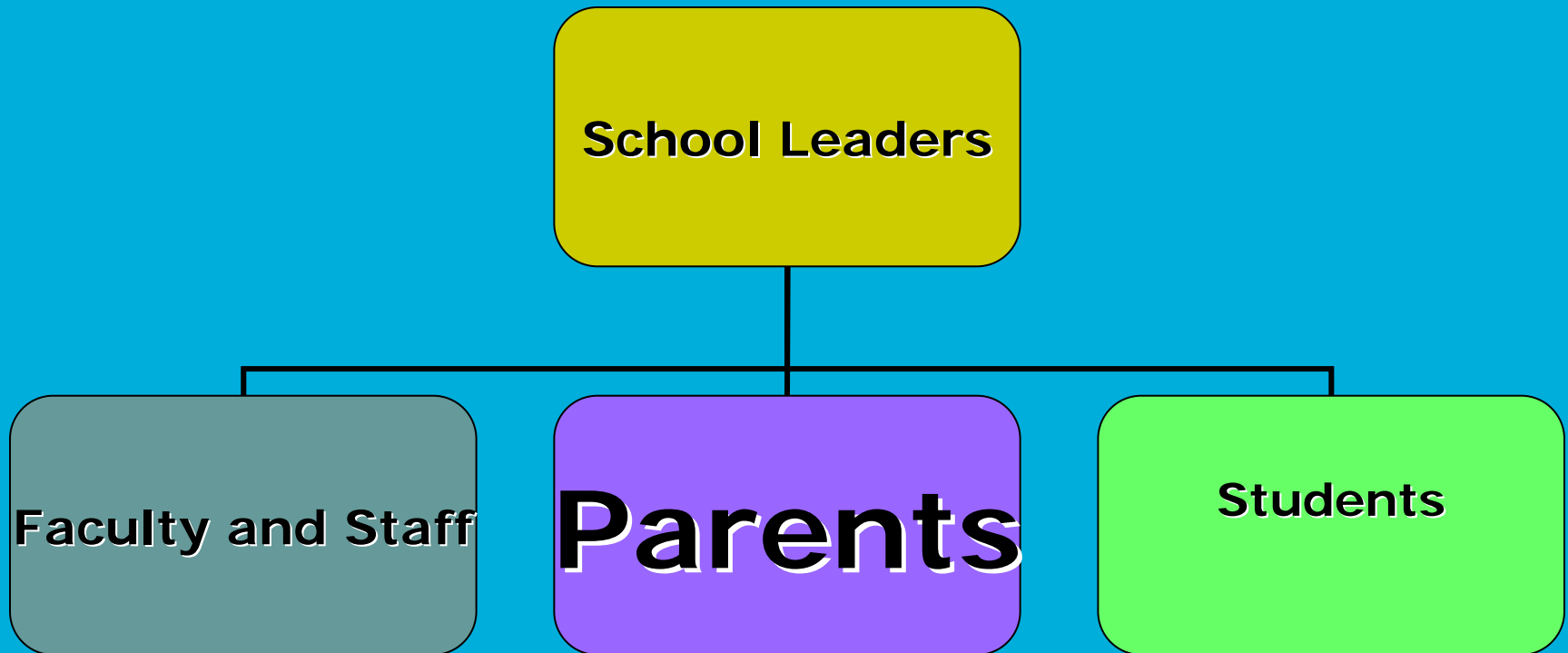
# Faculty Training Knowledge Gains

- Information about suicide
  - ◆ There is never just one reason for a suicide- every suicide is multidetermined  
TRUE- **8.5% increase in correct answer**
  - ◆ Most students do not tell parents about a suicide attempt  
TRUE- **13.9% increase**

# Would You Recommend this Training to Others?

- With no reservations- - 77.78%
- With some reservations- 19.97%
- Not at all – 2.25%

# A Competent School Community:

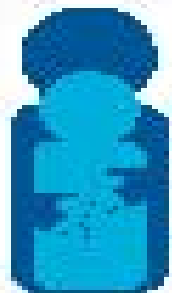


# Role of Parents

- Understand school's policies and procedures
- Recognize signs of trouble in their children
- Know what to do and where to go for resources
- Understand how to respond to other at-risk youth

# “Not My Kid”

What every parent should know.



**SOCIETY** *for the*  
**PREVENTION** *of*  
**TEEN SUICIDE**

# Parent Program- *“Not My Kid...”*

## Program Objectives:

- ◆ Address resistance- *“Not my kid...”*
- ◆ Enhance capacity of parents to address realities of youth suicide risk by modeling strategies for asking mental health professionals questions about suicide risk
- ◆ Empower parents to ask questions!

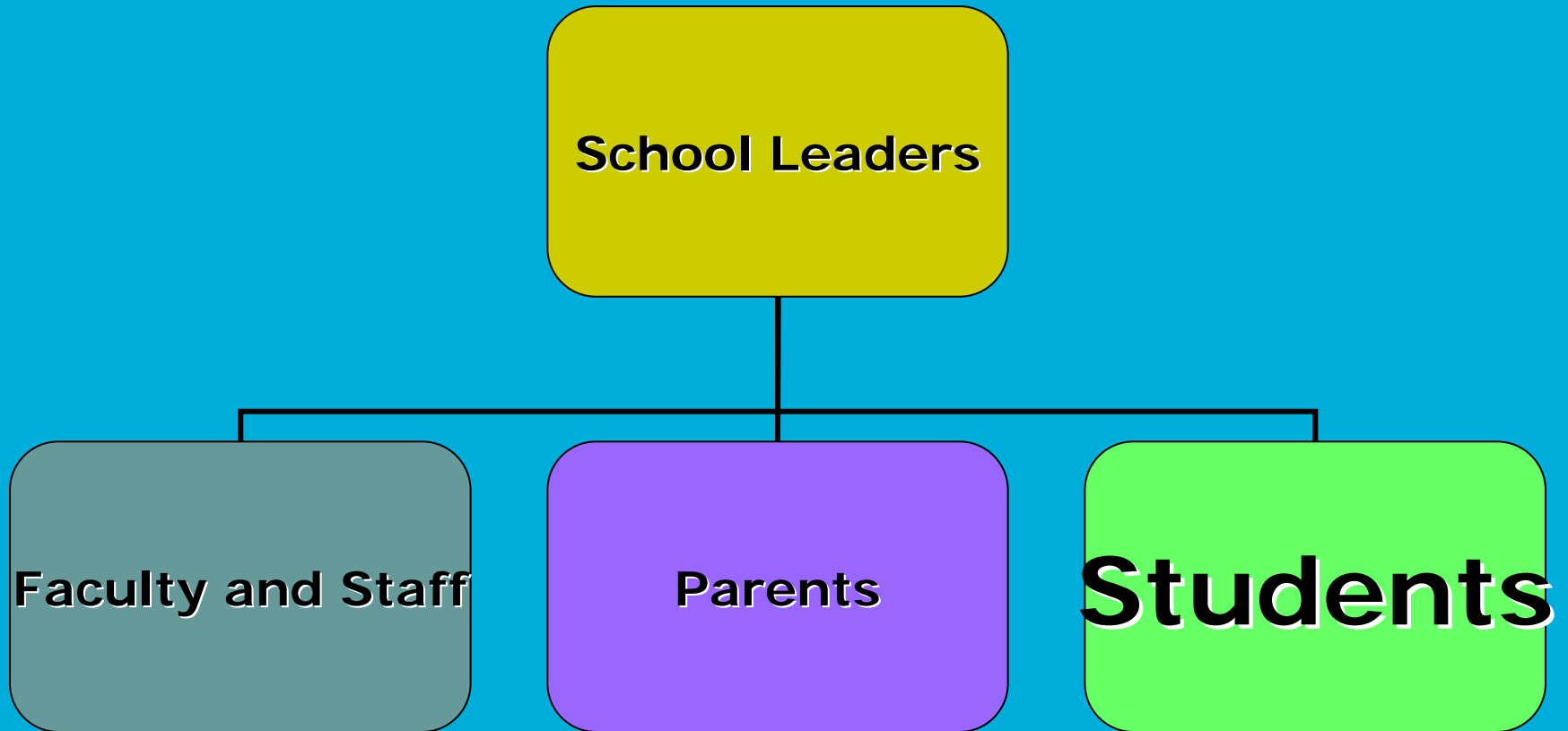
## Program Content

- ◆ Hosted by Lanny Berman, Executive Director, American Association of Suicidology & Maureen Underwood
- ◆ 8 culturally-diverse parents posing questions
- ◆ Addresses: how to talk about suicide, risk factors, responding to text messages, exposure concerns, medication questions, transition to college

## Program Dissemination

- ◆ On-line at [www. sptsnj.org](http://www.sptsnj.org)
- ◆ Hard copies- printed with instruction  
“After you have viewed this, please give to another parent...”

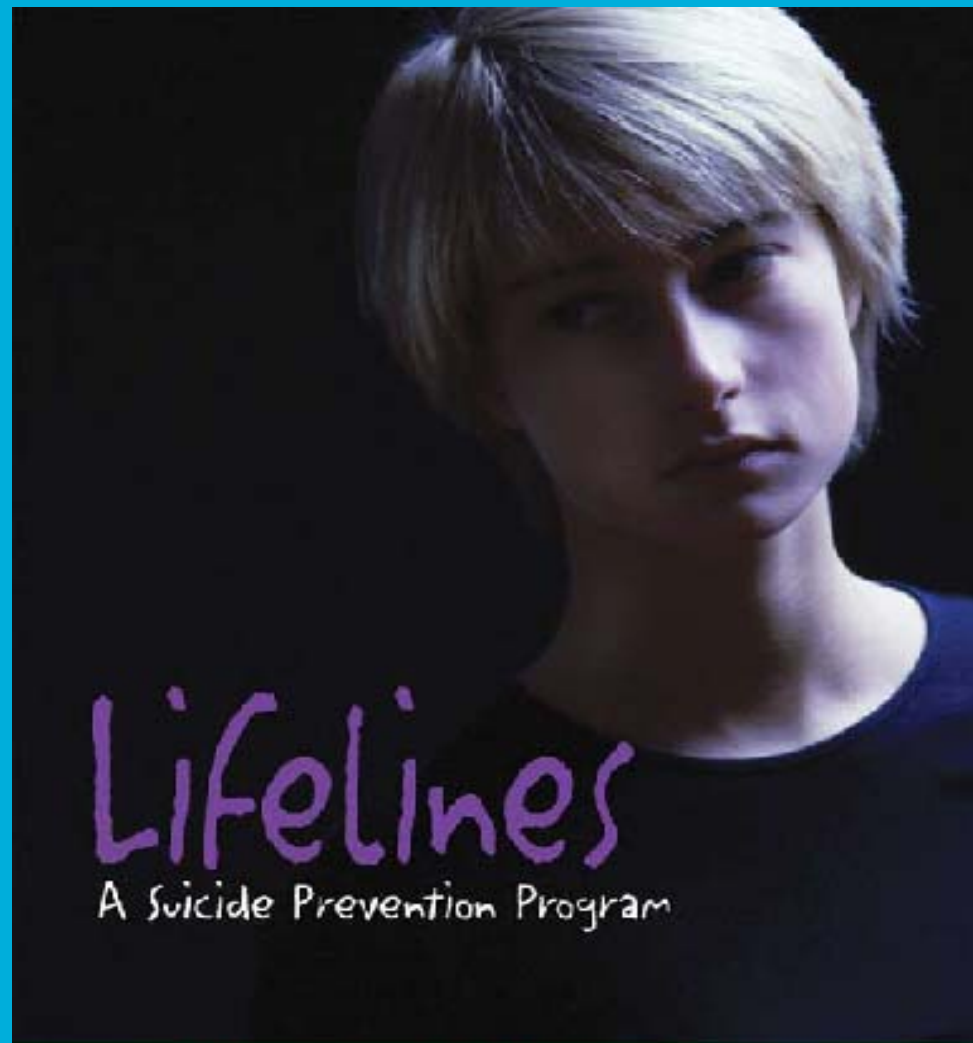
# A Competent School Community:



# Role of Students

- Know relevant facts about suicide, including warning signs
- Recognize the threat of suicidal thoughts & behavior and take troubled peers seriously
- Demonstrate positive attitudes about intervention & help-seeking
- Know how to respond to troubled peers
- Know resources: be able to name one trusted adult and know how resources will respond

For more information contact [Istrapon@hazleden.org](mailto:Istrapon@hazleden.org)



Maureen Underwood, L.C.S.W., John Kalafat, Ph.D.,  
and the Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program, led by the Maine CDC

# *LIFELINES* Components

- Models competent school community with specific, detailed components
  - ◆ Administrative consultation
  - ◆ Faculty/staff presentation
  - ◆ Parent workshop
  - ◆ Student curriculum

# *LIFELINES* Student Curriculum

- 4 session unit usually taught in 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade health classes
- Includes detailed lesson plans correlated to National curriculum standards and audiovisual aids that cover facts about suicide and the students' role in suicide prevention
- Reviews in school and community resources
- Designed to be taught by a school faculty member

- ◆ Established educational principles employed in lessons
  - Problem v. content focused
  - Contemporaneous issues
  - Uses participatory learning
  - Only 3 objectives per 45 minute lesson

# *LIFELINES* Student Curriculum Learning Objectives

## Session 1- When is a Friend in Trouble?

- Define reasons for a unit on suicide
- Examine personal reactions to a situation involving a peer's suicidal behavior
- Examine the ways in which our feelings about suicide influence our actions
- Identify basic facts about suicide

# *LIFELINES* Student Curriculum Learning Objectives

## Session 2: How do I Help a Friend?

- Organize warning signs around **FACTS** sheets
- Name three basic suicide intervention steps
- Identify the words to use to ask about suicide

# *LIFELINES* Student Curriculum Learning Objectives

## Session 3: Where Can I Go to Get Help?

- Recognize specific warning signs of suicide
- Identify the steps in a successful peer intervention
- Define traits of helpful people
- Identify school procedures for responding to suicidal students

# *LIFELINES* Student Curriculum Learning Objectives

## Session 4- How Can I Use What I've Learned?

- Demonstrate ability to help a troubled friend through scripted role-plays
- Demonstrate willingness to help self or a troubled friend by signing a “Help-Seeking Pledge”
- Identify the “wallet card” as a resource

# *LIFELINES* Evaluation

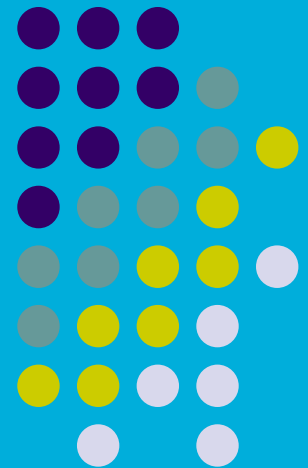
- Pre-post with comparison group
  - ◆ Kalafat & Elias (1994)
  - ◆ Kalafat & Gagliano (1996)
  - ◆ Haines & Kalafat (2006)
- Pre-post with comparison group, implementation evaluation, follow-up referrals
  - ◆ Hailey, Kalafat, O'Halloran & Lubell (2006)

## Evaluation Results

- ◆ Increased knowledge about suicide and school resources
- ◆ Increased inclination to tell an adult about an at-risk peer
- ◆ Increased confidence in school's response capability
- ◆ Increased referrals

*At the end of the day....*

... where do you go from here?



# Your Homework...

- Remember you don't have all the answers
- Evaluate existing resources for 'best fit'
- If you don't find what you want, keep looking!
- Stay current
- Be practical
- Remember: Youth suicide prevention is everyone's business!

# It's in the Shelter of Each Other...



...**THAT WE LIVE**

# Web Resources

- [www.sptsnj.org](http://www.sptsnj.org)  
**Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide**  
*Resources for the competent school community.*  
*PDF files for parents, educators, students,*  
*links to educator training, parent awareness video*
- [www.Maine.gov/suicide/](http://www.Maine.gov/suicide/)  
*Comprehensive and practical resources easy to download*
- <http://theguide.fmhi.usf.edu/>  
**University of Southern Florida**  
*Downloadable guide for a school suicide prevention*  
*program*