Comprehensive School Anti-Bullying Policy:

From 6 Years to Teens

(Developed by ECA-APER in the interest of student safety, for more queries write to ecapresidentindia@gmail.com)

The increasing number of child and teenage suicides are worrisome, especially because most of them are linked to bullying from peers, teachers and sometimes even parents and family members. Hence it is critical for schools to have an anti-bullying policy thus deterring all stakeholders from indulging in it or tolerating the same.

This policy applies to all students, staff, volunteers, and parents/guardians to ensure a safe, supportive, and respectful environment. It covers all school areas, school grounds, school-sponsored events, school buses, and online interactions impacting the school environment (cyberbullying).

Schools should put this on their website and make parents aware of the Anti-Bullying Policy.

1. Statement of Intent and Definition

- **Our Commitment: [School Name]** is committed to providing a learning and working environment free from bullying and harassment. Bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Every individual has the right to feel safe and respected.
- **Definition of Bullying:** Bullying is defined as **repeated, aggressive behaviour** that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is intended to cause distress, fear, or harm (emotional or physical).
- **Types of Bullying (Age-Appropriate Examples):**
    - **Verbal:** Name-calling, teasing, intimidating threats (including rumours or gossip).
    - **Physical:** Hitting, kicking, pushing, tripping, stealing, or damaging belongings.
    - **Social/Relational:** Excluding others from a group, spreading rumours, telling others not to be friends with someone (more common in elementary/middle school).
    - **Cyberbullying:** Using electronic communication (e.g., social media, texts, email) to harass, threaten, or humiliate (more common in middle/high school, but exposure starts younger).

2. Prevention Strategies (Proactive Measures)

- **Positive School Climate:** Establish a culture of **respect, inclusion, and belonging** through consistent modelling by all adults.
- **Curriculum Integration:** Incorporate **age-appropriate** social-emotional learning (SEL) and anti-bullying lessons:
    - **Primary Grades (Ages 6-10):** Focus on kindness, sharing, empathy, and identifying feelings. Use role-playing and storytelling.
    - **Middle/High School (Ages 11+):** Focus on conflict resolution, bystander intervention (safely standing up for others), responsible digital citizenship, and understanding the impact of cyberbullying.
- **Staff Training:** All staff will receive regular training on recognizing, responding to, and reporting bullying, including understanding "hot spots" (unsupervised areas like playgrounds, hallways, and online).
- **Bystander Empowerment:** Explicitly teach students to be **"upstanders"**—to safely intervene, distract, or report bullying.

3. Reporting and Investigation Procedures

- **Reporting:** All members of the school community (students, staff, parents) are responsible for reporting bullying.
  - **Methods:** Reports can be made verbally to any trusted adult (teacher, counsellor, administrator, bus driver) or through designated anonymous methods (e.g., written notes, anonymous online form).
  - **Protection from Retaliation:** The school guarantees that no student will be penalized for reporting bullying in good faith. Any retaliation will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.
- **Investigation:** All reports will be **promptly and confidentially** investigated by a designated staff member (e.g., Principal, Counsellor, Anti-Bullying Coordinator).
  - **Process:** Interviews will be conducted with the target, the person engaging in bullying behaviour, and any witnesses. A full written record will be maintained.
  - **Resolution:** The investigator will determine if bullying occurred based on the policy definition and the evidence collected.

4. Intervention and Consequences (Reactive Measures)

- **Consequences for Bullying:** Disciplinary actions will be **age-appropriate, consistent, and fair**, and will match the severity and frequency of the behaviour. Consequences may include:
  - **Restorative Practices:** Apologies (genuine, not forced), mediation (where appropriate and safe), and making amends (e.g., repairing damaged property).
  - **Disciplinary Action:** Detention, loss of privileges (e.g., exclusion from extracurricular activities), in-school or out-of-school suspension, or potential referral to law enforcement in severe cases.
- **Support for Students:**
  - **Target:** Immediate support, counselling, safety planning, and check-ins to rebuild self-esteem.
  - **Students Who Bully:** Counselling, behavioural contracts, social-skills training, and parental involvement to address the root causes of the behaviour.
  - **Bystanders:** Counselling and discussion on positive intervention strategies, as needed.
- **Parent/Guardian Collaboration:** Parents of all involved students will be notified of the incident and the steps taken (while maintaining confidentiality regarding the other students). Collaboration between the school and home is crucial for guiding the student toward positive behaviour change.

5. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed and updated annually by a committee including students, parents, and staff to ensure its continued effectiveness.

A Guide for Parents: Partnering for Safety and Wellness

Parents are the essential partners in a child's mental wellness journey. Providing them with clear information about the policy and how to support their child—both as a student and as a helpful friend—is critical. Here is a resource designed for parents, covering the anti-bullying policy, mental health support, and intervention guidance.

1. Understanding the Anti-Bullying Policy

We want you to be fully informed about how **[School Name]** defines and addresses bullying and social distress.

- **Our Definition:** Bullying is defined as **repeated, aggressive behaviour** that involves a real or perceived power imbalance and is intended to cause distress or harm. This includes physical acts, social exclusion, verbal abuse, and cyberbullying.
- **The School's Commitment:** We promise to **promptly investigate** all reports and provide support not just to the targeted student, but also to the student exhibiting bullying behaviour (through counselling and behavioural contracts) to foster lasting change.
- **Confidentiality:** Due to privacy laws, we **cannot disclose the specific disciplinary actions** taken against other students. However, we will assure you that the incident was investigated, the policy was applied, and measures are in place to ensure your child's safety moving forward.
- **Reporting:** If you suspect your child is being bullied, please use the **Anti-Bullying Incident Report Form** or contact the **School Counsellor** or **Principal** immediately.

2. Supporting Your Child's Mental Health

Suicide is a difficult topic, but it must be discussed as a health crisis. Your support at home is the most important protective factor.

Recognizing the Warning Signs:

It can be hard to tell the difference between normal teenage moodiness and depression. Look for changes that last longer than a few weeks:

- **Behavioural Changes:** Increased isolation, withdrawal from family/friends, dropping favourite hobbies, giving away prized possessions.
- **Emotional Changes:** Persistent sadness, hopelessness, irritability, or extreme anxiety.
- **Verbal Indicators:** Talking about feeling like a "burden," saying things like "I wish I could disappear," or saying there is no reason to live.
- **Physical Changes:** Significant change in eating or sleeping habits, or unexplained physical pain.

How You Can Help at Home:

1. **Ask Directly:** If you are worried, ask clearly and calmly: "**Are you having thoughts about killing yourself?**" Asking this question does *not* plant the idea; it opens the door to communication and allows them to share their pain.
2. **Listen, Don't Fix:** If they disclose distress, resist the urge to minimize their feelings (e.g., "Just cheer up"). Instead, **validate their pain**: "That sounds incredibly painful and overwhelming. Thank you for telling me. I am here to help you get through this."
3. **Secure Your Home:** Limit access to lethal means. Safely store all medications (prescription and over-the-counter) and ensure any firearms are locked and stored separately from ammunition. This is a critical step in prevention.

3. Guiding Your Teen to Be an "Upstander"

Our policy emphasize that **safety is everyone's job.** Please reinforce these safe intervention strategies at home:

- **Explain the ACT Principle:** Teach them to **A**cknowledge the concern, **C**are by listening, and **T**ell a trusted adult immediately.
- **Break the Secret:** Ensure your child understands that secrecy is dangerous when a friend is talking about hurting themselves. Tell them: **"You must break the promise to keep your friend safe. It is an act of love, not betrayal."**
- **The Adult Network:** Teach them the names of *at least three* adults at school (counsellor, coach, favourite teacher, administrator) they can go to immediately if a friend is in crisis.

Immediate Crisis Resources (24/7)
Tele MANAS- Government of India
Number- 14416

We look forward to partnering with you to create the safest, most supportive environment for every student.

Anti-Bullying Policy: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Here are Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) tailored for both students and parents/guardians regarding the Anti-Bullying Policy.

For Students

Question	Answer
What exactly is "bullying"?	Bullying is **repeated** mean behaviour where one person tries to hurt or control another person who has a hard time defending themselves. It's *not* just a one-time fight or argument.
If someone is mean to me online, is that bullying?	**Yes, that is cyberbullying.** Our policy covers mean texts, posts, messages, and photos that are shared online, especially if they make you feel unsafe or upset at school.
I saw someone being bullied. What should I do?	You should be an **upstander!** The safest thing to do is **report it immediately** to a trusted adult (teacher, coach, counsellor, bus driver). If you can safely distract the person doing the bullying, that helps too. **Never put yourself in danger.**
Will I get in trouble for reporting?	**No.** Our school protects anyone who reports bullying honestly. We treat any punishment or mean behaviour directed at someone for reporting as a very serious offense.
Can I report without giving my name?	**Yes.** You can use the anonymous reporting box or form. We still promise to investigate the issue, but if we can't ask you follow-up questions, the investigation might be harder.
What happens to the person who is bullying?	Consequences are **fair and fit the situation.** It might be counselling, working with them to change their behaviour, losing privileges, detention, or suspension. We focus on stopping the behaviour and helping them learn a better way to treat others.

For Parents and Guardians

Question	Answer
How do I report bullying involving my child?	You can report by contacting the school **Principal, Counsellor, or Vice Principal** directly. You may also use the formal **Anti-Bullying Incident Report Form** provided by the school.
How does the school define a "power imbalance"?	A power imbalance can be physical size, age, social status (e.g., popularity), or simply having information about someone else. The key is that the targeted student has difficulty stopping the behaviour.
How quickly will the school investigate a report?	All reports are treated as urgent. Investigations will begin **immediately** (usually within 24 hours of receiving the report) and proceed swiftly to ensure the safety and well-being of all students.
Will I be told the details of the consequences for the student who bullied my child?	Due to privacy laws, the school **cannot share specific disciplinary actions** taken against other students. However, we *can* assure you that the policy was followed, and we will communicate the steps taken to ensure your child's safety moving forward.
What support is offered to a student who has been bullied?	We prioritize safety and well-being. Support may include academic adjustments, counselling with the school counsellor, check-ins from administrative staff, and implementing a **safety plan** to minimize contact with the student who engaged in the bullying behaviour.
What if the bullying happens outside of school hours or online?	If the bullying or cyberbullying creates a **hostile or disruptive learning environment** for your child at school, the incident falls under our policy and will be investigated.

Understanding how and why bullying starts is the key to preventing it.

How Bullying Begins

Bullying rarely starts suddenly. It typically begins as a progression of behaviours tied to social dynamics and power.

1. **Seeking Social Standing:** Bullying often starts as an attempt to establish or maintain **social power and status** within a peer group, particularly in pre-teen and teen years. A child might observe that being aggressive or critical gets them attention or fear, which they confuse with respect.
2. **Experimental Aggression (Early Childhood):** In younger children (ages 3–6), behaviour that looks like bullying (e.g., snatching a toy, pushing) is often an experiment in **social boundaries** and control, testing the limits of acceptable behaviour. If this aggression is rewarded (e.g., they keep the toy, no adult intervenes), the behaviour may be repeated.
3. **Modelling Behaviour:** Children often mimic aggressive or exclusionary behaviour they witness—either from **older siblings, peers, media, or even adults** (at home or in school). If a child sees an adult gaining control through intimidation, they may adopt that tactic.
4. **The Ripple Effect:** A single negative action (e.g., an unkind joke) might be laughed at by others. This positive reinforcement (**attention or laughter**) signals to the initial aggressor that the behaviour is effective and "fun," leading to repetition and escalation. The behaviour then becomes targeted and repeated, solidifying into bullying.

Why Children Bully Others

Bullying is rarely about the victim; it's almost always about the **internal needs or deficits** of the child doing the bullying.

Reason for Bullying	Explanation
Power and Control	The most common reason. Bullying provides a feeling of **superiority and control** over a situation or another person, compensating for feelings of helplessness or insecurity in other areas of life (e.g., poor grades, lack of attention at home).
Lack of Empathy	The child is genuinely unable to understand or share the feelings of the victim, making it easier to inflict pain. They may not recognize that the activity is "harm" because they can't feel the victim's pain.
Attention Seeking	If a child feels ignored at home or school, negative attention (being disciplined, getting laughs) is often preferred over no attention at all.

Reason for Bullying	Explanation
Past Victimization	Many children who bully others have **been victims of bullying or abuse** themselves. They may feel the need to restore their own power by victimizing someone weaker or are simply replicating the destructive behaviours they have learned.
Peer Pressure/Group Dynamics	A child may participate in bullying to **fit in** with a popular group or to avoid becoming a target themselves. This is often driven by fear of social exclusion.

Curriculum Inclusion: Educating Against Harm

To effectively teach children that bullying is harm, not fun, education must be integrated early and focus heavily on **emotional intelligence and social responsibility.**

Early Childhood (Ages 4-7)

Focus	Activity/Lesson
Empathy & Feelings	**Reading Faces:** Use emotion flashcards or books to help children label feelings (sad, angry, surprised, scared). Ask: "If someone took your toy, what colour would your face be?"
The Ripple Effect	**"Kindness Rocks" or "Feeling Jars":** When someone is kind, put a colourful rock in the jar. When someone is hurtful, put a Gray rock in. Visually show how the Gray rocks affect the whole collection.
Taking Turns & Sharing	**Explicit Role-Playing:** Teach the words: "My turn now," "Can I play?" and "I need a minute." Focus on resolving conflicts using words, not actions.

Elementary School (Ages 8-12)

Focus	Activity/Lesson
Bystander Power	**Upstander Training:** Define the difference between a bystander (watching) and an **upstander** (acting). Practice safe actions: "Tell a teacher," "Get help," or "Distract the bully" ("Hey, let's go see what's for lunch!").

Focus	Activity/Lesson
Social Media & Words	**Digital Footprint:** Discuss how words online are permanent and can be shared widely. Use the "Would you say it to their face?" test. Emphasize that digital attention (likes/laughs) does not equal genuine friendship.
Impact and Causality	**The Crinkled Heart:** Have students gently handle a paper heart, keeping it smooth. Every time a bully says a mean word, crinkle the paper. Even when apologized to, the paper can't be perfectly smooth again. **Harm leaves scars.**

Role of Parents and Teachers

- **Model Respect:** Adults must **consistently model respectful conflict resolution.** Never speak poorly of other students, parents, or staff in front of children.
- **Intervene Immediately:** Bullying is a learned behaviour. If a child engages in aggressive behaviour, **immediate, calm, and consistent consequences** must be delivered.
- **Teach Responsibility, Not Guilt:** When a child bullies, focus on the **impact** of their actions, not labelling them as a "bad kid." Ask: "How do you think [victim's name] felt when you said that? What can you do right now to make things better?"

Robust theories that explain the roots of bullying and, more importantly, guide effective intervention and control strategies. The most comprehensive approach is not a single theory, but an integrated framework: the Social-Ecological Model.

The Social-Ecological Model (SEM) of Bullying

The SEM views bullying as a behaviour resulting from the complex interplay of factors across multiple levels of a child's environment, not just individual traits. Control strategies must address all these levels simultaneously to be effective (this is why simple "zero-tolerance" policies often fail).

The model consists of four interconnected levels:

Level	Focus (How Bullying is Fuelled)	Control Strategies (How to Intervene)
1. Individual	**Characteristics:** Lack of empathy, hostile attribution bias (seeing	**Therapy/Skills Training:** Anger management, Social-Emotional

Level	Focus (How Bullying is Fuelled)	Control Strategies (How to Intervene)
	others' actions as aggressive), need for power/dominance, history of victimization.	**Learning (SEL)** focusing on empathy, self-regulation, and non-aggressive conflict resolution.
2. Relationship	**Close Circle:** Family dysfunction, poor parental supervision, association with aggressive peers, lack of positive role models.	**Family and Peer Programs: Parent training** in positive discipline and monitoring, **Peer mentoring** programs, and classroom activities that promote **positive peer norms** and healthy relationship skills.
3. Community/School	**Settings:** Lack of supervision in corridors/buses, punitive school climate (not supportive), unclear rules, peer groups that reinforce bullying for status.	**Systemic Interventions: Whole-School Programs** : clear and consistently enforced anti-bullying policies, and empowering **bystanders** (creating a social norm that rejects bullying).
4. Societal	**Broad Factors:** Cultural norms that promote aggression, tolerance for violence in media, acceptance of structural inequalities (racism, sexism, etc.).	**Policy and Advocacy:** Community-wide awareness campaigns, media literacy education, and policies that address social and economic inequalities.

Other Key Theories Guiding Control

While the SEM provides the framework, other theories explain the *mechanisms* of control:

1. Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura)

- **How Bullying Starts:** This theory suggests children learn aggressive behaviours through **observation and imitation** (modelling) of others,

especially when those behaviours are rewarded. If a child sees a bully gain status, attention, or material items (like a lunch spot), they learn that bullying is an effective strategy.

- **Control Strategy: Remove the Reward.** Teachers and parents must ensure bullying behaviour is **never rewarded** (e.g., stopping the bully from keeping the toy, not giving them attention) and instead ensure that **pro-social behaviour is explicitly rewarded** (e.g., praising kindness, celebrating students who intervene).

2. Dominance Theory / Social Capital Theory

- **How Bullying Starts:** This suggests bullying is a strategic tool used by students to **acquire or maintain high social status** and **dominance** within a peer group. The "bully" is often popular and uses aggression to signal strength and push others down the social ladder.
- **Control Strategy: Redefine Status.** Intervention must focus on **shifting peer norms** so that high social status is achieved through **pro-social behaviours** (leadership, kindness, academic achievement) rather than dominance and aggression. Programs must involve the popular peer group to enforce the anti-bullying norm.

3. The Bystander Effect (Participant Roles)

- **How Bullying is Sustained:** Research by Salmivalli showed that bullying is a *group phenomenon*, not just a one-on-one issue. The bully is sustained by **reinforcers** (who laugh) and **assistants** (who join in), and is allowed to continue by **bystanders** (who do nothing).
- **Control Strategy: Empowering the Upstander.** Control methods must focus heavily on converting passive bystanders into **active upstanders**. This requires training students in safe, non-aggressive intervention techniques (like the **ACT** model or the **3-Foot Rule** we discussed) and building collective responsibility.

How Media Glorifies Bullying and Suicide

1. Glorification and Normalization of Bullying

- **The "Cool" Bully:** Media frequently depicts bullies as **attractive, popular, or powerful** figures who achieve social success (e.g., getting the love interest, winning the election) through manipulation, sarcasm, and exclusion. This implicitly teaches viewers that cruelty is an **effective social strategy.**
- **Lack of Consequences:** Bullying behaviour is often written as a plot device rather than a serious harmful act. When consequences are mild or non-existent, it **normalizes the behaviour** and minimizes the emotional toll on the victim.

- **The Entertainment Factor:** Content often uses sharp, sarcastic, and cruel dialogue as "funny" or witty banter, making the viewer laugh at the victim's expense and blurring the line between comedy and emotional abuse.

2. Contagion and Romanticization of Suicide

- **The "Contagion Effect" (Copycat Behaviour):** Extensive research shows that detailed, graphic, or sensationalized depictions of suicide methods can lead to an increase in suicidal behaviour, particularly among vulnerable youth.
- **Romanticization:** Suicide is sometimes portrayed as a **dramatic, noble, or understandable solution** to a character's pain, making the act seem tragic but beautiful. This can lead teens to view suicide as a way to "prove their pain" or finally get attention.
- **The Final Act of Revenge:** Some narratives use suicide as a **revenge plot** against bullies or unfaithful partners, suggesting that the act will make others feel guilt or realize their mistakes. This validates the feeling that suicide is a powerful, final statement.

Collaboration: Schools and Parents

Education must be a joint effort that focuses on **media literacy** and **critical thinking** rather than censorship.

1. School Curriculum Strategies

Strategy	Action
Media Literacy Classes	Teach students to **deconstruct narratives**. Ask: "What consequences does the popular mean character *really* face? Does the victim get help? Is the suicide scene necessary, or is it manipulative?"
Analysing the "Why"	Use clips (without showing harmful methods) to analyse the **motivation** of characters who bully. Focus on deficits: insecurity, lack of empathy, need for control (linking back to the Social-Ecological Model).
Content Review and Vetting	Review popular media (e.g., *Euphoria*, *13 Reasons Why*—being mindful of content) and discuss the **positive and negative takeaways** in a clinical setting, such as a health or counselling class.
Promoting Safe Alternatives	Use the **"Bystander-to-Upstander"** training to show that real-life power comes from intervention, not aggression.

2. Parent Education and Home Strategies

- **Establish Viewing Rules:** Parents should actively **co-view** media with their teens, especially popular, controversial shows. This allows for immediate discussion of difficult themes.
- **Use Media as a Conversation Starter:** When a teen watches a show featuring suicide or intense bullying, parents should ask open-ended questions:
    - "How did that scene make you feel?"
    - "If you were that character's friend, what would you have done to help?"
    - "Do you think the show handled that topic responsibly?"
- **Review Ratings and Warnings:** Teach teens to understand and respect content ratings and trigger warnings. If a show includes graphic depictions of suicide or self-harm, encourage the teen to skip that content if they are feeling vulnerable.
- **Open Dialogue on Mental Health:** Normalize seeking help by talking about mental health as a treatable condition, directly counteracting media narratives that frame mental distress as a tragedy without solution.

Anti-Bullying Incident Report Form

Here is a template for a School Anti-Bullying Incident Report Form, designed to be completed by a student, staff member, or parent/guardian.

This form is used to report any suspected or witnessed incident of bullying as defined in the **[School Name]** Anti-Bullying Policy. All reports will be handled confidentially and investigated promptly.

Section 1: Reporter Information

(Required)

Field	Detail
Your Role	Student \ Staff Member \Parent/Guardian \ Other:
Your Name	
Contact Phone/Email	
Date of Report	
Do you wish to remain anonymous?	Yes \ No
Note: *If you choose to remain anonymous, the school's ability to gather follow-up details may be limited, but the report will still be investigated.*	

Section 2: Details of the Incident

Field	Detail
Date(s) of Incident	
Time(s) of Incident	
Location	Classroom \ Hallway \ Playground \ Bus \ Cafeteria \ Online \ Other:
Type of Bullying	Verbal (Name-calling, threats) \ Physical (Hitting, pushing) \ Social/Relational (Exclusion, rumours) \ Cyberbullying\ Other

Section 3: Individuals Involved

Role	Name (if known)	Grade/Position (if known)
Targeted Student(s) (Who was bullied)		
Student(s) Engaging in Bullying Behaviour		
Witness(es) (Saw the incident)		

Section 4: Description of the Incident

Please describe exactly what happened. Be specific about the words used, the actions taken, and the frequency (if this has happened before).

(Use the space below to write your description)

Section 5: Previous Actions

Field	Detail
Has this happened before?	Yes \ No
If yes, when/how often?	
Did an adult witness the incident?	Yes \ No
Did you or the targeted student try to stop the behaviour?	Yes \ No
If yes, how?	

Signature

By signing, I confirm that the information provided is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Signature: _____

Submit this form to the Principal's Office, Counsellor, or a trusted administrator.

How to Talk About Suicide (And Why It's Not the Right Choice)

Educating children and teens about suicide is a sensitive but essential topic that must be handled with **age-appropriate language and a focus on hope, help, and protective factors.** The goal is not to introduce the concept, but to provide safe coping strategies and clear paths to help for those who may already be struggling or know someone who is.

Here is a guide on how to approach this education and why suicide is not the right choice, categorized by age group.

1. Primary/Elementary School (Ages 6-10): Focus on Feelings and Help

For this age group, the conversation should focus entirely on **managing big, overwhelming feelings** and **seeking help. Do not use the word "suicide."**

Key Message	Why It's Not the Right Choice
Big Feelings: "Sometimes, feelings can be so huge—like sadness, anger, or fear—that they feel like they'll never go away. This is called feeling **overwhelmed**."	**Feelings Change:** "The biggest, most important truth is that **feelings are temporary.** No matter how dark and permanent a feeling seems right now, it *will* change. If you end your life, you stop yourself from ever feeling happy, safe, or loved again."
Safety Plan: "When feelings are too big, we need to take a break and find a safe adult."	**Solutions Exist:** "Thinking of harm or harming, stops you from finding the solution. When you feel overwhelmed, your brain is lying to you, making you think there is no other choice. **There is always another choice and a solution.** A trusted adult can help you find it."
Trusted Adults: "If you feel like you want to hurt yourself or disappear, tell a trusted adult immediately—a parent, teacher, coach, or nurse. They are your **safety net**."	**You Are Loved:** "You are valuable, unique, and deeply loved. When you seek their help, it makes them feel loved too.
Kindness/Empathy: "If you see a friend struggling or looking very sad, tell an adult immediately. It's okay to ask for help for a friend."	

2. Preteens/Middle School (Ages 11-14): Focus on Mental Health and Identity

For this group, you can acknowledge difficult topics while normalizing mental health struggles. Use clear, factual, and non-judgmental language. <u>**Depending on the need and appropriateness you can substitute the word 'suicide' with 'self-harm'**</u>

Key Message	Why It's Not the Right Choice
Normalizing Distress: "It's normal to feel depressed, anxious, or hopeless sometimes. When these feelings last a long time or get so severe that you consider hurting yourself, it's a sign of a **mental health crisis** or **illness**, not a personal failure."	**It's Permanent:** "Self-harm \ Suicide is the one choice you can never undo. It stops your future, your dreams, and your potential achievements—all because you're fighting a temporary illness or crisis. **You deserve to see your future.**"
The Tunnel Vision Effect: "When someone is suicidal, their brain enters 'tunnel vision.' They genuinely believe they are a burden and that everyone would be better off without them. **This is a lie created by their pain.**"	**It Transfers Pain:** "Self-harm \Suicide doesn't end the pain; it just transfers it to everyone who loves you. The people left behind carry profound grief, guilt, and sadness forever. **Your pain is real, but it is treatable. Their pain would be endless.**"
Coping Skills: "When you are in crisis, focus on **delaying** the action. Use coping skills (deep breaths, cold water, calling a hotline) to get through the next 15 minutes, then the next. **Crisis passes.**"	**Effective Treatments Exist:** "Self-harm\ Suicidal ideation is often a symptom of treatable conditions (depression, anxiety). Help from a therapist, counsellor, or doctor can manage those symptoms and restore hope. **Help works.**"

3. Teens/High School (Ages 15-18): Focus on Responsibility, Resources, and Action

Teens are aware of suicide. The conversation must be direct, focus on recognizing warning signs, and empower them to intervene safely.

Key Message	Why It's Not the Right Choice
Warning Signs: "We all need to know the warning signs: talking about being a burden or wanting to die, giving away possessions, withdrawing from friends, increasing substance use, or sudden mood changes."	**Hope and Resources:** "There is always hope, and there are always resources. Choosing to live means choosing to fight a solvable problem and choosing the millions of possibilities ahead. **Help is a sign of strength.**"
Intervention (ACT): If you are worried about a friend, remember **ACT**: **A**cknowledge (admit you are worried), **C**are (show compassion), and **T**ell (tell a trusted adult immediately—never keep it a secret)."	**The Ripple Effect of Life:** "Think about the **legacy of your life**, not the final moment of pain. Every day you choose to live, you impact others, you create new experiences, and you have a chance to change the world. **Your story is unfinished, you can create a wonderful future.**"
The Promise: "If you are struggling, please make this promise: **I will not act on suicidal thoughts instead I will talk to one safe person.**"	

Guiding the Conversation: Resources for Adults

When discussing suicide, **how adults talk** about the topic directly impacts a child or teen's safety, willingness to seek help, and understanding of mental health.
Here are resources and guidelines for parents and educators on safely and effectively leading these difficult conversations.

1. The Core Principle: Safety First (Never Keep Secrets)

The most important takeaway for any adult is that **safety always overrides privacy.**

- **The Golden Rule:** Tell the child or student: "If you or a friend ever talk about hurting yourselves or dying, I will immediately tell another adult (like a parent, counsellor, or administrator) to get you help. I will not be able to keep that information secret because **your safety is the most important thing.**"
- **Acknowledge and Validate:** If a student discloses suicidal thoughts, avoid panic. Stay calm and say, "Thank you for telling me. I know that took a lot of courage, and I'm glad you trusted me. Let's get you connected with a professional right now."

2. What to Say (and What to Avoid)

Focus Area	What to SAY (The Safe Approach)	What to AVOID (The Harmful Approach)
Asking Directly	"Are you having thoughts about killing yourself?" (Use the word "kill" or "suicide" clearly.)	"You aren't going to do something stupid, are you?" (Avoid judging, minimizing, or using euphemisms like "harming yourself.")
Focusing on Feelings	"It sounds like you are going through a lot of intense pain right now. That is real, and we need to treat that pain."	"You have so much to live for, just cheer up." (Avoid offering platitudes or minimizing their genuine distress.)
Addressing the Crisis	"I am committed to helping you through this."	"You just need to promise me you won't do anything." (Avoid placing the burden of responsibility solely on the child; the adult must take action.)
Normalizing Help	"Mental health crises are common, just like	"What will people think if they find out you're seeing a

Focus Area	What to SAY (The Safe Approach)	What to AVOID (The Harmful Approach)
	breaking a bone. We need professional help to heal this, and that's okay."	therapist?" (Avoid suggesting therapy or seeking help carries shame.)

3. Key Resources for Adults

For Educators and School Staff:

- **QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer):** A widely used training program that teaches three simple steps anyone can learn to save a life from suicide. Schools should ensure all staff are trained in this or a similar intervention model.
- **Postvention Planning:** Have a clear, predefined plan for how the school will respond and communicate if a suicide occurs in the school community. Consistency and professional support are vital during this time.

For Parents and Guardians:

- **Tele MANAS (a government initiative):** Call 14416. Provides excellent, science-based resources for teens and young adults on mental health and suicide prevention, including guides specifically for parents on recognizing the signs.

- **Local Pediatrician or Therapist:** Encourage parents to talk to their child's primary care physician about integrating mental health check-ins during regular appointments.
- **Family Safety Planning:** Parents should safely store or remove access to lethal means (medications, knives, firearms) if they know a child is struggling. This is a critical preventive step.

4. Continuous Education

This conversation is not a one-time event. Parents and educators should:

- **Maintain Open Dialogue:** Check in regularly, asking general questions like, "How are your friends coping with stress?" or "What's the hardest part of being a teen right now?"

- **Model Healthy Coping:** Show students and children how you manage your own stress and disappointment constructively (e.g., "I'm feeling overwhelmed today, so I'm going to take a 15-minute walk before I tackle that problem.")

(Optional)
School-Wide Mental Health Campaign Ideas

Children are exposed to suicide in reels, OTT and more. It helps if there are campaigns in schools that make the awareness more accessible. Here are ideas for school-wide campaigns that promote safe intervention and mental health resources for teens and preteens. Campaigns are effective because they use repetition and peer influence to normalize intervention.

1. The "I've Got Your Back" Campaign (Focus: Acknowledge)
This campaign emphasizes the importance of noticing changes in friends and starting a caring conversation.

- **Slogan: "I've Got Your Back: Notice. Ask. Act."**
- **Visuals:** Posters showing two hands clasped, or a friend putting an arm around another. Use QR codes linking directly to the "What to Say" script.
- **Action Steps:**
    - **"Notice Bingo" Cards:** Students receive cards listing observable signs of distress (e.g., "Skipping 2+ lunches," "Always wearing sleeves in heat," "Posting vague, negative messages"). The goal is to **notice** these behaviours in general, not to "mark off" friends, but to raise awareness.
    - **Script Practice:** Host short, voluntary lunchtime workshops led by counsellors called **"How to Start the Hard Conversation,"** role-playing the Acknowledge phase of intervention.

2. The "3-Foot Rule" Campaign (Focus: Tell & Immediate Action)
This campaign focuses on the critical action of getting help immediately, reinforcing the idea that it's okay to break a secret for safety.

- **Slogan: "Don't Carry the Weight. Get Within 3 Feet of an Adult."**
- **Visuals:** Install brightly coloured decals or small signs on counsellor doors, administrative offices, and nurse stations with a clear message: **"Safe Zone. Tell Us."**
- **Action Steps:**
    - **"Go with Them" Challenge:** Encourage students to never let a struggling friend walk to the counselling office alone. They must **physically accompany them** ("Get within 3 feet") to ensure the friend follows through and receives immediate professional help.

- o **Resource Keychains:** Distribute small cards with the **14416** and Crisis Text Line numbers to parents. Stress that the student should *know* these numbers and keep them handy.

3. The "Unburden Yourself" Campaign (Focus: Resources & Hope)
This campaign works to reduce the stigma of seeking help and highlights the available professional support.

- **Slogan: "Unburden Yourself: It's Not a Burden, It's a Treatable Condition."**
- **Visuals:** Simple graphics comparing mental health treatment to physical health treatment (e.g., "See a coach for a sprain, see a counsellor for intense sadness").
- **Action Steps:**
    - o **Open House Hours:** The counselling department hosts "drop-in hour" where students can stop by, and ask an anonymous question to the counsellor ("What is stress-management?"). This demystifies the counselling office.
    - o **Peer Ambassadors:** Train a small group of responsible, empathetic older students to be **Mental Wellness Ambassadors** who act as liaisons. They wear distinctive lanyards or pins, signalling they are safe people to talk to who will then guide the struggling student to the professional staff.

These campaigns work best when they are **consistent**, **visual**, and **student-driven**, ensuring the message is authentic and empowering.

Faculty Circular: Supporting Student Intervention Campaigns

Here is a template for a brief faculty circular regarding the student-led mental health campaigns and the proper staff response protocol.

To: All Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

From: [Principal/Counselling Department Head Name]

Date:

Subject: URGENT: Protocol for Student-Assisted Crisis Intervention

Campaign Context: "The 3-Foot Rule"

Please be advised that the Counselling Department, in partnership with student leaders, is launching the **"I've Got Your Back"** and **"The 3-Foot Rule"** campaigns. These initiatives encourage students to **never let a struggling friend walk alone** to seek help.

This means you may observe students entering your classroom, office, or corridor space *accompanied by a concerned peer.*

Immediate Action Protocol (When a Student Arrives with a Friend)

It is essential that every staff member follows this quick protocol to validate the student's courage and ensure immediate safety:

1. **Stop and Listen:** Immediately cease non-essential tasks. Acknowledge the student who brought their friend first, stating: **"Thank you for being an upstander and prioritizing your friend's safety."** This validates the helper's courage.
2. **Ask the Helper:** Ask the student who brought their friend: **"What is your primary concern right now?"** (e.g., "They said they were thinking about hurting themselves," or "They have been skipping class for a week.")
3. **Transfer Responsibility:** If the concern involves **self-harm, suicidal ideation, or extreme distress**, you must immediately transfer responsibility to the designated support staff (Counsellor, Nurse, Administrator). Do not attempt to counsel the student yourself.
   - **Action:** Immediately call the counselling office/administrator and say, "I have a student here who needs immediate assistance. Please come to [Your Location] or prepare for transfer."
4. **Manage Environment:** Quietly direct the students to a private, safe space (e.g., corner of the room, office chair) away from other students while waiting for support staff. **Do not leave the student alone.**

Key Takeaways for All Staff

- **No Questions Asked:** If a student is escorted by a friend, immediately prioritize their need for support over routine procedures (e.g. attendance checks).
- **Safety Over Privacy:** If a student discloses suicidal ideation to you, **you must immediately notify the Counselling Department** and the appropriate administrator. This information cannot be kept confidential.
- **Validate the Behaviour:** Support for these student campaigns is critical. Your quick, calm, and respectful response reinforces that peer intervention is the most effective way to save a life.

Thank you for your cooperation in ensuring **[School Name]** maintains a strong culture of support and safety.