



## “How Not to Keep A Secret”

A manual for school advisors to provide a Peer Leader training day focused on teen depression awareness and suicide prevention



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The purpose of the manual is to provide faculty advisors with a resource to assist in implementing a Peer Leader training day, based on raising student awareness of adolescent depression and suicide prevention among their peers. This manual will attempt to address many of the content, logistical and planning issues relevant to the peer education program. It will provide you with many resources and handouts to streamline your program planning.

This manual was originally conceived in 2001 by Mary Ford Clark, Ph.D., the School Psychologist at Braintree High School, for the Adolescent Suicide Prevention Project which evolved into the Youth Health Connection. The current manual has been expanded with materials from several works, including *Preventing Depression: A Toolkit for Schools* (Reilly, N., 2006) and *An Adolescent Mental Health and Wellness Curriculum: A Starter Kit for Schools* (DeMaso, D. & Gold, J., 2006).

This manual is supplemented online through the Youth Health Connection section within [www.SouthShoreHospital.org](http://www.SouthShoreHospital.org) and [www.AdolescentWellness.org](http://www.AdolescentWellness.org) where you may download forms and presentation slides to edit.

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# How Not To Keep A Secret

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	2
Preface .....	6
Introduction.....	9
Acknowledgments .....	11
Contact Information.....	13
<b>CHAPTER ONE-PREPARATION .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Implementation Graphic of "How Not to Keep A Secret" .....	15
Preparation Details .....	16
Implementation Checklist .....	22
Appendix to Chapter One-Forms for Preparation .....	25
A1- Host school Faculty Advisor checklist.....	26
A2- Non-host school Faculty Advisor checklist .....	27
A3- Overview memo for school administration.....	28
A4- Memo requesting faculty recommend Peer Leader candidates .....	29
A5- Student recruitment announcement options .....	30
A6- Student recruitment letter .....	31
A7- Student application .....	32
A8- Parental permission slip.....	34
A9- Paperwork tracking form .....	35
A10- Faculty approval for student to attend Training Day .....	36
A11- Standard Agenda .....	37
A12- Host Faculty Welcome & Overview of the Day .....	38
A13- Peer Leader Skit Development .....	39
A14- List of approved DVD's.....	40
A15- Press release.....	41
A16- Sample thank you letter .....	42
<b>CHAPTER TWO-TRAINING DAY .....</b>	<b>43</b>
How to keep Training Day moving .....	48
Training Day Handouts and Forms .....	52
Handout- Pledge .....	53
Handout- Small group activity: Differences in Depression .....	54
Handout- Referral: Speak Up, Take Charge, Get Help! .....	56
Handout- Case Study: James .....	57

Clinical presenter questions to guide group discussion: .....	58
Handout- Mood Continuum .....	59
Pre-test of personal knowledge .....	60
Post-test of personal knowledge .....	61
Appendix to Chapter Two-Clinical Presentation slides .....	62
<b>CHAPTER THREE-PEER LEADERSHIP .....</b>	<b>69</b>
Implementation suggestions and examples .....	72
<b>IN THEIR OWN WORDS-PEER LEADER THOUGHTS .....</b>	<b>76</b>
Appendix to Chapter Three-Forms for Peer Leadership .....	79
B1- Presentation Record form .....	80
B2- Student evaluation of Peer Leader presentation .....	81
References .....	82
<b>SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL .....</b>	<b>84</b>
Suggested web sites .....	85
Icebreaker- Human Taco .....	86
Icebreaker- Group Juggle .....	87
Icebreaker- Gordian Knot .....	88
Icebreaker- Name Roulette .....	89
Icebreaker- Roving Reporter .....	90
Icebreaker- Roving Observer .....	91
Icebreaker- Mumble Jumble .....	92
Icebreaker- Comic Strip Chaos .....	93
Group Building- Stranded: Coming to Consensus .....	95
Group Building- Pledge .....	98
Peer Leader Evaluation (scaled) .....	102
Peer Leader End of Year Feedback .....	103
Faculty Advisor Feedback .....	104
Your Evaluation of the "How Not to Keep A Secret" Manual .....	105
Peer Leader Training Manual Registration Form .....	107

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# How Not To Keep A Secret

## Preface

How Not To Keep A Secret is one component of the South Shore Hospital's multi-faceted Youth Health Connection (YHC) program. YHC is a regionally based network of schools (public, charter, independent and parochial), medical professionals (nurses and doctors), mental health professionals, community agencies, clergy, law enforcement, parents and the teen themselves; dedicated to the positive mental health and physical well-being of youth. This network is designed to connect diverse individuals working together as a community to provide a safe and nurturing environment where youth have access to the information and resources they need to make healthy decisions. The program advances positive youth health outcomes through knowledge, risk prevention, collaboration, respect and connectedness with an emphasis on resiliency and strengths building.

The goals of YHC are the:

- Reduction of risk of suicide through education about depression and access to intervention and referral
- Promotion of positive mental health and resiliency/strengths building
- Support of healthy lifestyles
- Encouragement of positive decision making
- Reduction of the use of alcohol, tobacco, other substances
- Education on topics that decrease accidental injury and death
- Encouragement of good nutrition and physical fitness
- Discussion of risk factors such as bullying, trauma, and peer pressure

YHC works to address these goals by:

- Providing high quality educational programs to educators, parents, teens, clergy, law enforcement personnel, medical and mental health professionals across a range of topics
- Maintaining a collaborative network of community leaders who are focused on optimizing youth mental health and physical well-being
- Providing suicide prevention training (gatekeeper) for youth and all adults in our collaborative network
- Ensuring emergency access to evaluation through South Shore Hospital Emergency Room and Suicide Prevention Hotline
- Recommending utilization of a suicide screening tool ( Screening for Mental Health, S.O.S. or Teen Screen)

- Recommending utilization of advisory groups/school families at the middle and high school levels
- Conducting peer leader trainings; How Not To Keep A Secret
- Providing crisis consultation and training and outreach
- Providing weekly electronic newsletter
- Recommending reading lists and virtual book groups for parents, educators, and other adults
- Maintaining a lending library of resources and materials including videos, books and journal articles
- Maintaining a speaker's bureau with the resources to address a host of topics

YHC is governed by five advisory groups:

- Mental Health Professionals
- School Nurses
- Parents
- Law Enforcement
- Clergy

These groups serve as stewards and advisors, creating a link between the interconnected groups of adults responsible for the safety and growth of teens and families today.

YHC emphasizes education as a primary prevention tool. There are many layers of educational offerings:

- Community/Parent events in fall and spring.
- Gatekeeper training for school personnel.
- Faculty and staff education sessions held four to six times/academic year.
- Peer Leader Training Days sponsored annually.

This manual is for use with Peer Leader Training Days.

YHC maintains affiliations with: the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention, Swensrud Depression Prevention Initiative of Children's Hospital Boston, Adolescent Wellness, Norfolk and Plymouth County District Attorneys, and The Parent Connection. YHC is dedicated to maintaining rigorous research guided and evidence based practice principles.



## History of Youth Health Connection

### 1994:

- South Shore Hospital noted an alarming increase in the number of adolescent suicide attempts with significant increase by young adolescents.
- South Shore Hospital organized a grassroots effort aimed at prevention; early networking was with regional public, parochial and independent schools from Plymouth to Dedham.
- Education for parents, teens and educators was emphasized and the peer leader training program was designed as the cornerstone of this effort.
- The Adolescent Suicide Prevention Project (ASPP) was formed as a collaborative effort between South Shore Hospital and schools in the region. A unique aspect of the program is that from initial design participation is open to all schools, public, independent, parochial and charter.
- Its mission was to prevent adolescent suicide through early intervention and educational outreach to teens, parents, educators and health professionals.

### 1996:

- South Shore Hospital reached out to regional school nurses to create a network with the purpose of information sharing, needs assessment and program planning.
- The South Shore School Partnership for Health (SSSPH) was established, reaching out to public, parochial and independent schools in the region.
- A primary goal was annual educational programs for school nurses; these were held four times annually.

### 2006:

- A parent advisory group was formed to support both ASPP and SSSPH. This group was named the Parent Partner's.

### 2007:

- The Adolescent Suicide Prevention Project and the South Shore School Partnership for Health were merged and renamed Youth Health Connection (YHC)
- A Medical Director position for YHC was created.

### 2009:

- YHC established Law Enforcement and Religious Leaders Advisory Groups

## How Not To Keep A Secret

### **Introduction**

How Not To Keep A Secret is a dynamic drama program designed to allow teens the opportunity to gather together and comfortably discuss the often complex journey of adolescence. The program is designed to constructively address such emotionally charged topics as; the spectrum of typical to troubled; the reality of depression, anxiety and mental health issues; the risk factors which can lead to suicidal ideation and behavior; and how to turn to a trusted, caring adult for help with referral and treatment.

The core goals of the program are to ensure that all teens understand that depression can present during adolescence; that certain life events and family history can play a role; and that there is no shame in reaching out for help. Depression is a treatable illness and, for some, even preventable. Prevention is to identify and challenge unrealistic and overly negative thoughts with related problem-solving skills (PREVENTION OF DEPRESSION IN ADOLESCENTS. JAMA, 2009; 301(21):2215-2224). If symptoms occur, one should identify and act on them with a request for referral for treatment.

We know that teens turn to each other as confidants (Topping, 2001). As such we want to provide a framework and process for them to seek help for themselves or for a friend in need. Thus the name, How Not To Keep A Secret. A central tenet is the principle that there should be no stigma in acknowledging depression or emotional difficulty, and that there are safe, available resources for youth to turn to.

The research also clearly shows that connection to a trusted, caring adult is one of the most important anti-risk factors available to teens (The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Harris, 2002). How Not To Keep A Secret is designed to provide education and information. By giving teens a vehicle to express the issues in their own voices and through their eyes, they learn the value of turning to a trusted and caring adult without compromising respect and dignity.

How Not To Keep A Secret is one of the elements of YHC designed to facilitate the safe passage of youth through the sometimes turbulent teen years. We know that at the core is the guiding principle of connection and ability to turn to a trusted adult to help. Through this drama program the teens themselves find their voices, share their stories and concerns, and give respect to difficult issues

of depression and other related mental health topics. With an understanding of what depression is, what the risk factors are, what it can look like, what it can feel like, and what the symptoms are, we can give them the necessary tools to know when and how to seek assistance. The program gives teen's privacy, dignity and respect. We know they understand what is truly going on in their lives and the lives of their peers.

Our goal is to normalize the conversation and permit them to open up and to reach out. As they work together in a large group of three or four schools, they are given clinical information, create skits, present them to the large group, and are given feedback and input. These skits are then taken back to their home school and utilized in a variety of formats, ranging from presentation to advisory groups to whole school assemblies or classroom presentations to PTO meetings. By destigmatizing the reality of depression and generating options for early intervention and referral, we know lives can be saved. How Not To Keep A Secret is a powerful tool for teens to reach out.

## How Not To Keep A Secret

### **Acknowledgments**

How Not To Keep A Secret is the product of an enormous compilation of talent, commitment and risk taking on the part of many individuals and institutions since 1994. We would like to take this opportunity to recognize the efforts of those involved in the evolution of this innovative and impactful program. We want to acknowledge all those who have guided the development of the project professionally and personally; the teens, parents, clinical professionals, and dedicated school based personnel. Thank you for allowing us to be a part of your personal journeys and for enabling us to help many more.

Teens can be incredibly creative, insightful, and devoted when asked to contribute to causes important to them. It is with this in mind, that we want to acknowledge all the teens that have been a part of the development of How Not To Keep A Secret since its inception. While there are too many to identify individually, they have been fundamental to creating and refining this program. It is through their eyes and in their voices that we have seen the promotion of positive mental health in themselves and in their peers.

This drama program enables teens to differentiate between typical and troubled moments during adolescence, and to help them seek assistance from trusted, caring adults. Our goal is to acknowledge that mental health issues, in particular depression and anxiety, need not be feared or hidden. We want to lift the shroud of secrecy and to move to destigmatize mental health issues, and the seeking of care and treatment.

Through its history, How Not To Keep A Secret has also been shaped by too many adults to list. There are times when a grass roots effort takes on such power that it is not to be stopped. The work of countless dedicated professionals spread across the South Shore region of Boston has nurtured and refined this program. Their work has made an indelible difference in the lives of the youth and families we serve. For that they should feel enormous pride in the knowledge that the worth of some things can not be measured in dollars and cents.

The collaboration with the Swensrud Depression Prevention Initiative of Children's Hospital Boston, and Adolescent Wellness, Inc., has helped How Not To Keep A Secret continue to expand; utilizing clinical information, exercises, and video. It is

always a remarkable moment when professionals working in different locations come together and make the whole stronger than the individual parts.

None of this would have been possible without the ongoing support from South Shore Hospital. They have believed in the importance of the program and have given us an institutional home. South Shore Hospital has ensured that How Not To Keep A Secret would grow and become a preeminent example of a regional medical care center dedicating valuable resources to the benefit of the community beyond the bricks and mortar.

Finally, there is one individual who must be named; Kim Noble, RN, BS, MBA. Kim serves as the coordinator for South Shore Hospital's Youth Health Connection program, and has been the steady steward of How Not To Keep A Secret. She coordinates all of the peer trainings; always anticipating every possible need and requirement. Her commitment to YHC and this project has been remarkable and unwavering.

The success of How Not To Keep A Secret has shown the value of creating in adolescents the capacity to develop and evolve into productive, healthy, and resilient adults. Learning to deal with adversity is critical to the successful navigation from adolescence to adulthood.

-Barbara J. Green, PhD

## How Not To Keep A Secret

### **Contact Information**

We hope you will find this manual a useful tool. If there are any questions about its contents or regarding implementation, please use the contact information below.

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