SEIZE THE AWKWARD

Campus Toolkit
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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 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.

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.
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. Think about faculty, school officials, students or perhaps the reporter from the school paper. It may help to even invite mental health professionals from your counseling center to be available during and after the event.

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

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 and you'll find postcards, posters and other branded materials to distribute around campus.

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 STA 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/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).
When gathering people to have a conversation around mental health issues, you want to ask questions that will spark a thoughtful discussion. See below for some examples:

- Have you ever experienced an awkward moment of silence with a friend? Tell us about it.
- What's your favorite way to check in with a friend?
- What are the benefits to reaching out to a friend or peer when they seem down or not themselves?
- 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?
- Why do you think people don’t reach out to their friends when they sense something could be wrong?
- What are some things you might say to continue the conversation after you’ve initially checked in with your 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?
- When do you think it would be appropriate or necessary to get someone else involved (i.e., a professional on campus, trusted adult)?
RESOURCES FOR IMMEDIATE HELP

IN AN EMERGENCY

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

Get immediate support 24/7 by calling 1-800-273-8255 or text SEIZE to 741741. 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.
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)

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”
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

Campaign Background

Campaign PSAs

Social Media Copy and Assets

Templates & Promotional Assets

SWAG