

Organizational History, Mission, and Key Accomplishments

The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, Inc. (SPTS) is a 501(c)3 public charity, incorporated on January 18, 2005. The organization was founded by two Monmouth County, New Jersey fathers who each experienced the devastating loss of a teenage child by suicide. SPTS is dedicated to increasing awareness, saving lives and reducing the stigma of suicide through specialized training programs and mental health resources that empower students, parents, school staff and community members with the skills needed to help youth build a life of resiliency.

For nearly 20 years, SPTS has helped communities in need, most specifically to educators, parents and teens. SPTS was instrumental in the passage of legislation in New Jersey in 2006 requiring public educators to have a minimum of two hours of suicide prevention training every professional development period. SPTS developed a free, best practices, online training program for educators; published the *Lifelines Trilogy*, an Evidence-based, best practices, whole-school suicide prevention program; and produced *Not My Kid: What Every Parent Should Know*, a best practices video for parents to increase awareness and knowledge about youth suicide. SPTS offers a variety of prevention training programs and presentations such as: *Making Educators Partners in Youth Suicide Prevention*, *Making Youth Agencies Partners in Youth Suicide Prevention*, *Raising Resilient Teens in Challenging Times*, and the *Role of the Trusted Adult*. SPTS has routinely worked with states in developing community coalitions, implementing the *Lifelines* curriculum, enhancing community support and preparing districts for an organized response to traumatic events. SPTS has presented to over 100,000 educators, parents and students across more than half the country and trained over 950,000 educators through its online training programs. Though statistics are not able to report the number of lives directly saved by the efforts of our organization, it is estimated that over 20 million youth have been potentially impacted as a result of training and resources made readily available by SPTS.

In calendar year 2023, SPTS has been able to directly impact over 400,000 students, school staff, parents, healthcare providers and community members through our multitude of programs:

- Distributed 183,000 Behavioral Health Toolkits to the parents of 6th grade students across NJ and provided inventory for their schools
- Distributed nearly 50,000 Mental Health Crisis Toolkits to NJ hospitals, Children's Mobile Response Units and Care Management Organizations
- Increased the capacity to treat at-risk youth of 225 mental health professionals through Adolescent Clinical Training for Suicide Prevention
- Provided suicide prevention education to 3,500 parents/caregivers, trusted adults and students
- Delivered high energy Lead U workshops and assemblies to nearly 60,000 students and staff of over 190 schools
- Hosted 5 Youth Wellness Summits, positively impacting 831 high school students and staff across 75 schools in NY and NJ
- Trained 115,000 school staff through the SPTS University, potentially impacting the wellness of over 2.8 million students across the country

Many organizations address mental health needs across the entire age spectrum, however SPTS is the only organization focused solely on comprehensive youth suicide prevention for ages 5-18. SPTS utilizes a holistic approach, centered on evidence-based, best practices programming to build communities where everyone is concerned about the welfare of all members of their community, is committed to an environment that supports the common good, and knows how and where to get help if someone is in need. The array of programs offered by SPTS target the network around a young person.

Students: Youth Council, Youth Summits, Lead U empowerment assemblies, Taking Care of Ourselves and Our Friends

Parents: Behavioral Health Toolkit, Mental Health Crisis Toolkit, Not My Kid - What Every Parent Should Know About Teen Suicide Prevention online resource; Raising Resilient Teens in Challenging Times presentation

School Staff: Making Educators Partners in Youth Suicide Prevention, Trauma Informed Return to Learn: Navigating Back to School, Lifelines™ suicide prevention curriculum, Lead U professional development presentations

Healthcare: Adolescent and Clinical Training for Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Crisis Toolkit

Communities: Healing After a Loss, Role of the Trusted Adult, coalition/crisis team development and training, Making Youth Agencies Partners in Prevention

Program Overview

Lifelines: A Suicide Prevention Program

National data tells us that at-risk students are present in every school, at every grade level, yet how can schools implement procedures for identifying these at-risk students and addressing their needs all while remaining focused on their primary functions of educating all students in a safe and healthy environment for learning? The *Lifelines Trilogy™* makes school-based suicide prevention possible and practical. *Lifelines: A Suicide Prevention Program* is an Evidence-based, best practices curriculum that promotes a caring, competent school community in which help seeking is encouraged and modeled and suicidal behavior is recognized as an issue that cannot be kept secret. *Lifelines* increases the likelihood that school staff and students will know how to identify at-risk youth when they encounter them, provide an appropriate initial response, and obtain help, as well as be inclined to take such action. The schools would be equipped with the knowledge and resources to integrate suicide prevention curriculum into student health lessons grades 5-12, positively impacting the health, wellness and ability to learn for students.

Community Presentations

- *Making Educators Partners in Youth Suicide Prevention*
Educators are in a critical but limited role to listen to vulnerable youth, observe warning signs for suicide, and refer or connect students to resources. SPTS helps educators understand this important role with an acclaimed online training program that is self-paced, comprehensive and offered free of charge. Through the use of role-plays, the training embraces school culture and presents real-life scenarios for youth suicide prevention methods. Survivors of suicide loss share their personal stories, while many mental health experts give detailed accounts regarding at-risk populations, warning signs, risk factors, and what the referral process means for educators, counselors and members of the school community. This program is offered online (www.sptsuniversity.org) and in-person.
- *Navigating Back to School: A Trauma Informed Return to Learn Program for the School Community*
This online learning experience recognizes the challenges of returning to school in a post COVID-19 environment and provides simple, easy to apply information and activities to get everyone in the school on the same page, from educators, ancillary staff, parents, and students as young as kindergarten. Using a variety of training formats that include animation, video clips, interactive exercises and instructional content, these short modules will help set the tone for a school year where everyone is prepared to deal with the unexpected and keep their focus on the important educational mission of the school.

- *Raising Resilient Teens in Challenging Times*
This program educates parents on the warning signs of suicide, dispels myths, and encourages parents to speak to their children about suicide prevention, while providing direction on how to have the conversation with their teens.
- *The Role of the Trusted Adult*
This presentation educates those viewed by youth as role models (coaches, teachers, etc) on how to respond to at-risk youth. Participants learn how to engage with at-risk youth, confidentiality, warning signs and risk factors of youth suicide, protective factors and resources. This information empowers trusted adults to take action when a youth comes to them about either a friend talking about suicide or themselves.
- *Making Youth Agencies Partners in Youth Suicide Prevention*
Similar to *Making Educators Partners in Youth Suicide Prevention*, this program achieves three essential goals which further the mission of SPTS: increase awareness of teen suicide; outline the agency role in prevention; and review strategies for dealing with at-risk youth.

Youth Programs

- *Youth Council*
Research makes it clear that youth are an important part of the prevention process. In early 2015 SPTS developed a Youth Council directed at engaging selected youth as SPTS ambassadors in the prevention process. SPTS hosts councils to support Monmouth County, Ocean County and Woodbridge Township. They are comprised of high school students who collaborate with SPTS staff and volunteers to work on suicide prevention projects, learn resiliency and helping skills, all while functioning in an advisory role to the agency programming that is aimed at youth.
- *Youth Wellness Summit*
The Youth Wellness Summit is a day-long event hosted by SPTS and offered at no cost to public and private high schools. The summit was specifically designed to provide students, school administrators and school support staff with the necessary resources needed to encourage and support overall wellness, including the prevention of teen suicide and other upstream prevention measures. By engaging participants with a variety of activities, attending students will be able to develop positive coping strategies, increase their knowledge as it relates to wellness, and be introduced to practical techniques that can be easily implemented in their individual learning environments.
- *Lead U Empowerment Assemblies and Workshops*
SPTS acquired youth empowerment company Lead U in September 2021 as a strategic effort to expand its current program offerings to now include the ability provide school communities with the social-emotional support for students, faculty, and administrators heading back to school this Fall. The addition of Lead U allows SPTS to meet the needs of K-12 schools. NJ schools have acknowledged the social emotional needs of their staff and students and welcome Lead U into their schools for indoor, outdoor and virtual presentations.
- *Taking Care of Ourselves and Our Friends*
This presentation, delivered to small groups of students, helps to introduce prevention and enable youth to respond positively with healthy coping skills when faced with a crisis and begins broadly with a conversation about overall health and wellness. The ultimate goal of this program is to teach students to have a more proactive role in the prevention process and save the lives of our teens. Interactive activities relate to the student's own life in order to better engage them to participate.

ACTS: Adolescent Clinical Training for Suicide Prevention

Adolescent Clinician Training for Suicide Prevention (ACTS) is a program that enhances the competence and confidence of hospital staff and mental health professionals to assess and manage youth and adolescents at risk for suicide. There are professional trainings that address the needs of clinicians who treat adults, but not a single opportunity for those who treat youth. ACTS currently has three versions: Outpatient Providers, Emergency Department Staff and General Hospital Staff.

Mental Health Crisis Toolkit

This newly developed comprehensive, personal yet professional, community resource includes guidance for parents or guardians of an adolescent in the midst of a mental health crisis—an experience that is incredibly frightening, lonely, and confusing to most. The information is compiled in the simple order of “What to do now,”

“What questions to ask,” and “Where to go from here.” The toolkit includes a writing area and pen as well as an additional space for local resources to be included. The information is informed by parents, adolescents, mental health professionals, and emergency department staff who have all had varying experiences in mental health crises. The intentional approach is to calm a parent or guardian in this situation by suggesting helpful questions to ask, information to have available, and direction for after the immediate crisis is anticipated to reduce the stress level for families, provide answers to questions often left unanswered, and ultimately reduce return visits to the ED. The Toolkit is currently available in English and Spanish.

Behavioral Health Toolkit

The Behavioral Health Toolkit helps caregivers identify surfacing emotional and mental health issues in children and teens. This Toolkit focuses on upstream suicide prevention through the delivery of compassionate and competency-building education to caregivers before a crisis point. The Toolkit provides a basic understanding of mental wellness, including a “glossary” of terms, information on warning signs and risk factors of suicide, how to talk to an adolescent who might be at risk, an outline of options for assessment/treatment and discuss how to foster resilience in youth. Along with early intervention information, more immediate concerns are addressed in the pamphlet by an included list of local and state resources to contact in non-emergency situations. It also includes a clear description of the NJ Children’s System of Care, how to access this system, and local resources, such as mobile response.

This Toolkit provides information for parents/caregivers on common mental health issues, warning signs and resources available. Its purpose is to help them understand how to advocate for their child and respond to concerning behaviors in a timely manner. The Toolkit is designed to be distributed through schools, pediatric offices or mental health professionals. The Toolkit is a comprehensive, yet concise, list of what to DO, what to ASK, and what to EXPECT. The Toolkit is available in English, Spanish, Creole and Portuguese.

In March 2024 the toolkit is being introduced to Monmouth County, NJ through an online portal, providing access to this vital resource to all parents/caregivers across the country. With the shift to online, SPTS is now able to offer the resource in a total of 9 languages, greatly increasing accessibility. By June 30, 2024 the toolkit will be available in multiple languages to residents in each of the 21 counties in New Jersey. This resource is available to be customized for specific states, counties, organizations, or corporations.