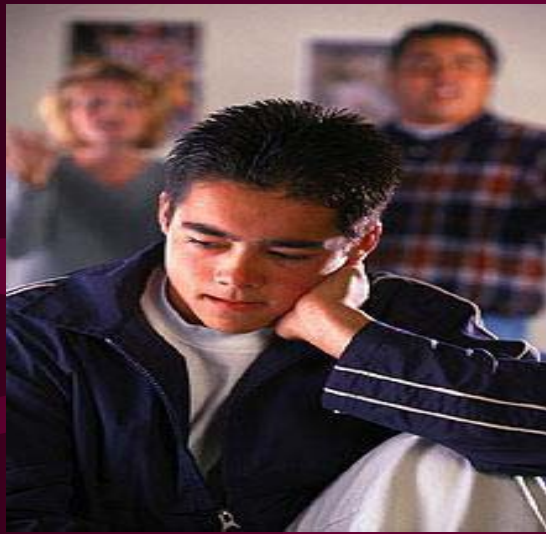


# Youth & Latina/o Suicide Prevention in Schools



**Theresa Rosner-Salazar, PsyD**

Licensed Clinical Psychologist

Colorado Council of College and High School Relations  
Annual Conference

December 4, 2009

# AGENDA

- Second Wind Fund & Youth/Latino/a Suicide Prevention
- Teen Suicide, Risk, Protective Factors & Warning Signs
- Latina/o Adolescent Suicide Prevention Issues
- What Counselors Can Do
- Suicide Prevention Implications
- Discussion

# Second Wind Fund

- Nonprofit provides free licensed professional counseling to kids, 19 and under, at risk for suicide, who otherwise would not be able to afford mental health care.
- 8-20 free sessions of therapy for teens at-risk of suicide throughout metro Denver schools
- First appointment within a week, often within a few days
- Aided in suicide prevention in over 1,700 students treated
- Reduced suicide rate in primary service/referral areas: Adams County Coroner and Jeffco Coroner reports Second Wind has reduced youth suicide in their jurisdictions.

# Teen Suicide

- Colorado ranks 6th in the nation in suicide rate
- Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among Colorado teens
- 25% of teens (1/4 youth) tend to experience more than passing suicidal thoughts in any given year
- Given statistics, many teens, or one of their best friends—will struggle with suicidal thoughts this year—it's part of a person's life experience and not just a rare "act."
- Teen suicide reverberates through the entire community and lives are impacted forever; important to also provide support to survivors.

# Suicide Risk Factors

- **History of depression, mental disorders**
- **History of alcohol and substance abuse**
- **Family history of suicide; past attempts & hospitalizations**
- **Family history of abuse, child maltreatment**
- **Feelings of hopelessness; isolation; poor self esteem**
- **Impulsive or aggressive tendencies**
- **Barriers to accessing mental health treatment**

# **Suicide Risk Factors (cont.)**

- **Significant loss (relational/ physical illness /work/ financial; i.e. divorce, death, loss of health, separation, break-ups, loss of respect)**
- **Easy access to lethal methods**
- **Unwillingness to seek help because of the stigma attached to mental health and substance abuse disorders or suicidal thoughts**
- **Family problems; Pressure to succeed**
- **Someone close to individual has completed suicide**

# Protective Factors

- Access to effective clinical care & treatment
- Access & Support for help seeking behavior
- Family and community support
- Support from ongoing school, medical and mental health care relationships
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution, and nonviolent handling of disputes
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation instincts

# Warning Signs

- Talking about suicide, death, or preoccupation with dying
- Trouble eating or sleeping (sleeping all the time, unable to sleep at all, not able to eat or overeating)
- Significant changes in behavior and/or personality
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Loss of interest in activities, work, school, hobbies, or social interactions
- Giving away prized possessions
- Previous suicide attempts

# Warning Signs (cont.)

- Increased drug and/or alcohol use
- Statements about hopelessness, or worthlessness
- Taking unnecessary risks
- Sudden happiness or calmness following a depressed mood
- Obsession with suicidal means (guns, knives, hanging materials)
- Problems in school or work performance
- Chronic pain or frequent complaints of physical symptoms
- An inability to concentrate, trouble remembering things

# Latina/o Adolescent Suicide

- Most lifetime suicide attempts by Latinos occurs when they are younger than 18 years of age (Fortuna, Perez, Canino, 2007).
- U.S.-born **Latino** adolescents are more likely to attempt **suicide** than are foreign-born **Latino** youths (Fortuna et al., 2007).
- **Adolescent Latinas** are consistently twice as likely as **Latinos** to report suicide attempts during the preceding 12 months (CDC, 2006)
- Latinas in particular report relatively high rates of hopelessness, suicide plans, and suicide attempts (CDC, 2006). Approximately one-third of Latina girls seriously contemplate suicide.

# Risk Factors

- Latino youth have both fewer mental health visits and less chance of their mental health problems being detected than other ethnic groups.
- High prevalence of depression in Latinos, compared to other ethnic groups
- Higher incidence of Alcohol abuse; substance abuse rates rising
- Family cultural conflict, English proficiency, English language of childhood and US nativity were correlated with suicidal behavior among Latinos
- Traumatic immigration process & acculturation

# Barriers

- **System barriers:** lack of health insurance, language barriers, and a lack of information about services (especially for individuals with poor English proficiency and recent immigrants).
- **Community centered barriers:** the stigma of mental illness, as well as a lack of familiarity with the mental health system and/or fear of the system. This is particularly true for many Hispanic cultures and recent immigrants.
- **Provider barriers:** limited access by those without health insurance, and limited mental health service care with managed care and commercial plans.

## Barriers (cont.)

- **Person-centered barriers:** lack of recognition of mental health problems, stigma of mental illness, and a self-reliant attitude. The shortage of trained bilingual and bicultural counselors, therapists, psychiatrists and social workers.
- **Immigration/ acculturation barriers:** mental health services may be unfamiliar or culturally suspect to many newcomers, affects ability to access services for mental health issues.

# Suicide Prevention Implications

- Attempts often a means of coping with intense emotional distress; often don't want to die; just don't know how to cope;
- Attempts related to conflict with parents & Cultural conflict (conflicting messages at home & majority culture);
- Acculturative differences in expectations re: dating, sexuality and relationships often hallmark in girls conflict with their parents.
- Family based therapies addressing conflict resolution
- Assisting immigrant parents to understand environment and adolescent's developmental needs and to respond appropriately

## Mental Health Implications

- Treatment not often sought until resources exhausted;
- Although many positive features of extended family, emotional and financial obligations may be additional source of stress;
- Importance and allegiance of family may at times take precedence over other obligations (school, work, etc)
- Should address not only problematic behavior but conflict between cultural and societal expectations

# What can School Counselors do?

If possible, work in conjunction with school mental health personnel to:

- Assess suicidal risk:
  - Thoughts: passive or active
  - Suicidal threats
  - Suicide plans
  - Lethality: access to means
- Assess Willingness for help
- Assess Current Safety and make safety plans

# What to do

- Take all suicide threats seriously. Listen and express concern in a nonjudgmental way.
- Take action! Get the individual connected with professional help.
- Ask questions openly ("Do you have a plan? Will you talk with someone who can help?")
- Show that you care.
-

# What Not To Do

- Do not keep it a secret
- Do not sidestep the issue or treat it lightly.
- Do not leave the person alone.
- Do not offer simple solutions.
- Do not judge.
- Do not offer or suggest drugs or alcohol.
- Do not try to be a therapist. Get professional help.

# Community Resources

- The Second Wind Fund: Provides free counseling for students at-risk of suicide 19 years and under in the Denver metro area. **Phone:** 303-988-2645; <http://www.thesecondwindfund.org>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC):
  - LIFELINE at 1.800.273.TALK (1.800.273.8255), or call 1.800.SUICIDE; 24-hour suicide prevention hotlines
  - Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program: Offers 24 hour suicide prevention hotline for teens, youth, adults in addition to support groups, trainings, etc. **Phone:** 303-429-3530; Website: [www.yellowribbon.org](http://www.yellowribbon.org)

# References & Resources

- Fortuna, Lisa, R. (2007). Latina Adolescent Suicide: Towards a deeper understanding of therapeutic interventions for Latino adolescents in distress.
- Miranda J, Schoenbaum M, Sherbourne C, Duan N, Wells K. 2004. Effects of primary care depression treatment on minority patients' clinical status and employment. Archives of General Psychiatry: 61(8): 827-834
- Goldston, D. et.al. (2008). Cultural Considerations in Adolescent Suicide Prevention and Psychosocial Treatment. American Psychologist. January, 2008.

# References & Resources

- Liss Resnick, J. (2006). *Strategies for Implementation of the Multicultural Guidelines in University and College Counseling Centers*. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 37(1).
- Vigil Laden, B. (2004). *Serving Emerging Majority Students*. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 127.
- Williams, D. A., Berger, J. B. & McClendon, S. A. (2005). *Towards a Model of Inclusive Excellence and Change in Postsecondary Institutions*. Association of American Colleges and Universities: Making Excellence Inclusive Initiative.