Social-Emotional Learning and Youth Suicide Prevention

Committee for Children conducted a review of literature and found that Social-emotional learning (SEL) skills can address and mitigate known risk factors for youth suicide, thus providing one avenue for upstream prevention.

The Problem

• Youth suicide is on the rise across the country.
• It's one of the top two causes of premature death of youth between ages 10 and 19.¹
• Approximately one in 12 high schoolers have attempted suicide; middle schoolers have nearly as high a rate.²

Findings

Social-emotional learning can combat youth suicide. Hopelessness, anxiety, substance use, and child sexual abuse are known risk factors for suicidal thoughts and behaviors. SEL curricula, as effective universal Tier I (all-student) interventions, promote skills related to protective factors that mitigate those risk factors.

Suicide Risk Factors and Social-Emotional Competencies that Mitigate Them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Self-Awareness</th>
<th>Self-Management</th>
<th>Responsible Decision Making</th>
<th>Social Awareness</th>
<th>Relationship Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Use</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendations for Policy Makers

• Include social-emotional learning within comprehensive youth suicide prevention efforts
• Fund comprehensive prevention that includes SEL to mitigate risk upstream
• Fund research and evaluation of SEL interventions for youth suicide, as they have yet to be studied rigorously
• Learn from local examples of SEL in suicide prevention, such as in Tooele, Utah³ and Jeffco County, Colorado⁴

For the full document of these findings and more information, go to cfchildren.org/policy-advocacy
References


