ELYSSA’S MISSION
SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAM OUTLINE

I. Presentation Opening

Facilitator is introduced by school principal or other school administrator/leader.

Facilitator:

1. Asks how everyone is doing today
2. Advises that we are going to talk about a very difficult subject today which requires undivided attention. Feelings of discomfort are normal.
3. Asks students to think of their best friend, the kinds of things one does with a best friend and kinds of things one talks about with a best friend
4. Asks students to think of Elyssa (or other teenager who ended life by suicide) as their best friend during the presentation.
5. Paints the scenario: You just arrived at school today. Elyssa isn’t here today; you assume she is sick. Suddenly, an announcement on the school’s loud speaker which facilitator reads, which informs everyone of Elyssa’s suicide.
6. Asks the students how they feel upon hearing of the tragic news.

Facilitator shares personal relationship with Elyssa and tells her story.

Facilitator provides facts and statistics about teen suicide in America.
II. **Stress Continuum: Why would someone attempt suicide?**
*(What makes you sad, angry, frustrated, scared?)*

Facilitator:

1. Draws a stress continuum
2. Asks students to share happy events, for example: an A on an exam, vacation, getting driver’s license
3. Asks students to share what creates stress, makes you sad, angry, frustrated, scared, for example:
   
   a. School/work – pressure to perform
   b. Death of relative or friend
   c. Death of pet
   d. Peer pressure to fit in
   e. Physical appearance
   f. Drugs & alcohol
   g. Friends and relationships
   h. Bullying
   i. Fights with parents/siblings
   j. Parents’ divorce
   k. Not doing well in a sport (form of rejection)
   l. Feeling different, feeling lonely
   m. Parent’s remarriage
   n. Sexual orientation/questioning
   o. Abuse – sexual, physical, emotional
   p. Broken romance
   q. Physical illness
   r. Bad grades
   s. Financial strains
   t. Feeling overwhelmed to have too much to do

4. Explains that depression is an illness. When diagnosed correctly and under the care of a doctor, one can lead a normal life.
III. **Coping Mechanisms:** Now, how do we cope both positively and negatively with all these feelings?

Facilitator:

1. Asks students to come up with examples of positive coping mechanisms, for example:
   
   a. Talking to parents/other family members, friends  
   b. Talking with trusted adults (teachers, clergy)  
   c. Talking with a professional (social worker, psychologist, doctor)  
   d. Physical activity (go for a run)  
   e. Creative outlets (music, dancing, writing, art)  
   f. Listen to music  
   g. Cry  
   h. Humor  
   i. Hang out with friends  
   j. Eat favorite food  
   k. Punching bag/pillow

2. Asks students to come up with examples of negative coping mechanisms, for example:

   a. Using drugs or alcohol  
   b. Smoking cigarettes  
   c. Under or over eating  
   d. Cutting oneself/self mutilation  
   e. Suicide attempt  
   f. Freak out/panic  
   g. Shutting down – not going to school, not doing homework  
   h. Sexual promiscuity  
   i. High risk behaviors – getting in fights, speeding, bullying  
   j. Run away (without coming back)
3. Explains that sometimes people feel overwhelmed, have fits of depression, overeat, are sad, are lonely – how do we know if someone is actually suicidal?

IV. **Warning Signs: Indicate someone may be suicidal**

Facilitator:

1. Asks students to identify warning signs, including the following:
   
   a. Having thoughts or verbalizing ideas about suicide  
   b. Changes in mood or personality  
   c. Changes in eating or sleeping patterns  
   d. Withdrawal from friends and usual activities  
   e. Taking unusual risks  
   f. Drug and alcohol abuse  
   g. Previous suicide attempts  
   h. Making final arrangements/giving away prized possessions  

2. Asks students what to do if warning signs are observed in a friend or relative?
V. What do you do?

Facilitator asks students what they would do if warning signs are observed, including the following:

a. Tell someone! Better to have a friend who is alive but angry than a friend who is dead.

b. You do not need to be certain before you talk with another person.

c. What you can do is a temporary fix – they need professional help.

d. If you know your friend has access to firearms, tell an adult immediately.

e. Refer your friend to a resource ie., parents, other adults or family members, teachers, counselors, coaches, medical professionals, clergy, local mental health agency.

f. If there is an attempt, call 911.
VI. Conclusion

Facilitator shows a video of three of Elyssa’s girlfriends. The video summarizes the learning points from the presentation, from a very real perspective of three girls who experienced a friend who took her life.

VII. **Final Logistics**

Facilitator:
1. Asks for any questions.
2. Asks the students to share what they learned.
3. Emphasizes the support resources available at school.

The suicide prevention brochure is distributed to students immediately after the presentation or, preferably, the following day in class for reinforcement.

Students are made aware of the website: [www.elyssasmission.org](http://www.elyssasmission.org) for additional information and support.