

This was followed by **interviews** and **focus groups** with three different cohorts of young adults:

- **Small group workshops** focusing on the “rules of engagement” for friends providing support
  - **Cohort 1:** young adults with limited experience of mental health issues
  - **Cohort 2:** those who’ve helped friends with mental health issues
- **One-on-one conversations** exploring experiences where support was needed
  - **Cohort 3:** those who’ve personally struggled with their mental health (recruited in assistance with our nonprofit partners)

The collected data showed that **peer helping and support was considered to be among the most effective strategies** for improving adolescent mental health and, ultimately, preventing teen suicide.

**76%**

OF YOUNG ADULTS WILL **TURN TO A PEER** IN A TIME OF CRISIS FOR SUPPORT.

The researchers also concluded that, **while many adolescents understand the concept of “being there” for their peers, they don’t necessarily know what to say** and how to say it when a friend expresses negative emotions, including suicidal thoughts. They further delved into the factors that can make young people feel more confident in delivering positive messages to their peers.

The feedback that was collected during the formative research phase of the campaign ultimately helped the team create **messaging that encouraged young people to do more than just “be there”** for their friends (Hopelab, 2023).

## Campaign Message

The campaign messaging empowered teens and young adults to reach out to and support their friends who may be struggling with mental health issues by encouraging them to **“Seize the Awkward”** – use an **awkward silence** or moment as an opportunity to **talk to a friend about their mental health**.

The campaign **avoids explicitly addressing the topic of suicide**, and rather focuses on “conversations your friends about their mental health.”

### Messages included:

- “If you suspect a friend is struggling, **reach out and check-in** (this can be face-to-face, text, or online).”
- “**You don’t need to be an expert** to recognize when someone needs outside help – if you can tell a friend isn’t doing well, they might need a greater network of support.”
- **Be the Friend Who Listens.** Starting a conversation about mental health does not need to be uncomfortable, and it can make all the difference.
- “**We don’t need to physically be there**, to be there for our friends.”
- “Whether it’s over a virtual dinner, while playing video games, or via a call, text, emoji, or a GIF, **what matters is that you reach out.**”

## Marketing Channels

The Seize the Awkward campaign features **TV, radio, online videos, digital banners and social media posts**. Since it launched in 2018, it has continuously launched digital and experiential activations to coincide with key moments in time, including Mental Health Awareness Month in May. A TV spot even aired during President Obama’s online graduation ceremony for high school students.

The campaign has **leveraged platforms popular among teens and young adults**, including Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Reddit, Shine, Tumblr and Twitch. The Broadway musical Dear Evan Hansen, art community Goodtype, and creative platform Social Native helped to amplify the campaign message (ARF, 2020).

Seize the Awkward has **prioritized partnering with actors, musicians, athletes, and other celebrities**. Creators and influencers who shared their personal struggles with mental illness include Billie Eilish, Megan Thee Stallion, Caleb Williams, Noah Cyrus, Tyler Posey,

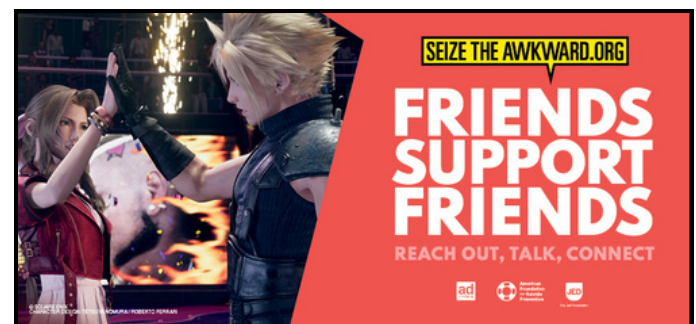


Figure 2: Friends Support Friends banner ad