



SEIZE THE AWKWARD

CAMPAIGN CASE STUDY

Background

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young adults between 16 and 24 years of age. For every youth who dies by suicide, it is estimated that 100-200 others attempt suicide (Ad Council, 2020).

Research conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) suggests that 90 percent of people who die by suicide may have experienced symptoms of a mental health condition (NAMI, 2024).

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LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH AMONG
16-24 YEAR-OLDS IS **SUICIDE**.

Nearly 20 percent, or **1 in 5 high school students**, reported serious thoughts of suicide.

Young adulthood is a critical time, when many people experience mental health issues and significant stress from major life transitions like moving away from home, friends and family, and beginning college or careers.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), **suicide rates for youth and young adults increased 52.2%** between 2000-2021. Those most impacted include American Indian/Alaskan Natives, followed by non-Hispanic white people. High school students who identify as sexual minorities, within the LGBTQ+ community, are five times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual students (Health Disparities in Suicide, 2024).

In order to approach the issues of mental health awareness and youth suicide prevention, the Ad Council, in partnership with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and The Jed Foundation (JED) launched a campaign focused on helping young people start conversations about mental health with their friends. **The Seize the Awkward campaign debuted in January 2018** (dentsu, 2021).

Target Audience

The campaign primarily targeted **friends of teens and young adults (16-24 years old)** who may be struggling with mental health issues (and who may be at risk for suicide).

Over time, the campaign's target audience was further segmented. Recognizing the need for culturally relevant content and resources for Black and Hispanic/Latine young adults, a 2021 refresh of the campaign focused on a more diverse range of young people (Ad Council, 2020).

Formative Research

To help identify the factors that influence how young people think about—and personally help with—teen suicide prevention, **campaign researchers talked to 400 16-to-25 year-olds**.

A **pre-task survey** asked participants to share instances when they had provided or sought support to or from friends.

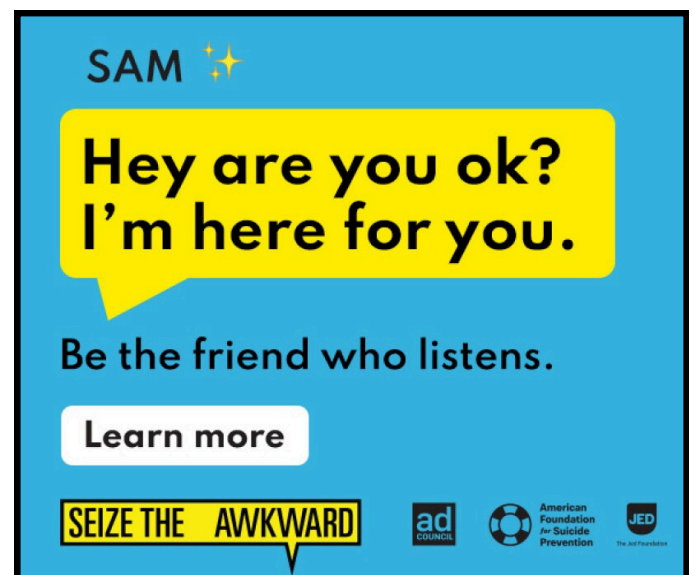


Figure 1: Seize the Awkward text bubble social media banner