



Seize the Awkward Talking Points

Key messages

- Friends of teens and young adults are often the first to recognize early signs of mental health problems and when they do seek support, an estimated 76% of young adults will turn to a peer.
- Teens and young adults are ready and willing to have conversations about mental health, they're just missing the language and tools to do so.
- It isn't always easy to reach out to a friend who may be struggling with mental health, but just having a conversation can really help.
- The Jed Foundation (JED), the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), the Ad Council, and Droga5 have launched a new campaign, *Seize the Awkward*, to empower teens and young adults (16-24) to reach out to a friend who is struggling with mental health issues (and who may be at risk for suicide). The campaign aims to educate young adults about mental health, encourages young adults to create a safe space for their friends to share more, and teaches them how to have those conversations and how to support a friend in need.
- The main message of the campaign is given through a character who personifies an awkward silence. This character takes viewers through some scenarios that they may identify as awkward and a silence occurs, but concludes that it doesn't always have to be such a bad thing. Instead, the character explains that an awkward silence can be used in a good way, to broach the subject of mental health with a friend who seems down or struggling.
- The campaign drives viewers to SeizeTheAwkward.org. The website provides various resources to help young people "seize the awkward" by reaching out to a friend who may be struggling with mental health issues. The resources include tutorial videos, information on warning signs, conversation starters, tips on how to sustain a conversation, and personal testimonial videos on mental health from digital talent and creators including Liza Koshy, Hannah Hart, Tyler Posey, and Remi Cruz.

About the issue:

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst young adults and for every youth suicide, it is estimated that 100-200 others attempt suicide.
- Young adulthood is a critical time in a person's life when they may experience great stress from multiple life changes like leaving high school, moving from home and beginning college or a job. It's also a time when mental health issues frequently emerge and, despite effective treatment

options, there are often long delays between the first appearance of symptoms and when people receive counseling or treatment.

- Friendships play an integral role in young adults' lives. They can often intuitively sense when something is "off" with their friends and want to do something to help. However, they may be unsure about reaching out because they are afraid of damaging the friendship, hurting their friends' feelings, saying something that is wrong or making the situation worse, not being able to help, or misinterpreting their friends' behaviors.
- These barriers can lead to isolation in friendships and potentially greater risk for those in distress. Young adults recognize when their friends are struggling and want to help, but don't feel like they know how to. Yet, those struggling with mental health desire and need their friends' support. In fact, when they do look for support, 76 percent of young adults will turn to a peer.
- By trusting their gut instincts when something is off with a friend and saying something, even if it's awkward, messy, or imperfect, a friend can create a space of trust for a conversation about mental health. And in turn, these conversations can help to prevent something much worse from happening later.

About the campaign:

- *Seize the Awkward* (STA) aims to encourage and empower young adults to reach out to a friend who may be struggling with their mental health. By leveraging moments of vulnerability in their friendships, they can create a safe space for their friends to open up about mental health.
- Friends can usually tell when something is off with their friends, whether it's a change in eating habits or a change in temperament. *Seize the Awkward* encourages these friends not to ignore these signs and instead, start talking about mental health with friends who may be struggling.
- Talking about mental health can be awkward, but it can really help. Just starting a conversation with a friend, no matter how awkward it may feel, can make a real difference in someone's life.
- Nobody likes an awkward silence. But when it comes to mental health, awkward silences don't have to be a bad thing. In fact, we want young adults to embrace this awkwardness and use it as an opportunity to reach out to a friend.
- The campaign personifies the awkward silence that can happen between friends before a conversation about mental health. The quirky, kooky, and well, awkward, character helps illustrate the ways young adults can broach the topic of mental health with their friends. He also reassures them that while things may get awkward when talking about mental health, that moment is brief and these conversations are worth it.

- On SeizeTheAwkward.org, users will find a variety of resources that intend to help prepare them for conversations with their friends about mental health. These resources include:
 - A tutorial video and detailed list describing and explaining the signs that a friend may be struggling
 - A tutorial video and interactive list of conversation starters to help users “seize the awkward” with their friends
 - A tutorial video featuring guidance on how to have an effective conversation about mental health
 - Videos featuring Liza Koshy, Hannah Hart, Tyler Posey, and Remi Cruz that highlight the real, personal experience each has faced around the issue of mental health
 - Tips on what to do following a conversation with a friend about their mental health
 - Advice on what to do if you feel your friend needs more help than you can provide
 - Emergency/crisis mental health resources
- The *Seize the Awkward* campaign is sponsored by The Jed Foundation (JED) and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP).
- [JED](#) is a nonprofit that exists to protect emotional health and prevent suicide for our nation’s teens and young adults. We’re partnering with high schools and colleges to strengthen their mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention programs and systems. We’re equipping teens and young adults with the skills and knowledge to help themselves and each other. We’re encouraging community awareness, understanding and action for young adult mental health.
- The [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#), the nation’s largest suicide prevention organization, is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. AFSP is the largest private funder of suicide prevention research, and provides support for those who struggle with thoughts of suicide or who have survived a suicide attempt.
- To further the *Seize the Awkward* campaign, the Ad Council produced a companion video featuring top creators and talent including Liza Koshy, Hannah Hart, Mark "Markiplier" Fischbach, Tyler Oakley, Tyler Posey, Meredith Foster, Remi Cruz, Shannon Beveridge, and Orion Carloto. The video shows each creator sitting in awkward silence, but using that space to open up a conversation with the viewer about mental health.
- *Seize the Awkward* was created pro bono by award-winning advertising agency Droga5.