

# A Guide To Adolescent Mental Health & Wellness

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# Introductions

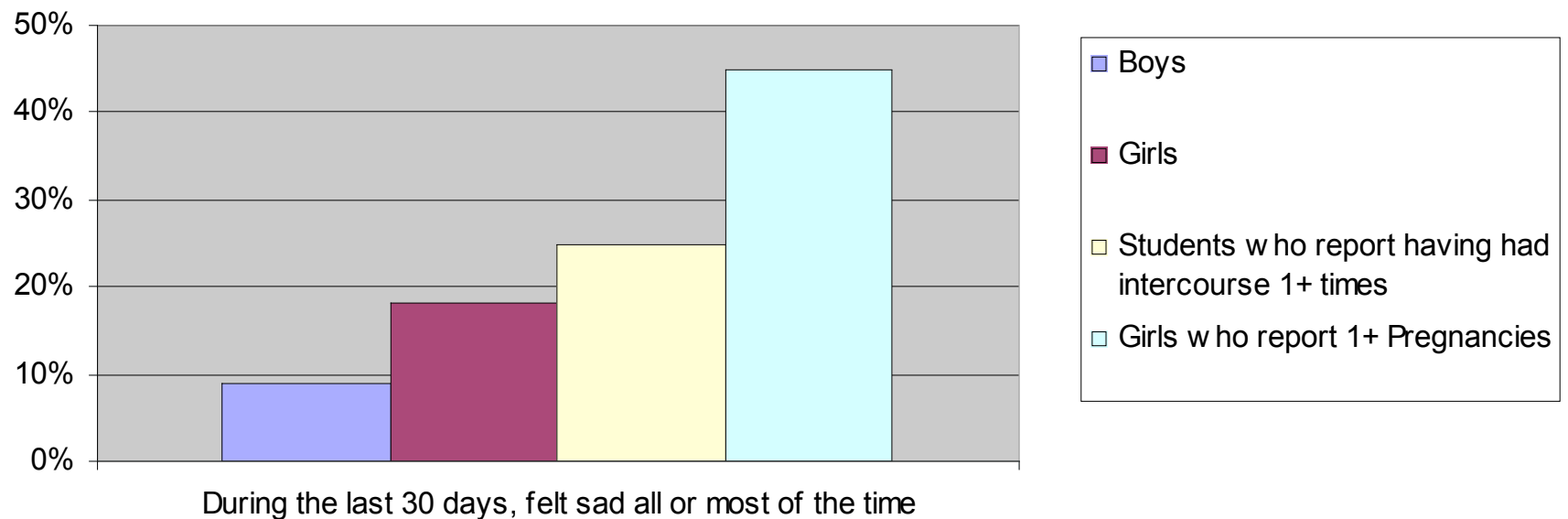
- My background
- A Public Health Approach to Mental Health
- Our path today
  - A glimpse at MN youth
  - Risk factors & warning signs
  - Action steps & strategies for promoting health

# A developmental perspective

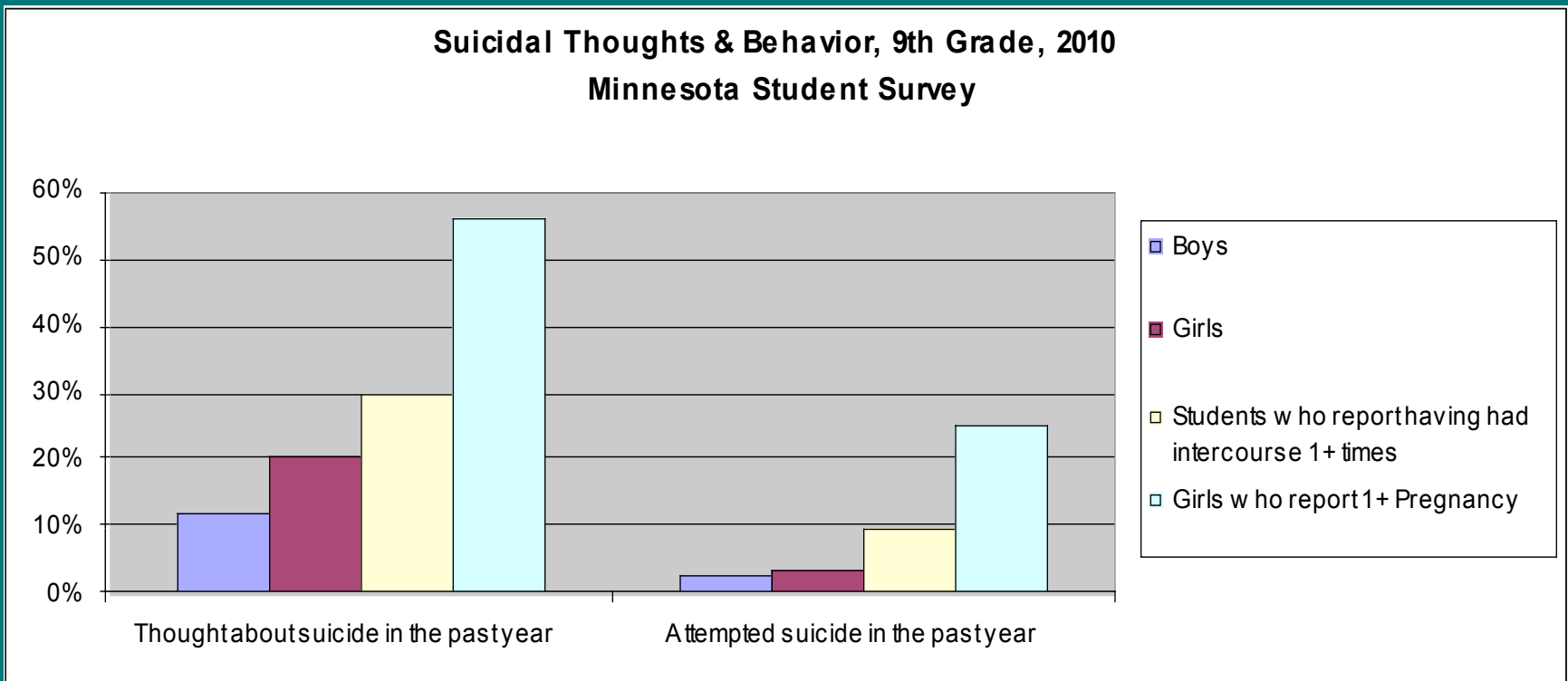
- Age-related patterns of competence & illness
- Multiple contexts of development
  - Neighborhoods, families, schools, culture
- Interactions among biological, psychological, and social factors

# What do we know about MN Youth? Emotional Distress

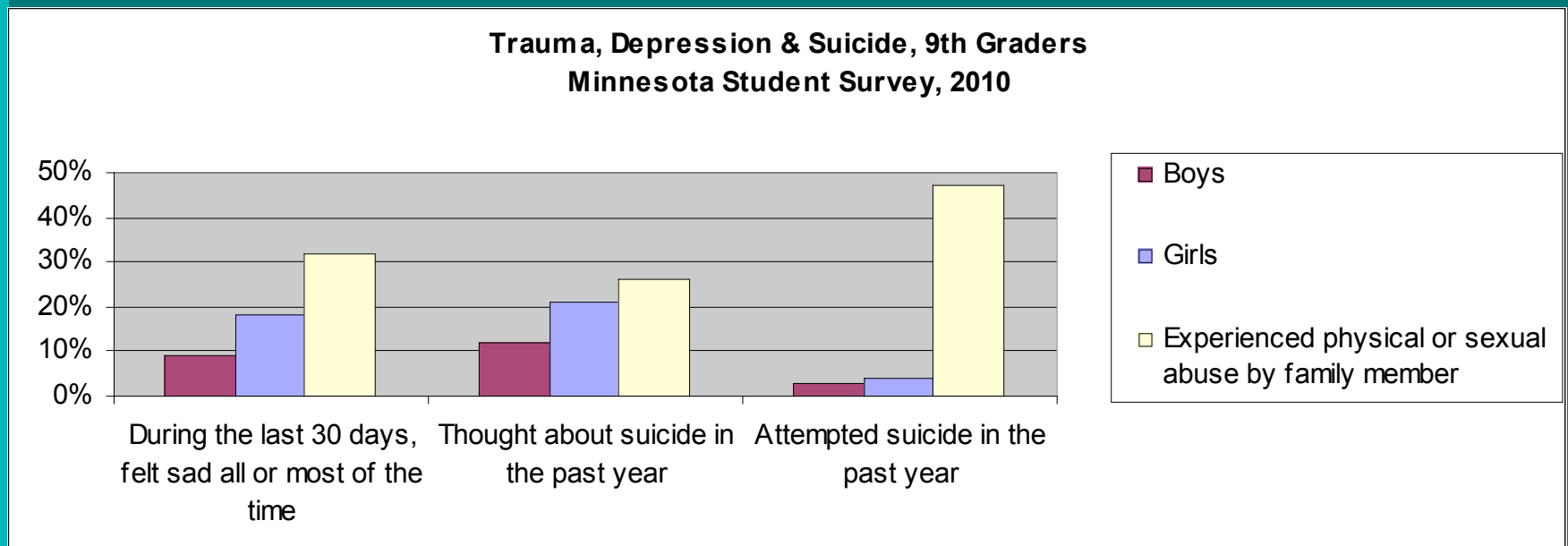
Feelings of Sadness, 9th Grade, 2010  
Minnesota Student Survey



# What do we know about MN Youth? Suicide



# What do we know about MN Youth? Trauma



# Cumulative Risk Factors

- Of female 9th graders who have been pregnant AND experienced sexual abuse, 71% thought about killing themselves in the past year.
  - In contrast, of the 9th grade females who have not experienced sexual abuse and have not been pregnant, 17% had thought about suicide.

# Symptoms of Depression



- Feeling sad, empty, or numb
- Feeling tired all the time
- Feeling hopeless, helpless, or worthless
- Feeling angry or moody, excessive crying
- Avoiding friends; feeling alone when with friends
- Loss of interest in things that used to be fun
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Eating less or eating more than usual
- Recurring headaches, backaches, or stomachaches
- Alcohol or drug use
- Thinking about, planning, or attempting suicide

# Warning Signs: Suicide



- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated or recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

# Key Risk Factors

- Common risk factors for multiple MEB disorders
  - Family history of mental illness
  - Personal history of previous depression or mental illness
  - Childhood trauma/maltreatment
  - Family disruption or dysfunction/substance abuse
  - Poverty
- Depression
  - “Depressogenic” cognitive style
- Suicide
  - Previous attempts
  - Substance abuse
  - Social isolation
  - Access to lethal means
  - Pre-existing vulnerability + crisis



# Action Steps

- Build developmental assets, protective factors
  - Problem solving skills, coping skills
- Talk about it
- Be attuned to the role of trauma
- Destigmatize mental illness
  - Reframe as normal responses to trauma
- Connect to appropriate treatment
- Utilize trauma-informed strategies
- Expand your universe of collaborators

# Key Protective Factors

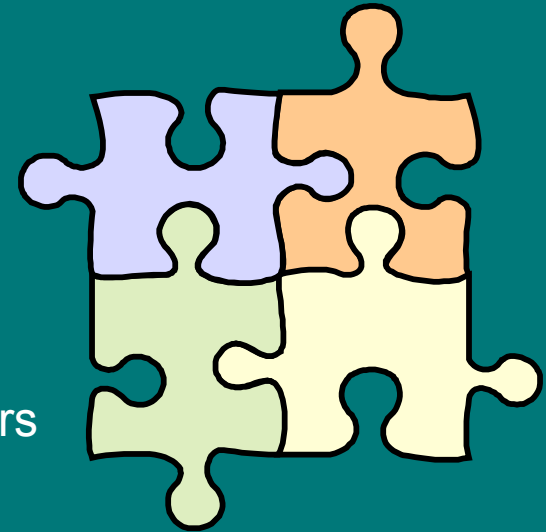
## Social Support

- Strong connections to family, peers, and community
- Support through ongoing medical and mental health care relationships
- Who/What are your Sources of Strength?
  - <http://www.sourcesofstrength.org/>



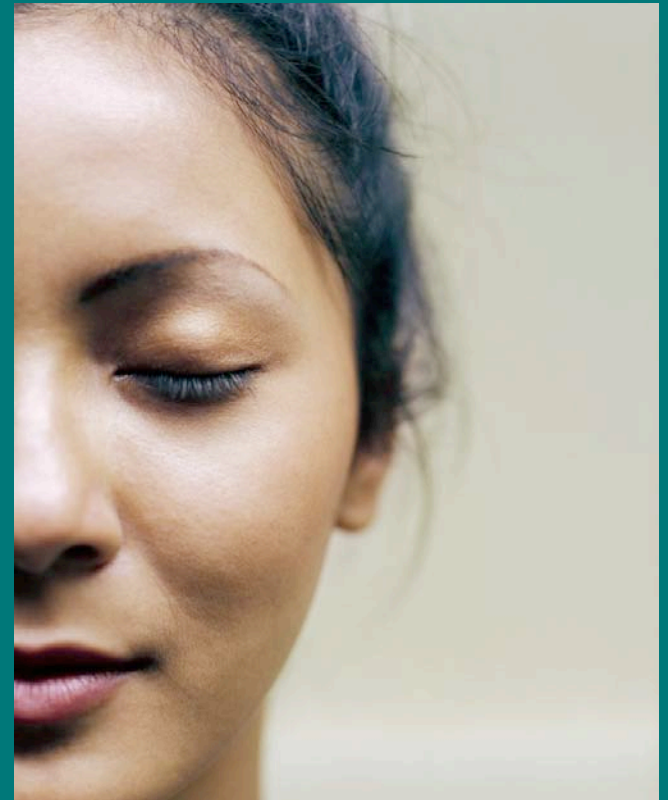
# Key Protective Factors Problem-solving & Coping Skills

- Programs can be school-, family-, or community-based
  - Strengthening Families Program
  - Positive Parenting Program
  - Family Home Visiting programs
  - Penn Resiliency Program
    - How beliefs + feelings influence behaviors
  - Seattle Social Development Program
- Cognitive-behavioral strategies that focus on the development of coping skills, mood management



# Protective Lifestyle Choices

- Sleep
  - Improve sleep duration & quality
- Diet
  - Adequate iron, esp. for infants & young children
  - Vitamin D
- Physical activity
  - Exercise can reduce depressive symptoms



# Talking to youth about mental health

- Create a safe space for disclosure.
  - Confidentiality
  - Language that doesn't stigmatize illness
  - Body language
  - Ask about strengths
- Meet youth where they are.
  - Help youth understand the role emotions play in their decision-making
  - Provide choices
  - Model healthy decision-making & coping skills



# Talking about mental health 2

- Start general.
  - How's your mood been lately?
  - How have you been feeling emotionally?
- Ask about sleep.
- If you are concerned, ask about suicide directly.
  - Are you planning to commit suicide?
  - Have you thought about killing yourself?
  - Do you feel like you want to die or be dead?
  - Do you wish you could just go to sleep and never wake up?
  - Are you thinking that it would be better if you were no longer around anymore?

# Know how to respond

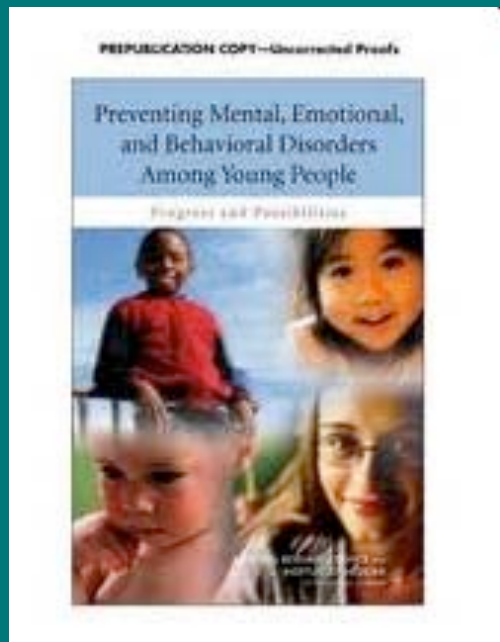
- Remain calm
- Listen, listen, listen
- Don't preach or lecture them
- Plan *with them* about how to involve parents or caregivers
- Assure them that there is help available and they can feel better
- Don't leave them alone



# Resources

- For youth: <http://www.reachout.com>
- County-based mental health crisis teams
- Suicide Prevention
  - <http://www.sprc.org>: Suicide Prevention Resource Ctr
  - <http://www.save.org>: Suicide Awareness Voices of Education
- Trauma-informed care
  - <http://www.riskingconnection.com>: Risking Connection
  - <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/ambit/>: AMBIT Network
  - <http://nctsn.org/>: Nat'l Child Traumatic Stress Network
  - Harris & Fallot, *Using Trauma Theory to Design Service Systems*
- Developmental assets
  - <http://www.search-institute.org>: The Search Institute

# Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders among Young People



- National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2009

[http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=12480](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12480)

# Contact Information

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- Information on mental health/suicide
- Technical assistance in prevention strategies