

Suicide Prevention
Seize the Awkward
2025 Brief

Issue Background

Teen and young adulthood is a time of major transition in life – newfound independence, forming and changing identities, new relationships, academic stress, moving away from home, entering the workplace, and more. These shifts can come with uncertainty, isolation, and emotional stress on a young person. Stressors and mental health challenges often surface during this transitional phase, yet many young people hesitate to speak openly about how they are feeling or their struggles with a friend.

About two-thirds (63%) of young adults (18-24) report symptoms of anxiety or depression in the past two years,¹ and 1 in 4 have a diagnosable mental health condition.² Suicide also remains the leading cause of death among young people aged 15-24.³ But there's hope – and it often starts with a friend. That's why *Seize the Awkward* empowers young people to reach out, check in, and support their friends – even when it feels uncomfortable or awkward. Because peer-to-peer connection can make all the difference for teens and young adults going through difficulties.

In 2025, the campaign is evolving to better serve both emotionally expressive and emotionally guarded young people. It's not just about encouraging the conversation – it's about equipping people to start it, model it, and feel confident that reaching out matters.

Key Insight

Young adults want to support their friends – but fear of awkwardness, emotional missteps, or saying the wrong thing holds them back. Many don't realize that simple presence and small check-ins (not perfect advice) are often the most powerful tools they have.

Campaign Goal & Objectives

Through *Seize the Awkward*, the Ad Council and its partners aim to create a cultural norm where young people feel emotionally prepared and socially supported in reaching out to their peers about mental health – ultimately contributing to the prevention of young adult suicide. We want to empower them to check in with their friends, even if they don't suspect they are going through something, as well as encourage young people to reach out if they need support.

Our objectives in 2025 are to:

- **Normalize** checking in on a friend's mental health, whether they might be struggling or not, even if it feels awkward at first, and demonstrate how a simple check in or "I'm here for you" can have a big impact.
- **Empower** young adults with emotional tools, language, and confidence to check in on their friends.
- **Educate** young people on how to spot signs of someone who may be struggling – especially in digital environments.
- **Build** a sense of mutual responsibility and compassion through the "virtuous cycle" of where vulnerability leads to support, and support inspires more openness.

Target Audience

Ensure we are speaking to the **varied** experiences and cultures of young adults/teens (16-24), **with a heightened sensitivity to resonating with** Black and Hispanic teens/young adults, who face [persistent disparities](#) in accessing quality mental health care.

Audience Segment Considerations:

- Emotionally expressive individuals who already check in but want deeper support and tools to help their friends.
- Emotionally guarded individuals who want to help but lack confidence, language, or know-how

Strategic Approach

We are reframing peer conversations about mental health as acts of care and strength – not pressure or perfection. We show that this simple act of checking in can make a meaningful difference. By modeling low-pressure, everyday check-ins, and offering tangible tools, we help young people see that:

- It doesn't have to be a crisis to check in with a friend.
- You don't have to be an expert – you just have to be present.
- Saying something is better than saying nothing.

Creative Platform

Seize the Awkward is a call to action for young people to reach out to a friend about their mental health, even if they don't think their friend is struggling. In this next phase, we also want to show just how possible these moments can be in their everyday lives. By equipping young people with the knowledge and tools to check on a friend, we help them feel empowered to start the conversation – even if it feels awkward at first.

Please see creative and messaging guidelines [here](#) and check out Seize the Awkward on [Instagram here](#)

Main Message

- Start a conversation with a friend about how they are feeling and their mental health, even if it may feel uncomfortable at first or they don't seem like they are struggling.

Call To Action

- Visit SeizetheAwkward.org for tips and resources on how to start a conversation with a friend about how they are feeling and their mental health.

Campaign Partners

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

[The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide, including those who have had a [loss](#). AFSP creates a culture that's smart about mental health through education and community programs, develops suicide prevention through research and advocacy, and provides support for those affected by suicide. Led by CEO Robert Gebbia and headquartered in New York, with an Advocacy office in Washington, DC, AFSP has local chapters in all 50 states with programs and events nationwide. Learn more about AFSP in its latest [Annual Report](#), and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following AFSP on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#).

National Alliance on Mental Illness

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

What started as a small group of families gathered around a kitchen table in 1979 has blossomed into the nation's leading voice on mental health. Today, we are an alliance of more than 600 local Affiliates and 49 State Organizations who work in your community to raise awareness and provide support and education that was not previously available to those in need.

Connect with NAMI: [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#) | [TikTok](#)

¹[NIH](#)

²[NIMH](#)

³[Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#) (data from 2015-2020)

⁴[The First Year College Experience](#)

