

**AT-RISK** FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATORS

# Workshop Discussion Guide

Print the following pages and use as a guide for leading the workshop.

# Workshop Discussion Guide

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Facilitator Prep time: 2-3 hours

Workshop Runtime: 2.5-4 hours

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## Preparation

✓ Determine how to best implement the training at your school:

**Decision 1:** Will staff complete the simulation prior to coming to the workshop?

- We recommend staff complete the simulation on their own and then meet for a 2.5 hour workshop.
- Alternatively, staff can take the simulation as part of the workshop (on separate computers). Then they rejoin the group for discussion. This would be a half-day training.

**Decision 2:** Will the workshop be face-to-face or online?

Tips for online workshops:

- Some software possibilities are Zoom, Google Hangouts, WebEx, or Skype.
- The “breakout rooms” in Zoom allow participants to partner for role plays and discussion.
- Share your screen to show PowerPoint slides.
- Assign a co-host to help you manage the workshop.
- Complete a recording of the online workshop and make it available for those who cannot attend.

✓ Review *At-Risk for Middle School Educators* and the full Workshop Discussion Guide and corresponding PowerPoint. Customize the PowerPoint to include your school’s or district’s logo and any mission- or vision-specific details. If you will have less than 2.5 hours for your workshop, customize it to suit your time constraints.

✓ Discuss your school’s referral process with the school leader, counselor, and/or mental-health team. Customize the referral processes and local resources slides and be ready to present this information to the group. Be sure to include both the traditional at-school referral process, as well as, the process for referral and connection if students are learning from home. If you will provide mental health services via telehealth, explain that process.

✓ Cue up the corresponding PowerPoint presentation and make sure you have adequate means to present it to your participants. If needed, you can adjust the length of time of your workshop by adding/removing discussion items or activities (download the PowerPoint presentation).

✓ Print or email the workshop handouts.

- Note-Taking Guide
- Simulation Summary
- Role-Play Scenarios
- Local Resources page from the simulation

## Sample Planning Timeline

- **60 Days Prior:** Confirm simulation training date and location
- **45 Days Prior:** Ensure account access for district/school staff
- **30 Days Prior (if staff will take simulation prior to workshop):** Confirm registration and that attendees have created their accounts
- **5 Days Prior:** Send reminder to staff

## Workshop Flow

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### Welcome & Hook Activity

10 min

#### Slide 1: Welcome

- Welcome attendees and thank them for coming.

#### Slide 2: Your role [customize]

- Introduce yourself and (if necessary) your role within the school or district.
- Share contact information. Encourage attendees to reach out to you with questions or follow up after the training.

#### Slide 3: Workshop overview [customize this slide if participants will not take the simulation during the workshop]

- Discuss what participants will learn in the workshop.

#### Slide 4: Group norms [customize as necessary]

- Sample norms: actively participate, be respectful, do not share names or identifying information of students or staff, seek help if you would like to discuss personal mental health issues, take a break if any of the material is triggering, reach out to me at the end if you are concerned about a student.

#### Slide 5: Hook activity (5 min)

- Ask attendees to use a scrap piece of paper to describe the image on the slide, using the acronym AEIOU. (1 min)

**A**  
**E**  
**I**  
**O**  
**U**

**Adjective:** A word to describe the image.

**Emotion:** How do you feel about the image?

**Interesting:** What is interesting to you about the image?

**OMG:** What surprised you about the image?

**Um?:** What question do you have about the image?

- Ask participants to share their observations with a neighbor. (1 min)
- Ask participants to share a few answers with the whole group. (2.5 min)

- Quick Debrief: (0.5 min)
  - Sometimes we see the kid at the desk but we don't see the wave behind them. Understanding a student's mental health helps educators see the student's bigger picture.
  - As educators, we should know how to identify signs of mental health distress, approach students confidently, and refer students to the support they need in order to succeed.

**Note:** *If staff have taken the Kognito simulation prior to the workshop (recommended), then skip to section 5 (PPT slide 11).*

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## Preparing for Simulation

Up to 10 min

### Slides 6 - 9: Brief overview of Kognito and the simulation they are about to take

- Kognito's simulations are evidence-based.
  - Encourage staff to choose the conversation pathway that best reflects what they would actually say in a real-life conversation.
  - Let staff know we are not asking them to become counselors... but to capitalize on the limited time they have with students to provide the most effective support.
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## Simulation

1 hr

### Slide 10

- Ensure participants are able to login to their account.
  - Provide headphones to all participants.
  - Pass out the note-taking handout to all participants.
  - Proctor the room to allow anyone needing assistance to communicate with you.
  - Participants who finish early can begin their break. Write on the board what time the workshop will reconvene for discussion.
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## 20-Minute Break

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## Discussion

30 min

### Slide 11: Simulation review (5 min)

- Pass out the Simulation Summary.
- Remind participants about the conversations in the simulation (include more detail if the participants took the simulation prior to the workshop).
- Ask a few questions to get the discussion going. Sample questions:
  - How similar did these feel to conversations you've had in real life?
  - Did you try new things in these conversations that you haven't tried in real life?

### Slide 12: Warning signs (10 min)

- “Remember the wave we saw in the picture at the beginning of the workshop? Often we don’t know that wave is there. All we see are the student’s reactions to that wave. These are warning signs that tell you a child might be dealing with more under the surface than we realize.”
- “Look for worrisome behavior or worrisome changes in behavior.”
- Possible discussion questions:
  - What kinds of things do kids your students’ age struggle with emotionally? (Possible answers: managing school work, responsibilities at home, relationship stuff, parents fighting, divorced parents, mental disorders)
  - How do young people typically cope with these kinds of struggles? (Possible answers: they don’t, they shut down, maybe they don’t do their work, they talk to an adult who can help)
  - Were there any signs that surprised you, or that you hadn’t thought to take note of before playing through the simulation?
  - Why is it important for teachers to notice these things, reach out to the student, and possibly refer them for support? (Possible answers: build the student’s resiliency by being another adult they know cares; educators in an ideal position to notice when a student needs help and connect them with the resources designed to help them; the earlier a child gets the help they need, the better their overall outcomes might be; students receiving needed support may take less of our time and attention in the classroom and cause less disruption)
  - Why do some students’ warning signs not lead to approach and referral by a teacher? (Possible answers: teachers may not realize the behavior is indicative of a deeper issue; or the student’s behavior may not be a problem in the classroom)
  - How might identifying an at-risk student save you time in the long run? (Possible answers: the student could get the help they need to improve behavior in the long run; when you improve your relationship with the child, their behavior may also improve)

### Slide 13: Bringing up concerns (10 min)

- Review the four techniques discussed in the simulation:
  - Use “I” statements, with phrases like “I think,” “I feel,” and “it seems like.”
  - Avoid negative labels and replace them with neutral phrases that avoid accusation.
  - Avoid exaggeration and use soft modifiers.
  - Be specific about what you’ve observed.
- Possible discussion questions:
  - Which of these techniques do you already use when talking to students/ caregivers? How are they helpful?
  - Which of these are new techniques you want to try in the future? Why?
  - What words/tone do we often use when we’re approaching a student as an authority figure? (Possible answers: giving unsolicited advice, disciplining, presuming we already know the reason the student is behaving the way they are)

- Why might we want to, instead, approach a student as a supportive adult? (Possible answers: the student may be struggling and need help, we want to work with the student to evoke behavior changes, we want to encourage the student to talk with the counselor without making them defensive)
- How do techniques like these help us assume the role of a supportive adult? (Possible answers: not acting like we already know the reasons for the behavior, bringing up concerns in a way that doesn't blame or criticize the student and is less likely to provoke defensiveness)

#### Slide 14: Referring students (5 min)

- Techniques for talking with the student about counseling:
  - **Normalize it:** “The counselor has helped students with similar issues...” (not giving specific names)
  - **Discuss advantages:** “It can feel good to talk about your feelings” or “the counselor can help you meet your goals.”
  - **Make the introduction:** “I can introduce you.”
- Why is it important to use techniques like these, instead of just telling the student they should see the counselor? (Possible answers: the student is less likely to push back against the idea if you use a soft approach; if you can increase the student's ownership of seeing the counselor, they are more likely to follow through with it)

## Role Play 1

30 min

#### Prepare for role play (5 min)

- Ask participants to break into groups of two for a set of role plays. Online-meeting systems like Zoom offer randomized break-out rooms for set periods of time and set group sizes.
- Tell participants they will role-play two challenging conversations between a teacher and a student.
- Ask them to decide who will play the teacher first.

#### Role play (10 min)

- Participants should look at the role-play handout and read **ONLY** about their character (the concerned teacher or the student). Then they begin their first role play.
- Keep up Slide 13 (techniques for bringing up concerns).
- Give participants a one-minute warning before the end of the role play.

#### Role play discussion (15 min)

- If you played the role of the teacher... Raise your hand if you tried anything new in this conversation (anything you haven't tried in the past in discussions with students)? What did you try and how did it work or not work?
- What did you learn about Tamina's emotional state and home life?
- If you played the role of the student... What did your partner do in this conversation to make you feel comfortable and respected?

- How were the techniques for bringing up sensitive topics used to approach Tamina more as a supportive adult than as a disciplinarian? Alternatively, how could they have been used to make the conversation even better?
- Could Tamina be helped by a referral to a school mental health professional? (Yes, she seems to be under a lot of stress and may benefit from talking with a trained professional at school; it would also be helpful to talk with her parent about your observations.)
- How did this conversation build Tamina’s resilience? What does that mean? (Resilient students know that they can ask for help when they need it, because they’re connected to a support system. By showing this student you care and introducing her to the counselor, you increase the number of caring adults in her life and the number of people she can go to when she needs help.)
- What kind of advance planning, if any, is necessary for conducting a conversation like this? (Possible answers: checking your emotions to put aside any unhelpful thoughts or presumptions you may have about the student or parent; considering how you might bring up the things you’ve noticed and what kind of language you will use)

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## 15-Minute Break

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### Suicide

5 min

#### Slide 15: Suicide warning signs

- According to the CDC, suicide is the second leading cause of death for children aged 10-14.
- The presence of more than one of the following warning signs may increase a youth’s risk for engaging in suicidal behaviors in the near future:
  - Talking about or making plans for suicide
  - Expressing hopelessness about the future
  - Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
  - Showing worrisome behavior or changes in behavior, such as:
    - Withdrawal from or changes in social connections/situation
    - Changes in sleep (increased or decreased)
    - Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
    - Recent increased agitation or irritability

#### Slide 16: What to do if you suspect a student may be considering suicide

- “Suicide is often preventable. If you fear that a student is considering suicide, talk to him or her immediately and be direct. Asking about suicide will not put the idea into a student’s head.”

- **01.** Gather as much information as the student is willing to share, such as:
  - Are they thinking about suicide?
  - Do they have a plan?
  - Do they intend to act on the plan?
  - Do they have the means to act on the plan?
- **02.** Connect the student immediately and in person to a supportive counselor, staff member, local service provider, or crisis center.
- “If you have questions on how to handle a particular situation and you cannot reach anyone in your school administration, you can call or text The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 9-8-8 (988) 24 hours a day, seven days a week.”

#### Slide 17: How to ask about suicide

- Asking a student if they are considering suicide will not put the idea in the student’s head.
- Also, the way the question is asked makes a big difference in whether or not the student will give you a truthful answer.
  - **Not Effective:** “You’re not thinking about suicide, are you?”
  - **Not Effective:** “You wouldn’t kill yourself. I know you’re smarter than that.”
  - **Effective:** “Are you considering suicide?”
- Many students who are thinking about suicide will welcome the opportunity to talk about those thoughts if given a chance.
- Get participants to turn to their role play partner, and take turns asking the question.

## Role Play 2

25 min

#### Role play (10 min)

- Now participants will switch roles. Whoever played the teacher before, will now play the student.
- Ask participants to read Section B on the role-play handout and begin their second role play.
- Keep up Slide 13 (techniques for bringing up concerns).
- Give participants a one-minute warning before the end of the role play.

#### Role play discussion (15 min)

- If you played the role of the teacher... Raise your hand if you tried anything new in this conversation? What did you try and how did it work or not work?
- What did you learn about Dallas’s emotional state?
- If you played the student... What did your partner do in this conversation to make you feel comfortable and respected?
- How do you think this conversation helped Dallas? Why was it helpful to talk with him yourself instead of taking him directly to the counselor? (He may feel shy and uncomfortable with the counselor, whereas you already have a relationship with him; he may be more willing to open up to you than the counselor; your conversation may make him more comfortable with the idea of talking with a counselor.)



**Reminders:** Never promise confidentiality to a student. If you do, you will have to break your promise when you pass along details to the counselor. Also, never leave a possibly suicidal student alone. Connect them immediately and in person with the counselor or other designated school personnel.

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## Our School's Processes

10 min

### Slide 18: Bullying referral process

#### Slides 19-20: Referring at-risk students

- Ask participants to turn to the back of the Simulation Summary and take notes.
  - Pass out copies of the “Local Resources” page from the simulation. These are resources that will have been provided by the agency sponsoring your access to the simulation.
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## Conclusion Activities

20 min

### Slide 21: 3, 2, 1 activity (8 min)

- On a new piece of paper, write down 3 things you learned today, 2 questions you have, and 1 way you're going to change your practice.
- Allow participants to share their answers.

### Slide 22: Bridging the Gap activity (12 min)

- “Let's do some action planning, to think about your school and commit to some takeaways. Visualize where you are, where you'd like to be, and what it takes to get there.”
- **01.** Where You Are: List some of your observations.
- **02.** Where You'd Like to Be: List some of the qualities of your ideal school.
- **03.** What It Takes: Finally, list some ideas that might bridge the gap between where you are and where you'd like to be. What could happen to bring your school one step closer to your ideal?
- Allow participants to share their ideas.

### Slide 23: Conclusion

- Thank participants for their time and remind them of why this topic is important.
- Allow for questions.

AT-RISK FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATORS

# Note-Taking Guide

Print the following pages  
and distribute to workshop  
participants.

# Note-Taking Guide

By the end of this simulation, you will be able to:

- **Identify students** in psychological distress
- **Effectively approach students** to discuss your concerns
- **Refer students** to mental health resources within your school

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## Connecting with Students

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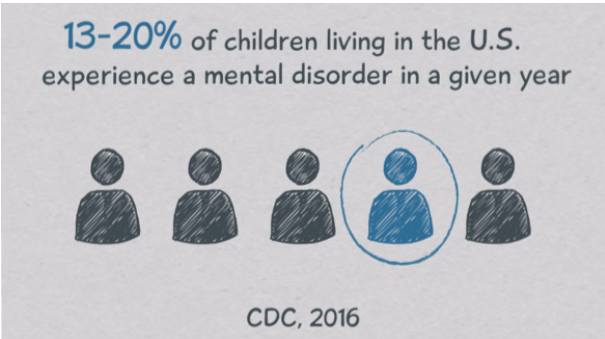
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# Note-Taking Guide

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## Identifying At-Risk Students

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Look for worrisome behaviors or worrisome changes in behavior.

- **Behaviors:** Withdrawal/isolation, anger, emotional outbursts, mood swings, excessive worry, demands for your time and attention, frequent health complaints, unnecessary risk-taking
- **Academics:** Frequent missed/late assignments, falling grades, low participation, low attendance
- **Appearance:** Poor grooming/hygiene, disheveled/worsening appearance, drastic weight gain/loss, avoidance of eye contact

# Note-Taking Guide

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Talk to Mariah

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Resiliency

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**Students with resiliency:**

- ✓ Maintain perspective
- ✓ Feel empowered to solve problems
- ✓ Feel connected to support system

# Note-Taking Guide

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## Approaching At-Risk Students

Handwriting practice area consisting of multiple horizontal lines for notes.

- ✓ Use “I” statements
- ✓ Avoid negative labels
- ✓ Avoid exaggeration
- ✓ Be specific about observations

# Note-Taking Guide

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## Talk to Jen

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## Bullying

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**Bullying:**

- Unwanted, aggressive behavior
- An imbalance of power
- Repeated or with potential to reoccur

# Note-Taking Guide

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## Referring At-Risk Students

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**Ways to Refer**

- ✓ Tell the student about the counselor
- ✓ Tell the counselor about the student
- ✓ Both (recommended)

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## Talk to Michael

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# Note-Taking Guide

## Suicide Prevention

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### Suicide Warning Signs

- Talking about or making plans for suicide
- Expressing hopelessness about the future
- Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
- Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes, such as:
  - Withdrawal from or changes in social connections/situation
  - Changes in sleep (increased or decreased)
  - Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
  - Recent increased agitation or irritability

- **01.** Gather as much information as the student is willing to share:
  - Are they thinking about suicide?
  - Do they have a plan?
  - Do they intend to act on the plan?
  - Do they have the means to act on the plan?
- **02.** Connect the student immediately and in person to a supportive counselor, staff member, local service provider, or crisis center.



AT-RISK FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATORS

# Simulation Summary

Print the following handout and distribute to workshop participants.

# Simulation Summary

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## Identifying At-Risk Students

Look for **worrisome behavior** and **worrisome changes** in behavior.

- **Behaviors:** Withdrawal/isolation, anger, emotional outbursts, mood swings, excessive worry, demands for your time and attention, frequent health complaints, unnecessary risk-taking
- **Academics:** Frequent missed/late assignments, falling grades, low participation, low attendance
- **Appearance:** Poor grooming/hygiene, disheveled/worsening appearance, drastic weight gain/loss, avoidance of eye contact

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## Approaching At-Risk Students

- **Use “I” statements**, with phrases such as “I think,” “I feel,” and “it seems like.”
- **Avoid negative labels** and replace them with neutral phrases that avoid accusation.
- **Avoid exaggeration** and use soft modifiers.
- **Be specific** about what you’ve observed.
- **Ask open-ended questions** that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.”
- **Reflect** what you think the student is saying, thinking, or feeling.
- **Avoid disagreeing, criticizing, and giving unsolicited advice.**

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## Referring At-Risk Students

- **Normalize it:** “The counselor has helped students with similar issues...” (don’t name names!)
- **Discuss advantages:** “It can feel good to talk about your feelings.” “The counselor can help you meet your goals.”
- **Make the introduction:** “I can introduce you.”

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# Simulation Summary

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## Suicide Warning Signs

- Talking about or making plans for suicide
  - Expressing hopelessness about the future
  - Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
  - Showing worrisome behavior or changes in behavior, such as:
    - Withdrawal from or changing in social connections/situation
    - Changes in sleep (increased or decreased)
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- 01.** Gather as much information as the student is willing to share:
    - Are they thinking about suicide?
    - Do they have a plan?
    - Do they intend to act on the plan?
    - Do they have the means to act on the plan?
  - 02.** Connect the student immediately and in person to a supportive counselor, staff member, local service provider, or crisis center.

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## Your School's Referral Process

**Q. To whom should you refer a student who may be in psychological distress?**

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**Q. What is the referral policy in your school for students who may be a danger to themselves or others?**

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**Q. When and how would a student's parents/guardians be notified about your concerns? Whose role is it to notify them?**

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AT-RISK FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATORS

# Role-Play Scenarios

Print the following handout and distribute to workshop participants.

# Role-Play Scenarios

## Role-Play Scenario A

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### Concerned Teacher

**Read this if you are playing the teacher role.**

During the first half of the school year, your student Tamina did well, making mostly Bs and Cs, and seemed happy and outgoing. She was popular and often told jokes in class that made the students (and you) laugh. However, since the winter break, there's been a change in her. She often comes to school in clothing that is stained and dirty. She sometimes smells of body odor. She's become more quiet and withdrawn. Now, instead of laughing with her friends, she's more likely to say things that hurt their feelings--in class or out. Two days ago, she made a girl cry when she made fun of her answer in class. You addressed Tamina's behavior at the time, letting her know that was not acceptable. Now you want to reach out to Tamina for a longer chat to see what's going on.

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### Tamina

**Read this if you are playing the student role.**

You are the third of four kids at home, being raised by your mom and grandma. Even though your mom is super busy, she used to make time to do things just with you in the evenings. You used to help her cook and do laundry, just to spend more time with her. She's really funny and always makes you laugh.

Just after Christmas, your grandma Kiki had a stroke. Now she can't smile on the left side of her face, and she has to stay in bed most of the time. Your mom has been in a bad mood ever since. She yells at you for no reason and never has time for you anymore. When she works late (about three times a week), she leaves your sister Amira in charge. Amira is a junior in high school and very snotty. She bullies you and your brothers, often telling you you're ugly and dumb. You just want things to go back to the way they used to be.

Sometimes you get so mad you don't know what to do. Two days ago, you made fun of Jeanne in class when she was having trouble reading. You told her she was dumb, which you believe is true. The other kids laughed. Your teacher didn't like it, but so what? When the other kids laugh because of something you said, it makes you feel important again. Like a million bucks.

# Role-Play Scenarios

## Role Play-Scenario **B**

### Concerned Teacher

**Read this if you are playing the teacher role.**

Your student Dallas is very shy. He hardly ever speaks in class. He is a loner with few friends. He sits alone at recess, and you've seen a few things that make you wonder if he is being bullied or shunned by other students. His handwriting and grammar are concerning, as is his reading ability. You worry that, if he cannot improve quickly, he may have to repeat the grade.

Another student told you today she heard Dallas on the playground, saying he was going to hang himself. She said he sounded like he was half joking, half bragging. You spoke to the school leader and the counselor. The counselor is waiting for you to bring Dallas to her office. Before you do, you want to talk with him yourself to ask about his suicidal comments and introduce the idea of going to the counselor together.

### Dallas

**Read this if you are playing the student role.**

Your mother left home when you were one; you don't remember her at all. Two years ago, your father died by suicide. Now you live with your grandparents, who are old and don't understand you the way your dad did. Your grandpa watches TV all day and fusses about how your dad was a "coward." Your grandma doesn't talk about your dad but sometimes locks herself in her room to cry. Maybe if they didn't have to raise you, they wouldn't be reminded of their dead son all the time and they'd be happier.

School is no better. The kids all seem to have good families and more money; they seem smarter. You've been at the bottom of your class ever since you can remember. Sometimes they say mean things to you. More often, they just ignore you.

You must just not be special like Dad was. He knew everything. He could do crossword puzzles, he loved watching nature shows, and he could talk about anything. Maybe you took after your mother. Maybe that's why he was sad, too.

You're tired of being trouble and making everyone unhappy. Sometimes you think about hanging yourself with a piece of rope you found, which you keep under your bed. You read how to do it online, and you've been practicing the knot. It was your big secret, but today you talked about it at recess. The other kids listened. For the first time, they seemed excited about what you had to say. It felt good.





# Stay Connected

Congratulations! You have completed the Kognito ***At-Risk for Middle School Educators*** program.

We invite you to be part of the Kognito community online and connect with us on social media. Share your experience using Kognito, hear from experts, stay in the know about new products and be the first to hear about conferences and online events.

Connect with us today!

-  LinkedIn [www.linkedin.com/company/kognito/](http://www.linkedin.com/company/kognito/)
-  Facebook [www.facebook.com/KognitoConversations](http://www.facebook.com/KognitoConversations)
-  YouTube [www.youtube.com/@kognito3071](http://www.youtube.com/@kognito3071)
-  Twitter: [twitter.com/Kognito](https://twitter.com/Kognito)

You can browse our complete library of PK-12 solutions at <https://kognito.com/pk-12/>.

For support please visit [support.kognito.com](http://support.kognito.com) or email us at [support@kognito.com](mailto:support@kognito.com).