



## Lights, Camera, Empathy

### *Scriptwriting Activity*

Grades 9 – 12

**Learning Objective:** Students will practice composing empathetic statements and questions in order to help a friend in crisis.

#### **Core Curriculum Language Arts Standards:**

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A](#) and [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.A](#)

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

#### **Materials:**

- Identifying Warning Signs of Suicide (located under **Resources** on [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org))
- Peer-to-Peer Counseling Scenarios
- Trevor Project Classroom Poster

#### **Before the Lesson:**

Have students view **The Trevor Project Lifeguard Workshop video** and complete the activities in the supplementary lesson plan. Make sure to remind students of the **Safer Space Guidelines** they came up with before this lesson as these scenarios deal with sensitive topics and diverse identities.

**Please note that this is an advanced lesson.** Gauge your students' level of maturity and understanding of the previous lessons before using this curriculum in your classroom.

- **Remember:** Calling on anyone to be the “expert” in their identity or to share stories they might not be ready to share can make a student feel uncomfortable or reduced to a single aspect of who they are. *This is one of the reasons having a diversity of voices in our class readings is important.*

Students should not be put in the position of being required to educate others about their identities. Try to avoid making a student into an LGBT “mascot.” Encourage students to grow in their understanding of the complexity of our world by developing the ability to view all situations through multiple perspectives and by questioning stereotypes. These skills are crucial for critical thinking and media literacy.

If a student asks a question about a term or concept, it is okay for you to say, “I don’t know but I can find out and get back to you.” We have many resources on [The Trevor Support Center](#) as well as on our [Pinterest Education Resource Board](#) where you can learn more about LGBTQ terms and topics.

## Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Basics

---

Though rare, these lessons can lead to self-disclosures of depression, suicidal thoughts or feelings. Before you begin this workshop, it is important to get an understanding of your school or organization’s suicide prevention plan, including who to connect a student with if they reveal they are struggling. In most cases, this will likely be a school nurse, counselor or social worker. You’ll want to let them know that you’re facilitating this workshop so they are prepared to help if necessary.

In general, if encountering a suicidal or struggling student, facilitators should follow the same steps we are empowering youth to follow: listen to the young person, accept their feelings, and connect them to a trusted adult or resource like our 24/7 Lifeline at 866-488-7386. Any young person – regardless of their identity – can benefit from the support our Lifeline provides. Adults can even call the Lifeline with their student!

You can become more informed about the warning signs, risk factors and appropriate responses through our Safer Spaces, Brighter Future Guide or by visiting our [website](#).

### **Anticipatory Set (10 minutes): *We’ve All Been There***

Ask students to think of a time when a friend asked them for help or advice. Brainstorm some words to describe how they felt and write those words on the board. Encourage students to use specific, descriptive words to portray those emotions. Student might say things like it felt meaningful/good that someone trusted them enough to ask or they felt nervous/worried about saying the wrong thing.

Then, ask students to think of a time when they were the ones asking for help or advice. Brainstorm how that feels. Write those words on the board as well. Maybe they felt worried about being judged or relieved once they finally said it aloud. Let students know they don’t need to share details of the event, only the words to describe the feeling.

Next, brainstorm questions or comments that can be helpful. Student’s may bring up the idea that dismissive comments such as “that’s not a big deal, get over it” are not helpful. Encourage them to think of the positive comments that are more helpful such as “that sounds really difficult.” Write the positive comments and questions on the board.

### **Introduction (5 minutes):**

Have students get into pairs. Ask them to take out the empathy lesson worksheets from the previous lesson. Have **The Warning Signs of Suicide** and **Y-CARE (You, Connect, Accept, Respond, Empower)** written on the board.

## **Y-CARE:** How YOU can help a suicidal person

### **YOU**

You are never alone. You are not responsible for anyone who chooses to take their own life. As friends, family and loved ones, all you can do is listen, support and assist the person in getting the help they need.

### **CONNECT**

the person to resources and to a supportive, trusted adult.

### **ACCEPT**

and listen to the person's feelings and take them seriously.

### **RESPOND**

if a person has a plan to attempt suicide and tell someone you trust.

### **EMPOWER**

the person to get help and to call The Trevor Lifeline (866-488-7386)

**Because...**  
suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15 to 24-year-olds.

**Because...**  
LGB youth are up to 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers.

**Because...**  
depression is treatable and suicide is preventable.

**Because...**  
when You CARE, you can help save a life!

[TheTrevorProject.org](http://TheTrevorProject.org)

Distribute one scenario to each student pair. There are only four scenarios so there will be multiple student pairs working on the same scenario. This will allow students to hear different options for how people can respond to the same situation.

### **Procedures (20 minutes):**

Let students know that they will be writing a brief script of a positive conversation between two good friends. Remind them to refer to the lists on the board for guidance while writing a script where one friend demonstrates all the components of **Y-CARE**. Also, let students know to be on the lookout for stereotypes in their writing and challenge them to create complex characters with emotional depth.

**Let Students Know:** *All scripts* will end with one person feeling empowered to reach out for help and to engage in self-care.

## **Peer-to-Peer Counseling Scenarios**

### **Scenario One: Social Media Situation**

Skylar is on Facebook at 11:45pm on a Friday night. While Skylar is scrolling through the newsfeed, this public status appears:

Jamie

Friday at 11:30pm

*I don't want to make anyone upset but sometimes it feels like that I'm only staying here for them. I don't know maybe I am kidding myself and nobody really cares if I stay or go. I think it be such a relief to disappear.*

Write a script about Skylar reaching out to Jamie.

### **Scenario Two: Exploring Identity**

Rowan has started hanging out with a new group. They all wear lots of black and listen to music with dark lyrics. A talented artist, Rowan has started a series of sketches with death themes. Jesse isn't sure if these are warning signs of depression or suicide.

Write a script about Jesse checking in with Rowan to make sure everything is okay.

### **Scenario Three: Ready to Come Out?**

Ari knows that Casey has had questions about sexual orientation. Casey has dated both guys and girls. Ari has noticed that Casey hasn't been showing up to soccer practice and has missed several homework assignments. In addition to these out-of-character actions, Casey seems withdrawn and distracted.

Write a script about Ari offering Casey support.

### **Scenario Four: Dangerous Drive**

At a party, Bobbie is drinking a lot. Charlie has noticed that Bobbie's behavior has changed during the last couple of weeks. Charlie knows that three weeks ago, Bobbie's parents threw out a bunch of Bobbie's favorite outfits that they consider to be the "wrong gender" for Bobbie to wear.

Charlie wants to go home and doesn't want to leave Bobbie at the party. Bobbie insists on driving. When Charlie mentions it might not be safe, Bobbie says, "no one would really care if I were gone."

Write a script about Charlie says to Bobbie next.

## **Conclusion (10 minutes): Talk It Out**

Ask a for a few student volunteers to read their scripts. Allow for discussion about what worked and what might have been done differently. Encourage students to talk about how difficult all these scenarios can be for both characters. Remind them that we all need help from time to time.

Gently, address any stereotyping or lack of empathy that might have come up in the scripts with the assumption that we are all here to learn and any mistakes were not intentionally negative. Remind them of what they learned during the **Gender Boxes** and **Power of Words** activities and how we are all limited by narrow categories and negative language.

Also, ask students to reflect on the previous lessons and how they are never responsible if someone continues to be in crisis or does die by suicide. Emphasis the importance of self-care and how they can always reach out to an adult for support if they are concerned about a friend. Let them know that you are available to discuss any feeling that may have come up during this lesson and about any other resources they can use on campus such as the counseling center or GSA. Post **The Trevor Project Lifeline number 866-488-7386** and website **[www.TheTrevorProject.org](http://www.TheTrevorProject.org)** in your class so students know they can reach out to a trained volunteer counselor.

### **Continuing the Lesson: Narrative Writing**

Ask students to write a personal essay about a time when they asked for help or offered help to a friend. What did they learn? What helped? What didn't help?

Have students use descriptive details and showing writing to bring the story to life for the reader. For resources on personal essay writing, visit <http://www.wholecommunities.org/learning/story.shtml> and download the worksheet on **Telling Your Public Story** through examining the challenge, choice, outcome, and values.

## **Program Evaluation**

After this lesson, we ask that you facilitate a brief evaluation survey with your students. You can [download student surveys](#) and distribute them to your class to gather feedback. Your feedback is very important to us as we develop more education resources to upload. Please fill out a [Teacher Survey](#) online to let us know how we can support you. Thank you!