

Beneath the Surface

Parent Series

A three-part, evidence-informed psychoeducational program for organizations supporting parents and caregivers of teens navigating mental health crisis, treatment, or recovery.

WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

This guide is designed for school systems, treatment centers, hospitals, and community organizations looking for effective ways to support parents and caregivers who are helping a teen through a mental health crisis, treatment, and recovery. Inside, you will find an overview of the Parent Series, why this support matters, about the facilitator, and a closer look at the three guided conversations available to your organization.

OUR GOAL

The goal of the Parent Series is to educate, equip, and support parents and caregivers as they navigate their teen's mental health treatment and recovery. When we do this, we turn unspoken struggles into shared support, and demonstrate our commitment to the families we serve.

THE PARENTS YOU SERVE

This series is for parents and caregivers navigating: depression and anxiety disorders, self-harm, substance use, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts or attempts, overdoses, or treatment ranging from hospital stays and residential care to PHP, IOP, and outpatient support. Parents in this situation have immense responsibility. They watch for warning signs and triggers, make treatment choices, keep their child safe, organize care, and support recovery—all while feeling scared, tired, and sometimes unsure of what to do. They need clear information about diagnoses, symptoms, treatment options, and what comes next.

Unfortunately, information alone cannot capture the emotional experience of seeing their child struggle. Beneath all the decisions and planning, parents often feel grief, fear, and loss. The stress of a crisis can last for months or even years. With the right support, parents can take a more active role in treatment, set healthier boundaries, stay close to their teen, and help build a more stable environment for recovery.

ABOUT AMY

Amy Kathleen Lee is an award-winning eating disorder recovery advocate, professional speaker, and suicide prevention trainer with over ten years of experience training adults and youth in suicidality, crisis response, and mental health. As a Certified Crisis Intervention Specialist, QPR instructor, and Youth Mental Health First Aid Trainer, she has trained and certified more than 1,000 adults and young people in suicide prevention. In addition, she worked as a crisis counselor with AZ Crisis, providing crisis support using 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline protocols. She earned her undergraduate degree in Human Services from the University of Phoenix in 2008 and is currently pursuing a Master of Social Work from Capella University. Amy is also a clinical intern at an intensive outpatient eating disorder treatment center in Arizona.

Amy is a survivor of both an eating disorder and suicide, having lived with an eating disorder for almost 20 years while managing bipolar disorder. She has

spent nearly 30 years navigating the mental health system for herself and as a parent supporting her teen through a suicide attempt, intensive treatment, and recovery. Her work combines professional training, personal experience, and parenting, helping her connect with families with both expertise and genuine empathy.

OUR APPROACH

Our program is based on suicide-prevention and crisis-response best practices, trauma-informed and relational approaches, family systems theory, social work's person-in-environment perspective, and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy. The three-part format provides meaningful education and support while remaining flexible and easy to integrate into existing family programming.

Amy meets parents where they are. She utilizes human-centered, strengths-based engagement strategies to help parents orient themselves to what is happening. By doing this, she builds the trust and understanding needed for learning during difficult moments. In addition, Amy recognizes that a teen's mental health journey impacts the family system. Parents may often experience the crisis in their own way. These conversations open a door to self-reflection, safely exploring ways they may unintentionally enable while highlighting opportunities for growth.

BRING THE PARENT SERIES TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

[A flexible addition to family support](#)

The Parent Series works alongside treatment, family programs, and caregiver support. It is not a substitute for therapy, crisis care, or personalized clinical advice. This series gives parents time to reflect on their experiences and be more open to the information and support their treatment team offers.

Every organization serves a different community, and every family faces unique challenges. Before starting a Parent Series, we partner with your team to understand your community, level of care, and goals so the experience reflects the unique needs of the families you serve.

Format

- Three 60- to 90-minute conversations offered individually or as a complete series.
- Available in person or virtually.

- Guided reflection and discussion adapted to the setting and families being served.
- Selected Beneath the Surface youth artwork integrated into the experience.
- Additional resources for continued reflection and support.

Contact Us:

beneath@amykathleenlee.com or amykathleenlee.com/beneath-the-surface

CONVERSATION ONE

What I Wish Someone Told Me When My Teen Was Struggling

“What is happening to me and my family?”

The conversation

A teen’s mental health crisis can change how a parent experiences their child, family, and themselves. This conversation helps parents put their responses and their teen’s behavior in context. It helps them understand what may be happening beneath both and begin responding with greater awareness and intention.

Outcomes include:

- A clearer understanding of common caregiver responses to crisis and treatment.
- Language for fear, grief, hypervigilance, loss of identity, and disorientation.
- Greater awareness of their own signs of burnout, overwhelm, or shutdown.
- A way to consider the human needs beneath behavior while maintaining responsibility.

What this sounds like: *“My response to this situation makes sense.*

Understanding what may be beneath my teen’s behavior can help me respond differently.”

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CONVERSATION TWO

Holding Boundaries When Your Teen Is Struggling

“Whose fault is this? Who caused it? Who needs to fix it?”

The conversation

When a teen is struggling, families can become caught in questions of blame. This session shifts the conversation from blame to responsibility. This session explores relational and emotional boundaries within the family system. Parents examine what emotional responsibility means, what belongs to them, what belongs to their teen, and how fear, guilt, conflict, or family patterns can blur those lines. The goal is to help each person take appropriate responsibility for their own emotional well-being, choices, and role in the family.

Outcomes include:

- How to differentiate emotional responsibility and identify what belongs to the parent, what belongs to the teen, and where those responsibilities overlap during treatment and recovery.
- How to recognize overfunctioning and notice how fear, guilt, hypervigilance, or the urge to fix can lead parents to take responsibility for their teen’s emotions, choices, or recovery.
- How to maintain connection without taking over using boundaries that support emotional safety, mutual respect, and the teen’s developing autonomy while remaining an engaged caregiver.
- How to protect their own capacity by identifying personal boundaries, coping strategies, and sources of support that reduce burnout and help parents remain emotionally available over time.

What this sounds like: *“I know what is mine to carry, what belongs to my teen, and how to remain connected in a healthy way.”*

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CONVERSATION THREE

Plan B: Changing How We See Suicide

"My teen has a great life. I don't understand why they are suicidal."

The conversation

At the heart of suicide prevention is becoming someone a young person can trust with their pain. In this honest conversation, Amy talks about the night her daughter attempted suicide and the question that guided her: *Who do I need to be for her right now?* Drawing from her own experience and suicide prevention best practices, Plan B helps parents see and respond to suicidal thoughts with connection, presence, and empathy, leaving with a clearer understanding of how to become a safe place when it matters most.

Outcomes include:

- A broader understanding of the pain, isolation, and disconnection that can accompany suicidal distress, beyond viewing suicidality solely through symptoms or diagnosis.
- Recognition of the role belonging, meaning, and purpose play as fundamental human needs and protective factors.
- A conversation framework that focuses on recognizing feelings, having honest conversations, validating experiences, and working together.
- Practical steps they can take to be the parent their teen needs in life's most painful moments.

What this sounds like: *"I understand that beneath my teen's suicidal thoughts and behaviors is a need for connection, and I know how to have a conversation that cultivates hope."*

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