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Press Release

New Ad Council Campaign Empowers Young Adults to ‘Seize the Awkward’ and Start the Conversation with Friends At Risk

Campaign developed by JED, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Droga5 includes support from BuzzFeed, Chegg, Colossal Media, Facebook, The Jacksonville Jaguars, Reddit, Upworthy, Wattpad and YouTube along with Talent including Hannah Hart, Liza Koshy, Markiplier, Meredith Foster, Orion Carloto, Remi Cruz, Shannon Beveridge, Tyler Oakley and Tyler Posey

NEW YORK, January 17, 2018 – In a groundbreaking effort to empower teens and young adults to reach out to friends with mental health issues who may be at risk for suicide, the Ad Council has joined The Jed Foundation (JED), the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and Droga5 to launch *Seize the Awkward*, a national public service campaign. Beginning today the campaign will be activated by an unprecedented group of media partners and platforms, including BuzzFeed, Chegg, Colossal Media, Facebook, The Jacksonville Jaguars, Reddit, Upworthy, Wattpad and YouTube.



Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young adults and for every youth suicide, it is estimated that 100-200 others attempt suicide (CDC; ACHA NCHA).

Young adulthood is a critical time when many people experience mental health issues as well as significant stress from life transitions such as gaining more independence and responsibility when moving from home and beginning college or a career. In fact, 50 percent of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and 75 percent begin by age 24 (NAMI). Friends of young adults are often the first to recognize signs of an emerging mental health problem or crisis and an estimated 76 percent of young adults turn to a peer in a time of crisis for support (First-Year College Experience Survey: Harris Poll; JED; Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, The Jordan Porco Foundation; College Mental Health Study: Stress, Depression, Stigma & Students; mtvU/JED).

Seize the Awkward encourages teens and young adults, particularly those ages 16-24, to create a safe space for their friends to open up about mental health challenges. The campaign personifies an awkward silence that can happen between friends before a conversation about mental health. This character, Awkward Silence, portrayed by Broadway star and actor Gideon Glick, shows viewers the opportunity that exists in recognizing something is wrong and breaking through an awkward silence between friends – and encourages them to use this moment to check in and ask about their mental health.

“Suicide prevention is increasingly gaining awareness and attention in the national media, but *Seize the Awkward* marks the start of a collective movement to empower this generation to do something,” said Lisa Sherman, President and CEO of the Ad Council. “This campaign gives young adults the tools and specific language they need to embrace the critical moment of an awkward silence in a way that could have a life-saving impact.”

The campaign directs audiences to [SeizeTheAwkward.org](https://www.seizetheawkward.org), a new website created by Haus that provides various resources to help young people “seize the awkward” by reaching out to a friend who may be struggling with mental health problems. Resources include tutorial videos, information on warning signs, conversation starters, tips on how to sustain a conversation around mental health, and video testimonials on mental health from talent such as Hannah Hart, Liza Koshy, Remi Cruz and Tyler Posey.

“Mental health is still something of a stigmatized topic among adults and young adults alike. Our aim with *Seize the Awkward* is to open the lines of communication among friends at risk in an approachable, thoughtful way,” said Ted Royer, Chief Creative Officer of Droga5. “When we see something troublesome, or worse, in our friends and we find the courage to speak to them, we can really help someone in need.”

Popular digital and television talent, with a total audience exceeding 70 million people, are starring in an additional campaign video, as well as supporting the campaign on their social platforms. The video, featuring Hannah Hart, Liza Koshy, Markiplier, Meredith Foster, Orion Carloto, Remi Cruz, Shannon Beveridge, Tyler Oakley and Tyler Posey, shows each celebrity initially looking at the camera in awkward silence, before using that space to start a conversation about mental health. Additional videos include deeper personal stories from many of the celebrities. Talent content was produced by Northbound Film.

“We are excited about the campaign’s potential to dramatically change how young adults, and generations to come, understand mental health, and what to do when a friend may be struggling. And we know from research that suicide is preventable and that it starts with the person opening up and getting someone the help they need,” said Bob Gebbia, AFSP CEO. “Partnering with the Ad Council, JED and Droga5, we have created a campaign that’s the first of its kind and will save lives.”

Dozens of artists, including Baron Von Fancy, Jeremyville, Saša Ostoja, Iain Burke and Franz Lang have interpreted the phrase “seize the awkward” in reference to their personal experiences with mental health. These artworks have been turned into posters that will be shared across college campuses and on social media. They will also be used as wild postings and in a *Seize the Awkward* exhibition.

“Too many young adults are struggling with mental health issues and not getting the help they need,” said John MacPhee, Executive Director/CEO, JED. “*Seize the Awkward* will help empower young people to start important and potentially live-saving conversations and take action to support one another. This generation is poised to lead us in changing the culture around mental health and *Seize the Awkward* aims to help

them do just that. We're proud to launch this groundbreaking campaign with our partners at the Ad Council, AFSP and Droga5.”

Per the Ad Council’s model, the new creative assets will be distributed to media outlets nationwide and will be placed in donated time and space. Several media partners have made commitments to the campaign prior to launch. Each partner will be providing significant exposure and customized content on their platforms. The campaign also includes activations on platforms including:

- **BuzzFeed:** BuzzFeed is developing original content that aims to tackle how to handle awkward conversations about suicide while educating the audience about *Seize the Awkward*.
- **Chegg:** Chegg is donating a sign-in page takeover as well as interactive video inventory to spread the campaign message to their massive audience of college students throughout the country.
- **Colossal Media:** Colossal Media is donating a hand painted mural that will give passersby the opportunity to take a picture with a message that they can then send to a friend in need. The artwork, created by Rob Flowers, Sam Dunn and Mel Cerri, can be found at the corner of White and Siegel Streets in Bushwick, a young and creative neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, starting January 22nd.
- **Initiative:** Initiative is providing their expertise to support the campaign through pro bono development and execution of a custom media strategy and communications plan to secure additional high-profile targeted media.
- **The Jacksonville Jaguars:** NFL player Brad Nortman of the Jacksonville Jaguars stars in a video about his personal experiences with mental health. Nortman and the Jaguars will also support the campaign on social media.
- **Reddit:** Reddit is donating paid media to support four AMAs around the topic of mental health. The first chat will be with the chief medical officers from JED and AFSP, Dr. Victor Schwartz and Dr. Christine Moutier, in late January.
- **Upworthy:** Upworthy is sharing the campaign video content with their community of over 11.4 million Facebook followers.

- Wattpad: Wattpad, the global multiplatform entertainment company for original stories, will be donating premium digital media inventory to help reach millions of their young adult readers.
- YouTube: YouTube will be supporting and promoting the campaign on YouTube and on various social channels.

To learn more about the campaign, visit SeizeTheAwkward.org and follow #SeizeTheAwkward. To get immediate, free support 24/7, call 1-800-273-8255 or text “SEIZE” to 741741.

JED

JED is a nonprofit that exists to protect emotional health and prevent suicide for our nation’s teens and young adults. We’re partnering with high schools and colleges to strengthen their mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention programs and systems. We’re equipping teens and young adults with the skills and knowledge to help themselves and each other. We’re encouraging community awareness, understanding and action for young adult mental health. Learn more at jedfoundation.org.

Check out our programs including: JED Campus (jedcampus.org), Set to Go (settogo.org), ULifeline (ulifeline.org), Half of Us (halfofus.com) and Love is Louder (loveislouder.com).

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American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. 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, and with a public policy office in Washington, D.C., 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](#).

Droga5

Droga5 is a creative and strategic advertising agency headquartered in New York, with an office in London. Founded in 2006, Droga5’s clients include Ancestry, Belstaff, Blue Apron, Chase, COVERGIRL, Danone, ESPN, Georgia-Pacific, Google, Heineken, IHOP, Johnsonville, LVMH, MailChimp, Mattress Firm, Mondelēz International, The Nature’s Bounty Co., The New York Times, Peroni, Pizza Hut, Prudential, Sprint, Tencent, Under Armour, Unilever, and the Y, among others. Droga5 has won Agency of the Year 13 times in the last 11 years and is the only agency to be named to Advertising Age’s A-List over seven consecutive years. For more information, visit droga5.com.

The Ad Council

The Ad Council brings together the most creative minds in advertising and media to address the most worthy causes. Its innovative, pro bono social good campaigns raise awareness. They inspire action. They save lives. To learn more, visit AdCouncil.org follow the Ad Council’s communities on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), and view the creative on [YouTube](#).

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