Tips for Keeping Your Child Safe

**WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUTH SUICIDE?**

Risk factors for suicidal behavior:

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| * Psychiatric disorders * Alcohol/drug misuse * Previous suicide attempts * Non-suicidal self-injury * Personality characteristics (e.g. impulsivity, aggressiveness) | * Family psychiatric history * Sexual abuse/trauma * Bullying/peer victimization * Perceived peer rejection * Lack of acceptance/LGBTQ+ issues |

Suicide warning signs:

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| * Talking or writing about suicide – feeling hopeless, having no reason to live, perceived burdensomeness * Direct: * “I want to kill myself” * “I wish I was dead” * Indirect: * “I can’t do this anymore” * “I just want out” | * Significant changes in behavior (e.g. withdrawing from friends/family) * Neglecting hygiene and appearance * Reckless, risk-taking behavior * Giving away prized possessions |

*\*It is important to remember that not all students who contemplate or die by suicide will exhibit these kinds of symptoms AND not all students who exhibit these behaviors are suicidal.*

**WHAT CAN I DO TO KEEP MY CHILD SAFE?**

* **ASK**. Talking about suicide in a supportive, caring context does not make a student suicidal or “put the idea in their head.” Asking if someone is having suicidal thoughts gives a person permission to talk about it. Asking sends the message that you are concerned and want to help.

* **TAKE SIGNS SERIOUSLY**. Studies have found that more than 75% of people who die by suicide showed some of the warning signs in the weeks or months prior to their death.

* **GET HELP**. If you have concerns that your child is suicidal, seek immediate help from a mental health practitioner. Suicidal students need to be evaluated by an expert in assessing risk and developing treatment plans. Parents can contact school counselors, social workers or psychologists for a listing of resources. Parents may also want to consult with their insurance company to obtain a list of mental health providers covered by their policy. When you call to make an appointment, tell the person on the phone that your child is suicidal and needs to be seen as soon as possible.

* **LIMIT ACCESS TO WEAPONS, PRESCRIPTION DRUGS, MEDICATIONS AND OTHER MEANS**.

* **REASSURE YOUR CHILD THAT LIFE CAN GET BETTER**. Many suicidal people have lost all hope that life can improve. They may have difficulty problem solving even simple issues. Remind your child that no matter how bad things are the problem can be worked out. Offer your help.
* **LISTEN**. Avoid making statements such as “I know what it’s like” or “I understand.” Instead make statements such as “Help me understand what life is like for you right now.”

***If you are concerned your child may be at risk of harming themselves, do not leave them alone.***

**KNOW AND BE READY TO USE EMERGENCY RESOURCES (such as):**

Suicide Prevention Lifeline-988 (talk and referrals 24 hours)

Local Police 911

Nearby behavioral health hospitals (assessment/referrals)

For more information about depression and suicide:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

National Mental Health Association [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

American Academy of Pediatrics [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)