

## GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

### Youth Suicide in the United States\*

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for adolescents in the United States. \*
- In recent years more young people have died from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, congenital birth defects, and diabetes combined. \*
- For every young person who dies by suicide, between 100-200 attempt suicide. \*
- Males are four times as likely to die by suicide as females, although females attempt suicide three times as often as males. \*

## SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE

### Here is what you can do

- **Talk** to your child about suicide. Asking direct questions will not put ideas into their minds, as many fear. **Asking for help** is the single greatest skill that will protect your child. Help your child identify and connect to caring adults to talk to when they need guidance and support.
- **Know** the risk factors and warning signs of suicide.
- **Remain calm.** Establish a safe environment to talk about suicide.
- **Listen** to your child's feelings. Don't minimize what your child says about what is upsetting him or her. Put yourself in your child's place; don't attempt to provide simple solutions.
- **Be Honest.** If you are concerned, do not pretend the problem is minor. Tell your child there are people who can help. State that you will be with him or her to provide comfort and love.

- **Be Supportive.** Children look for help and support from parents and siblings. Talk about ways of dealing with problems and reassure your child that you care. Let children know their difficult feelings will not last forever.
- **Take Action.** It is crucial to get professional help for your child and the entire family. When you are close to a situation it is often hard to see problems clearly. You may not be able to solve the problem yourself.
  - Help may be found at a suicide prevention center, local mental health agency, family service agency, or through your clergy.
  - Become familiar with the support services at your child's school. Contact the appropriate person(s) at the school; this could be the school social worker, school psychologist, school counselor, or school nurse.
  - Remove access to firearms or other lethal means from your home.

## **YOUTH SUICIDE RISK FACTORS**

While the path that leads to suicidal behavior is long and complex and there is no "profile" that predicts suicidal behavior with certainty, there are certain risk factors associated with increased suicide risk. In isolation, these factors are not signs of suicidal thinking. However, when present they signal the need to be vigilant for the warning signs of suicide. The behaviors listed below may indicate that a child is emotionally distressed and may begin to think and act in self-destructive ways. If you are concerned about one or more of the following behaviors, please seek assistance at your child's school or at your local mental health service agency.

### HOME PROBLEMS

- Running away from home
- Arguments with parents/caregivers

### BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

- Temper tantrums
- Thumb sucking or bed wetting/soiling

- Acting out, violent, impulsive behavior
- Bullying
- Accident proneness
- Sudden change in activity level or behavior
- Hyperactivity or withdrawal

#### PHYSICAL PROBLEMS

- Frequent stomach aches or headaches for no apparent reason
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Nightmares or night terrors

#### SCHOOL PROBLEMS

- Chronic truancy or tardiness
- Decline in academic performance
- Fears associated with school

### SERIOUS WARNING SIGNS

- Severe physical cruelty towards people or pets
- Scratching, cutting, erasing, burning, or marking the body
- Thinking, talking, drawing, or posting to social media about suicide
- Previous suicide attempts
- Risk-taking, such as intentional running in front of cars or jumping from high places
- Intense or excessive preoccupation with death

#### References:

\* Center for Disease Control. (2015). *Understanding Suicide: Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/suicide\\_factsheet-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/suicide_factsheet-a.pdf)

\* National Institute of Mental Health. (2016). *NIMH answers questions about suicide*. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/nimh-answers-questions-about-suicide/index.shtml>