

STUDENT GATEKEEPERS – SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE

- Most children and adolescents are not aware that suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth in the United States and that it can be prevented if adults and youth know the warning signs and what to do.
- Research shows the number one person a teenager wants to talk to in times of crisis is another teenager.
- Although children and adolescents thinking about suicide are not likely to seek help, they do say or do something, post to social media, write or draw something that comes to the attention of a friend, classmate, parent or school staff. **Never ignore these signs. You can help.**
- If you want to help prevent suicide, the first step is to learn the warning signs. Then learn the steps to take to save a friend.

STEPS TO TAKE

1. **Don't be afraid to talk to your friends about suicide, you will not be putting ideas in to their heads,** as many fear. Listen to their feelings. Make sure they know how important they are to you, but don't believe you can keep them from hurting themselves on your own. Preventing suicide will require adult help.
2. **Know the warning signs.** Read over the list below and keep it in a safe place.
3. **Make no deals.** Never keep secrets about a friend's suicidal plans or thoughts. You cannot promise that you will not tell. You *have* to tell someone to get help for your friend.
4. **Tell an adult.** Talk to your parent, your friend's parent, your school's psychologist, social worker, nurse or counselor - a trusted adult. **And don't wait.** Don't be afraid the adults will not believe you or take you seriously. Keep talking until they listen. Even if you are not sure your friend is suicidal, talk to someone.
5. **Ask if your school has a crisis team.** Many schools (elementary, middle, and high schools) have organized crisis teams, which include teachers, counselors, social workers, psychologists, and principals. These teams help train all staff to recognize warning signs of suicide as well as how to help in

a crisis situation. These teams can help students understand warning signs of violence and suicide. If your school does not have a crisis team, ask your Student Council or faculty advisor to look into starting one.

WARNING SIGNS

- **Suicide notes.** These are a real sign of danger and should be taken seriously. They can be written notes, text messages, or social media posts.
- **Plan/method/access.** A suicidal child or adolescent may show an increased interest in guns and other weapons. They may hint at or talk about a suicide plan.
- **Threats.** Threats may be direct statements (e.g. "I want to die." or "I am going to kill myself.") or indirect comments (e.g. "The world would be better without me. Nobody will miss me anyway.")
- **Previous attempts.** If a child or teenager has attempted suicide in the past, there is a greater likelihood he or she will try again. Be very observant of any friends who have tried suicide before.
- **Depression.** When symptoms of depression include strong feelings of sadness, helplessness, and hopelessness, a child or adolescent is possibly at greater risk for suicide.
- **Masked depression.** Engaging in risk-taking behaviors can include acts of aggression, gunplay, and alcohol or substance abuse. While your friend may not act depressed, their behavior suggests they are not concerned about their own safety.
- **Final arrangements.** This behavior may take many forms. In adolescents, it might be giving away prized possessions such as jewelry, clothing, journals, or pictures.
- **Efforts to hurt oneself.** Self-injury behaviors are warning signs for young children as well as teenagers. Common self-destructive behaviors include running into traffic, jumping from heights, and scratching, cutting, burning, or marking the body.
- **Inability to concentrate or think clearly.** Such problems may be reflected in classroom behavior, homework habits, academic performance, household chores, and even conversation. If your friend starts skipping classes, getting poor grades, acting up in class, forgetting or poorly performing chores around the house, or talking in a way that suggests they are having trouble concentrating, these might be signs of stress and risk for suicide.

- **Changes in physical habits and appearance.** These changes include inability to sleep or sleeping all the time, sudden weight gain or loss, or disinterest in appearance or hygiene.
- **Sudden changes in personality, friends, and behaviors.** Changes can include withdrawing from friends and family, skipping school or classes, loss of involvement in activities that were once important, and avoiding friends.
- **Death and suicidal themes.** These might appear in classroom drawings, work samples, journals, homework, or social media sites.