

Welcome to Family Service & Guidance Center's



*Real-World
Parenting
Series*

How to Talk to Your Child About Suicide

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FAMILY SERVICE &
GUIDANCE CENTER

What is Suicide?

- ▶ Death caused by injury or harm to oneself with an intention to die
- ▶ Should be differentiated from non-suicidal self-injury
- ▶ Self-injury may or may not be indicative of suicidal ideation

National Statistics About Suicide

- ▶ 48,344 deaths by suicide in 2018
- ▶ 10th ranking cause of death in the US, 2nd for youth.
- ▶ 3.6 male deaths by suicide for every female death by suicide
- ▶ 1 of 6 high school students seriously considered suicide
- ▶ 1 of 12 high school students attempted suicide in the past year
- ▶ Out of all 50 states, Kansas has the 18th highest suicide rate

-American Association of Suicidology-2018 statistics last updated 2/2020

Protective Factors

- ▶ Family and community support
- ▶ Positive relationships with medical and mental health communities
- ▶ Problem solving and conflict resolution skills
- ▶ Cultural, familial and/or faith community
- ▶ Positive Academic and Extra-curricular activities
- ▶ Work and volunteerism
- ▶ At least one positive, nurturing relationship with an adult
- ▶ Resiliency skills: Children who are allowed to fail-safely

Risk Factors

- ▶ Family history of child maltreatment/trauma
- ▶ Social isolation
- ▶ Easy access to lethal methods
- ▶ Upcoming anniversary of a loss/certain times of year
- ▶ Local epidemics of suicide
- ▶ Family history of suicide
- ▶ Beliefs about mental health; stigma about mental illness

(MHFA, 2019)

Risk Factors

- ▶ Recent loss-relationships, job, family member
- ▶ Feelings of hopelessness
- ▶ Impulse control issues
- ▶ Previous suicide attempts
- ▶ Substance use disorders*!!!! (Alcohol, Opioids and others)

Red Flags

- ▶ Making verbal or written threats (consider social media)
- ▶ physical gestures of harm or suicide
- ▶ Seeking access to means (i.e. weapons, pills, etc.)
- ▶ Hopelessness, lack of meaning in life
- ▶ Reckless behaviors, impulsivity
- ▶ Unusual anger outbursts, rage, wanting revenge



Red Flags

- ▶ Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- ▶ Dramatic changes in mood-emotional turbulence or sudden calm.
- ▶ Giving away things that have value
- ▶ Uncharacteristic social withdrawal
- ▶ Substance Use.



Asking “The Question”

- ▶ **Asking “the question” is a conversation, not a checklist.**
- ▶ Talking/Listening to your child about suicide DOES NOT encourage suicide or “plant the idea” of suicide in his/her head.
- ▶ Having an open, nonjudgmental dialogue with your child is more likely to open the door for him/her to be honest and provide a safe space in which to ask for help.
- ▶ It is imperative to be aware of your own reactions and emotions to this conversation.

Asking “The Question”

- ▶ Are you having thoughts about suicide?
or
- ▶ Are you thinking of killing yourself?
- ▶ What does that mean to you?
- ▶ Have you thought about how or when you would do that

Developmental Considerations

Consider aspects of the child's cognitive, social and emotional development:

- ▶ Youth who threaten suicide as an expression of anger or other overwhelming emotions.
- ▶ Learned or mirroring behavior
- ▶ Youth who are seeking connection or exploring the boundaries of relationships. *also strongly impacted by modeling
- ▶ Not all children/youth express thoughts or feelings verbally or in writing.

How You Can Help: Non judgmental Listening

- ▶ Listen to your children, give them time to find or form the words – when we are worried, we may talk more than we listen!
- ▶ Develop a comfort with silence
- ▶ Be aware that your own fear/anxiety may be misperceived as anger
- ▶ Provide hope – without invalidating your child's experience
- ▶ Avoid using the word “why”
- ▶ Steer clear of problem solving or trying to “fix” the situation
- ▶ Give time, space especially for youth who “shut down”.

How You Can Help: Explore thoughts and feelings

- ▶ Ask your child how he/she is feeling and help your child with emotional development skills
- ▶ Help your child with social development skills-resolving conflict, how to address gossip, limiting and monitoring online interactions.
- ▶ Make observations and express concern
- ▶ Help your child to identify triggers
- ▶ Try not to suggest that you are attempting to change his/her mood or symptoms
- ▶ Use “I” statements to avoid seeming accusatory

How You Can Help: Communication-Things to Avoid

- ▶ Avoid over-generalizations: “You always do this”...
- ▶ Avoid using guilt, blame or threats
- ▶ Do not insist on eye contact – fidgets, coloring, etc. are okay!
- ▶ Do not invalidate your child’s experience

How do YOU feel when someone says, “Tomorrow’s a new day” or “Some people have real problems?” or “You’ll get over it”.

How You Can Help: Accept and Connect

- ▶ Express genuine unconditional acceptance of your child
You may not agree with all of your child's choices, but you accept him/her just the way he/she is, no matter what.
- ▶ Normalize the experience of having frightening thoughts and feelings while reminding your child that these do not have to be acted upon
- ▶ Connect with others – other parents, teachers, mental health professionals, community resources

How You Can Help: Encourage expression

- ▶ Encourage verbal, creative, artistic expression-perhaps drawing out your feelings.
- ▶ Non verbal communication- sit side by side, instead of face to face, avoid hands on hips, pointing.
- ▶ Sometimes using a scale is easier than talking or describing.
- ▶ Be alert to changes in behavior, appearance and mood

Getting Help

- ▶ Prioritize safety. What needs to happen right NOW?
 - Do not leave your child alone if you have concerns about suicide
- ▶ Seek professional help ASAP if your child is expressing intent or a plan.
 - Local emergency room
 - Local Community Mental Health Center
 - National Suicide Lifeline
 - 911

REMINDER

- ▶ PLEASE REMEMBER: You are not, nor are you expected to be, your child's therapist.
- ▶ PLEASE DO NOT refer to or use therapy or hospitalization as "punishment".
- ▶ None of the talking points, tactics or ideas in this presentation are meant to take the place of seeking professional help for your child in the event that he/she is experiencing a clinical depressive episode, thoughts of self-harm or suicidal ideation.
- ▶ Please support your child in receiving a clinical assessment and safety evaluation as soon as possible.

Resources

- ▶ Family Service & Guidance Center
 - Individual and family therapy, case management, parent support, respite care, psychosocial groups
 - 24-hour crisis services: **785-232-5005**
- ▶ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 800.273.8255
- ▶ Crisis Text Line: Text “HOME” to 741741
- ▶ <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>

Resources

- ▶ Local hospital emergency rooms
- ▶ Mental Health First Aid classes – www.MentalHealthFirstAid.org
- ▶ www.verywellmind.com/suicide
- ▶ www.parents.com/health/mental

Resources

- ▶ If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, it is always okay to call “911” for immediate assistance.
- ▶ If you came here today feeling suicidal or if the content of this presentation has been triggering in any way, please stay after and come speak with me.

References

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Questions?



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