

Parents Talk Suicide Prevention With Your Kids!

Don't be afraid to talk to your children about suicide prevention, especially if your children appear to be depressed.

Most suicides occur due to some form of mental condition, such as depression or a substance abuse disorder.

Depression is treatable and suicide is preventable.

Talking to your son or daughter about suicide is difficult but not talking about it can be devastating. Get up the courage and do it, and get your child the help he or she needs.

When to talk to your kids

- Pay attention to your instincts.
- When things don't seem quite right with your child's behavior, say something. Tell them what you are noticing.
- Know the suicide warning signs. Although kids thinking about suicide are not likely to seek help, many show warning signs to their friends, classmates, parents or trusted school officials.

Suicide warning signs

- **Previous attempts.** If your son or daughter has attempted suicide in the past, there is a greater likelihood that he or she will try again. Be very observant of any friends who have tried suicide before.
- **Depression – feelings of helplessness or hopelessness.** Strong thoughts of helplessness and hopelessness; behaviors or comments that indicate overwhelming feelings of sadness or pessimistic views of their future.
- **"Masked" depression.** Acts of aggression, gunplay and alcohol/substance abuse. While your daughter or son may not act "depressed," their behavior suggests that they are not concerned about their own safety.
- **Final arrangements.** Giving away prized possessions such as jewelry, clothing, journals or pictures.
- **Efforts to hurt oneself.** Self-injury behaviors including running into traffic, jumping from heights and scratching, cutting and marking the body.

Statistics

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death after motor vehicle crashes for young Coloradans ages 10 to 24.
- The number of young people in Colorado who die from suicide is 1.7 times that of the number who die from homicide.
- Young males are particularly at risk. More than 80 percent of the suicide deaths of young people involve males. However, young females are also at risk – more females ages 10 to 24 are hospitalized for a suicide attempt than for injuries resulting from a motor vehicle crash.

Suicide is preventable.

Talking about it is the first step.

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- **Inability to concentrate or think clearly.** Such problems may be reflected in classroom behavior, homework habits, academic performance, household chores and even in conversation. If your son or daughter starts 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.** 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.** Withdrawing and avoiding friends and family; skipping school or classes; loss of involvement in activities that were once important.
- **Death and suicidal themes.** These might appear in classroom drawings; work samples; journals; or homework.
- **Plan/method/access.** An increased interest in guns and other weapons; increased access to guns or pills; and/or talking about or hinting at a suicide plan. The greater the planning, the greater the potential for suicide.
- **Suicide notes.** These are a very real sign of danger and should be taken seriously.
- **Threats.** Threats may be direct statements such as "I want to die" or "I am going to kill myself." Or, unfortunately, indirect comments such as "The world would be better without me" or "Nobody will miss me anyway" also may be strong indicators of suicidal feelings. A teenage son or daughter might give indirect clues through joking or through comments in school assignments, particularly creative writing or artwork. Younger children and those who may have some delays in their development may not be able to express their feelings in words, but may provide indirect clues in the form of acting-out, violent behavior, often with threatening or suicidal comments.

Situations that could increase thoughts of suicide

- Breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend; failing in school; problems with parents; or rejection by friends.
- After a disaster, such as a school shooting or terrorist attack in our country.
- A personal loss.
- Abuse or an earlier tragic or frightening event.
- Depression or other emotional problems.

How to ask your child if they are thinking of suicide

- Don't wait until you're not afraid to discuss suicide.
- Be direct so that you can get a direct answer.
- Tell your child what you're noticing, and make statements about their changed behavior, such as, "I noticed that you are spending more time in your room. Sometimes people who do that are having thoughts of suicide. Are you having thoughts of suicide?"
- Be ready to listen non-judgmentally. Listen to what led up to their feeling the way they are. Some kids may have some warning signs but may not be thinking about suicide. Even if your child says "no", you have given them the message that it's OK to talk about suicidal thoughts.
- Figure out what kind of help your child needs and get help.

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Facts

- Many people who kill themselves have a diagnosable mental health or substance abuse disorder or both, and the majority has a depressive illness.
- Most people don't just 'snap out of' depression. The good news is that there are excellent treatments for depression and most people recover.

For help

Call 1-800-SUICIDE, a national suicide prevention hotline accessible from anywhere in the country. If immediate action is needed, call 911 or visit your local hospital's emergency room.

If the need isn't immediate, talk to your primary care doctor or pediatrician; a school counselor; or a community mental health professional in your county.

Check with your health insurance companies for mental health coverage. For those who don't have insurance or insurance don't cover mental health, the Mental Health Association's list of affordable mental health professionals is available at (<http://www.mhacolorado.org/GetHelp.html#agencies>).

Information provided by the Office of Suicide Prevention, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, (303) 692-2539.