Tips for Keeping My Child Safe

Learning that your child is having suicidal thoughts can be a frightening experience for parents. Several questions typically run through a parent's mind following an intervention;

1. What do I need to know about teen suicide.?
2. How do I keep my child safe?

Hopefully, the following information can help you answer some of your questions. As you read through this information it is important to remember that each child's situation is unique. The information provided here is in general terms. It may not all apply to your child's situation. If you are receiving this information, we encourage you to access community agency professionals who can help you evaluate your child's unique situation. School personnel can provide you with a listing of some of the resources in the community that you can access at your own expense, as well as discuss how the school can support your child.

What do I need to know about teen suicide?

Suicide is consistently one of the leading causes of death for teenagers. Since 1950 the rate of adolescent suicide has increased 300%. Research shows that a small percentage of students who contemplate suicide actually die by suicide. Parents can help monitor their children by being aware of risk factors of suicide and identifying signs and symptoms of suicidal thinking.

The following factors put a young person more at risk for exhibiting suicidal behavior:

- Loss of a significant other
- Previous suicide of a peer or family member
- Family and personal stress
- Substance Abuse
- Depression and other mental health issues
- Problems at school
- Access to weapons or other means of harming oneself
- Questions regarding sexual orientation

Students who are having suicidal thoughts may exhibit a variety of symptoms including, but not limited to:

- Significant changes in behavior such as change in appearance, changes in grades, withdrawing from friends, changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Making suicidal threats - either direct "I want to die" or indirect “Things would be better if I weren't here."
- Appears sad or hopeless.
- Reckless behavior
- Self inflicted injuries
- Giving away prized possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family

Again it is important to remember the signs and risk factors listed are generalities. 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?

There are many things parents can do to help a suicidal child.

1. ASK. Talking about suicide does not make a student suicidal. Asking if someone is having suicidal thoughts gives him or her permission to talk about it. Asking sends the message that you are concerned and want to help.

2. DO 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.
3. 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 and 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, do tell the person on the phone that your child is suicidal and needs to be seen as soon as possible.
4. **LIMIT ACCESS TO WEAPONS AND OTHER MEANS.**
5. If a student is acutely suicidal DO NOT LEAVE HIM OR HER ALONE. It is important that parents surround themselves with a team of supportive friends or family members who can step in and help as needed.
6. REASSURE YOUR CHILD THAT LIFE CAN GET BETTER. Many suicidal people have lost all hope that life can improve. They may have difficulty solving even simple issues. Remind your child that no matter how bad things are, the problems can be worked out. Offer your help.
7. 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."
8. KNOW AND BE READY TO USE EMERGENCY RESOURCES such as

Girls & Boys Town National Hotline	1-800- 448 - 3000
Network National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
Police	911

You cam get more information about depression and suicide by contacting:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention	www.afsp.org
American Association o.f Suicidology	www.suicidology.org
National Mental Health Association	www.nmha.org
American Academy of Pediatrics	www.aap.org
National Association of School Psychologists	

or by contacting your student’s school counselor, school psychologist, or social worker.