



Suicide Prevention and Children

By Teresa Drelicharz, LIHMP

“An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth a Pound of Cure”

~ Benjamin Franklin

The words above were written by Ben Franklin in a letter addressing fire prevention in 1735, but over the centuries the phrase has been used in relation to many other things, including matters of health. Many in the mental health field believe that **suicide** has become a public health crisis. Unfortunately, the current civil unrest along with the impact of the pandemic is likely adding “fuel to the fire.”

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention statistics report 2020, **suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for ages 10-34** in the state of Nebraska. Suicidal behavior among younger children, ages 5-12, is relatively infrequent, but tends to increase in adolescence and into young adulthood. Risk factors that can lead to suicidal behavior include substance abuse, mental health issues, social isolation and lack of access to behavioral health services.

As **Suicide Prevention Awareness Week** approaches, September 6 through September 12, 2020, Jewish Family Service would like to help pass along a message of hope: early intervention and education can greatly reduce the risks of suicide later in life! The earlier children are presented with opportunities to engage in Social and Emotional Learning, the more likely they are to “acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” **suicideispreventable.org**

All significant people in a child’s life can help promote Social-Emotional Health and Resilience in that child. The American Academy of Pediatrics shares the following suggestions:

Parents- Catch your child being good! Praise your child often, even for small accomplishments like playing nicely, or helping pick up toys. Make time for a routine that includes regular family meals when parents and children can sit and talk about their day together. Model behaviors that you want to see in your child. Parents are their child’s first and most important teachers, and what they do can be much more important than what they say. Be especially careful of criticizing teachers or other trusted adults in front of the child. Teach your child to ask for help and identify who can help when needed. Listen to and respect your child. Remind your child that he or she can always come to you to discuss concerns, fears, and thoughts.

Early Education and Childcare Providers- Greet each child warmly. Smile, make eye contact and use a positive tone of voice that says you are happy to see the child. Look for each child's strengths. Show children how to talk to other children and build friendships. Teach children how to handle problems with others, and ask for help when needed. Provide children with opportunities to make choices when possible and help them learn to understand the consequences of their actions. Administrators, promote positive staff morale among child care workers in order to minimize staff turnover, and maintain consistency for children.

Other Significant Adults- one of the greatest things we can do for children is to make them feel good about themselves and to equip them with a wide repertoire of positive coping strategies. They learn these strategies best when they see them modeled by the important adults in their lives.

Children are the future. Their future depends on how well we love, teach, support, and include them now.

- Article by Teresa Drelicharz, LIHMP -

“You tell me and I forget-

You teach me and I remember,

You involve me and I learn.”

~ Benjamin Franklin