

Elementary School General Guidelines for Parents

Youth Suicide in the United States*

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth aged 10-24 in the United States.*
- In recent years more young people have died from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, congenital birth defects, and diabetes combined.*
- For every young person who dies by suicide, between 100-200 attempt suicide.*
- Males are four times as likely to die by suicide as females - although females attempt suicide three times as often as males.*

Young Children Suicide Risk Factors

While the path that leads to suicidal behavior is long and complex and there is no “profile” that predicts suicidal behavior with certainty, there are certain risk factors associated with increased suicide risk. In isolation, these factors are not signs of suicidal thinking. However, when present they signal the need to be vigilant for the warning signs of suicide. The behaviors listed below may indicate that a child is emotionally distressed and may begin to think and act in self-destructive ways. If you are concerned about one or more of the following behaviors, please seek assistance at your child’s school or at your local mental health service agency.

Home Problems

- Running away from home
- Arguments with parents/caregivers

Behavior Problems

- Temper tantrums
- Thumb sucking or bed wetting/soiling
- Acting out, violent, impulsive behavior
- Bullying
- Accident proneness
- Sudden change in activity level or behavior
- Hyperactivity or withdrawal

Physical Problems

- Frequent stomachaches or headaches for no apparent reason
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Nightmares or night terrors

School Problems

- Chronic truancy or tardiness
- Decline in academic performance
- Fears associated with school

Serious Warning Signs

- Severe physical cruelty towards people or pets
- Scratching, cutting or marking the body
- Thinking, talking, drawing about suicide
- Previous suicide attempts
- Risk taking, such as intentional running in front of cars or jumping from high places
- Intense/excessive preoccupation with death

SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE

Here is what YOU can do:

- **Talk** to your child about suicide, don't be afraid, you will not be "putting ideas into their heads."
- **Asking for help** is the single skill that will protect your child. Help your child to identify and connect to caring adults to talk to when they need guidance and support.
- **Know** the risk factors and warning signs of suicide.
- **Remain calm.** Establish a safe environment to talk about suicide.
- **Listen** to your child's feelings. Don't minimize what your child says about what is upsetting him or her. Put yourself in your child's place; don't attempt to provide simple solutions.
- **Be Honest.** If you are concerned, do not pretend that the problem is minor. Tell the child that there are people who can help. State that you will be with him or her to provide comfort and love.
- **Be Supportive.** Children look for help and support from parents, older brothers and sisters. Talk about ways of dealing with problems and reassure your child that you care. Let children know that their bad feelings will not last forever.
- **Take Action.** It is crucial to get professional help for your child and the entire family. When you are close to a situation it is often hard to see it clearly. You may not be able to solve the problem yourself.
 - Help may be found at a suicide prevention center, local mental health agency, family service agency or through your clergy.
 - Become familiar with the support services at your child's school. Contact the appropriate person(s) at the school, for example, the school social worker, school psychologist, school counselor, or school nurse.

**If someone you know is in IMMEDIATE danger: call 9-1-1
National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255**

*M. Heron, D. L. Hoyert, S. L. Murphy, J. Xu, K. D. Kochanek, & B. Tejada-Vera. (2009, April). Deaths: Final Data for 2006. National Vital Statistics Reports, 57(14).

Adapted from LA COUNTY YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION PROJECT & SAMHSA <http://preventsuicide.lacoe.edu>