

Suicide Awareness & Prevention Guidance for Families:

Always take warning signs seriously, and never promise to keep them secret. Get help immediately from the school, your family doctor, local hospital, local police. Common signs include:

- o Suicide threats, both direct (“I am going to kill myself.” “I need life to stop.”) and indirect (“I need it to stop.” “I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up.”). Threats can be verbal or written, and they are often found in online postings.
- o Giving away prized possessions.
- o Preoccupation with death in conversation, writing, drawing, and social media.
- o Changes in behavior, appearance/hygiene, thoughts, and/or feelings. This can include someone who is typically sad who suddenly becomes extremely happy.
- o Emotional distress.

Students who feel suicidal are not likely to seek help directly; however, you can recognize the warning signs and take immediate action to keep them safe. When a student gives signs that they may be considering suicide, take the following actions:

- o Remain calm, be nonjudgmental, and listen. Strive to understand the intolerable emotional pain that has resulted in suicidal thoughts.
- o Avoid statements that might be perceived as minimizing your child’s emotional pain (e.g., “You need to move on.” or “You should get over it.”).
- o Ask your child **directly** if they are thinking about suicide (i.e., “Are you thinking of suicide?”).
- o Focus on your concern for their well-being and avoid being accusatory.
- o Reassure them that there is help and they will not feel like this forever.
- o Provide constant supervision. **Do not leave them alone.**
- o Without putting yourself in danger, remove means for self-harm, including any weapons they might find.
- o **GET HELP IMMEDIATELY.** Never agree to keep suicidal thoughts a secret. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources.

Talking to your child:

1. If they exhibit any of the warning signs above, don’t be afraid to ask if they have thought about suicide or if someone is hurting them. Raising the issue of suicide does not increase the risk or plant the idea. On the contrary, it creates the opportunity to offer help.
2. Ask your child if they think any of their friends or classmates exhibit warning signs. Talk with them about how to seek help for their friend or classmate. Guide them on how to respond when they see or hear any of the warning signs.
3. **Listen** to your child’s comments without judgment. Doing so requires that you fully concentrate, understand, respond, and then remember what is being said. Put your own agenda aside.
4. **Get help** from a school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker or community-based mental health professional if you are concerned for your child’s safety or the safety of one of their peers.