

How to Talk to Your Child About Suicide



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT
OF LEE COUNTY

Where Do I Start....



Every parent would like to believe that suicide is not relevant to them or their family or friends. Unfortunately, it is all too relevant for all of us. It is the third leading cause of death in adolescents and the second for college aged students. Even more disturbing are national surveys that tell us that 16% of high school

students admit to thinking about suicide and almost 8% acknowledge actually making an attempt. The unfortunate truth is that suicide can happen to ANY child in ANY family at ANY time.

So how do you deal with this reality? You talk to your children about suicide. Contrary to myth, talking about suicide

CANNOT plant the idea in someone's head. It actually can open up communication about a topic that is often kept a secret. And secrets that are exposed to the rational light of day often become less powerful and scary. You also give your child permission to bring up the subject again in the future.

When approaching the topic of suicide:

- Timing
- Think
- Be Honest
- Ask for Your Child's Response
- Listen
- Avoid Overreacting or Underreacting

How to Have a Conversation About Suicide With Your Child

If a discussion about suicide is not prompted by something your child is saying or doing that worries you, approach this topic in the same way as other subjects that are important to you, but may or may not be important to your child:

Timing is everything. Pick a time when you have the best chance of getting your child's attention. Sometimes a car ride, for example, assures you of a captive, attentive audience. Additionally, a suicide that has received media attention can provide the perfect opportunity to bring up the topic.

Think about what you want to say ahead of time and rehearse a script if necessary. Be honest. If this is a hard subject for you to talk about, admit it. (*"You know, I never thought this was something I'd be talking with you about, but I think it's really important"*). By acknowledging your discomfort, you give your child permission to acknowledge his/her discomfort, too.

Ask for your child's response. Be direct. (*"What do you think about suicide?"*; *"Is it something that any of your friends talk about?"*; *"The statistics make it sound*

pretty common. Have you ever thought about it? What about your friends?")

Listen to what your child has to say. You have asked the questions, so simply consider your child's answers. If you hear something that worries you, be honest about that too. (*"What you're telling me has really gotten my attention and I need to think about it some more. Let's talk about this again, okay?"*)

Avoid over or under reacting. Overreaction will close off any future communication on the subject. Underreacting, especially in relation to suicide, is often just a way to make ourselves feel better. ANY thoughts or talk of suicide (*"I felt that way awhile ago, but don't any more."*) should ALWAYS be revisited.

Remember that suicide is an attempt to solve a problem that seems impossible to solve in any other way. Ask about the problem that created the suicidal thoughts. This can make it easier to bring up again in the future. (*"I wanted to ask you again about the situation you were telling me about..."*)



Remember It Is a Process

The most important thing to remember is that suicide ideation is not simply an ‘event’ but an ongoing process that will require you to continue to

make decisions about your child’s welfare. If you are struggling with making good choices for your child due to concerns about their safety

and their mood, then get a professional to help you. A mental health clinician is going to be able to assist you in making the best decisions.

Keep Your Child’s School Counselor Informed

There is no reason for you or your child to feel embarrassed about getting help; however, that being said, it is important to recognize that there still is a lot of misinformation about mental health treatment. Most treatment providers

recommend that the school counselor have some basic information about your child and his/her recent struggle. No one needs to know all the details, but it will be extraordinarily helpful for your child to have an identified adult

whom they can trust to be a resource if they are struggling. As one wise teen put it: “You may not want anyone to know, but make sure that someone knows just enough to have your back. You will be thankful when you need it.”

Warning Signs - F.A.C.T.S.

Here are some possible warning signs of suicide ideation that can be organized around the word “F.A.C.T.S.”:

FEEELINGS that, again, seem different from the past, like hopelessness; fear of losing control; helplessness; worthlessness; feeling anxious, worried or angry often.

ACTIONS that are different from the way your child acted in the past, especially things like talking about death or suicide, taking dangerous risks, withdrawing

from activities or sports or using alcohol or drugs.

CHANGES in personality, behavior, eating habits, sleeping patterns, loss of interest in friends or activities or sudden improvement after a period of being down or withdrawn.

THREATS that convey a sense of hopelessness, worthlessness, or preoccupation with death (“Life doesn’t seem worth it sometimes”; “I wish I were dead”; “Heaven’s got to be better than this”); plans like giving away favorite

things, studying ways to die, obtaining a weapon or stash of pills; suicide attempts like overdosing or cutting.

SITUATIONS that can serve as “trigger points” for suicidal behaviors. These include things like loss or death; getting in trouble at home, in school or with the law; a break-up; or impending changes for which your child feels scared or unprepared.

If you notice any of these things in children who have always been impulsive, made previous suicide attempts or threats or seem vulnerable in any way, you really should seek consultation from a mental health professional.



If Your Child is In Need of Immediate Assistance

SalusCare - Crisis Unit
Colonial Campus
10140 Deer Run Farms
Road Fort Myers, FL 33966
239-275-4242

Mobile Crisis Response Team
The Center for Progress and
Excellence Inc. (local team)
1-844-395-4432

**National Suicide and
Crisis Lifeline**
Call 988

Crisis Text Line
Text HOME to
741741

SAMSHA National Hotline
1-800-662-HELP (4357)