



## Youth Suicide Prevention **TOOLKIT** For Parents

### Why do I need to watch for suicide?

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death for those ages 15 to 24 in the U.S.
- For each suicide death, family and close friends are at higher risk for suicide themselves.
- If you are concerned, don't wait to talk to your child.
- Knowing the risk factors and warning signs helps you help your child with concerns about himself or another student.
- Asking directly about suicide tells your child it's ok to talk about it with you.
- Take all suicidal thoughts, threats and behaviors seriously.
- Most suicidal people want to end severe emotional pain.
- Emotional pain makes it hard to think clearly, consider options or remember reasons for living.

### Risk factors

#### ***Prior suicide attempt***

- This is the strongest predictor of future attempts.

#### ***Mental illness***

- 1 in 5 teens will have depression at some point.
- Many teens with depression are undiagnosed.
- Childhood depression often continues into adulthood, especially if left untreated.

#### ***Interpersonal conflict***

- **Bullying:** In-person or cyberbullying.
- **Trauma:** Examples include injury, assault, legal trouble, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.
- **Relationship breakups:** Impulsivity combined with a personal inability to think through consequences before acting can increase the risk for suicide following a breakup.
- **Sexting:** Tell your children to never take images they don't want classmates, family or future employers to see. Forwarding a sexual picture of a minor is a crime.
- **Recent loss:** Examples include moving, changing schools, divorce, or death of a loved one.
- **Questioning sexual orientation.**

### Warning signs

#### ***Call 911 if:***

- A suicide attempt has been made.
- A weapon is present.
- The person is out of control.
- The person makes a serious threat to kill himself or herself such as:
  - "I wish I were dead."
  - "If ..... doesn't happen, I'll kill myself."
  - "What's the point of living?"
- Looks for a way to carry out a suicide plan.
- Talks about death or suicide in text messages, on social media sites or in poems/music.
- Gives away possessions.
- Hopelessness.
- Rage, anger or seeking revenge.
- Reckless or risky behavior.
- Expressions of feeling trapped, like there's no way out.
- Alcohol or drug use.
- Withdrawal from family or friends.
- Anxiety, agitation or sleep irregularity.
- Dramatic mood changes.
- Discussions of no reason for living or no sense of purpose.

## Prevention

### ***What you can do right now:***

- Know suicide risk factors and warning signs.
- Share this website with your child.
- Have a conversation about what your child should do if he is concerned about himself or a friend.
- Promote skills in problem-solving and conflict resolution.
- Maintain a supportive and involved relationship with your child.
- Encourage participation in sports, activities at school/place of worship or volunteering.
- Help your teen develop strong communication skills.
- Get medical care for depression and substance use.
- Don't leave a depressed or suicidal teen home alone.
- Most suicides occur in the early afternoon/evening in the teen's home.

### **Remove these items or secure in your home:**

#### ***Prescription and over-the-counter medications***

- Keep medications, including vitamins with iron, where your kids or their friends cannot access them.
- Don't keep lethal doses of medication on hand. A pharmacist can advise you on safe quantities.

#### ***Alcohol and drugs***

- Talk to your kids about substance use as a major risk factor for suicide.
- If your teen has a pattern of substance use, seek mental health care. Substance use could be an attempt to self-medicate a mental illness.
- Substance use makes youth more likely to choose lethal means, such as guns. Remove firearms from your home.

#### ***Poisons***

- Lock up potentially harmful common household products, including household cleaners, products containing alcohol (such as mouthwash, hand sanitizer, etc.), and cosmetics (such as nail polish remover, perfume, etc.).

#### ***Guns***

- Remove firearms from your home. More than half of all suicide deaths result from a gunshot wound.

## Talking to your kids

### ***How to start a conversation after a relationship breakup:***

- What did you notice about yourself in the relationship?
- What is positive? What would you like to change?
- Were there patterns or issues that brought you into this relationship or caused it to end?
- What are your priorities and preferences in life?
- Who are you on your own and how do you want to live your life?

### ***How to start a conversation about suicide:***

- "I have been feeling concerned about you lately."
- "Lately, I've noticed some differences in you. How are you doing?"
- "What happened? It might help to talk about it."

### ***Questions you can ask:***

- "When did you begin feeling like this?"
- "Did something happen that made you start feeling this way?"
- "How can I support you right now?"
- "Could you tell me more about that?"

### ***What to say that can help:***

- "You are not alone – I'm here for you."
- "I may not understand exactly how you feel, but I love you and want to help."
- "I think you feel there is no way out. Let's talk about some options."

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[www.ruokmichigan.org/parents.htm](http://www.ruokmichigan.org/parents.htm)

Credits & Reference:

[www.oakgov.com/health/information/Pages/Youth-Suicide-Toolkit.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/health/information/Pages/Youth-Suicide-Toolkit.aspx)