

Talking To Kids About Suicide

The tween and teen years are a time when your child experiences many changes. Although these may seem like some of the happiest years of your child's life, they can also be the most confusing. Overwhelming feelings of stress, sadness, uncertainty and pressure to succeed are not uncommon during adolescence. These already strong feelings are often intensified by changes in their life, such as a move to a different community, a divorce, trouble with school or a breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend. For some, suicide may seem like the only solution to their problems.

What's a Parent to Do?

The best way to keep your kids safe is to be a nosey parent. Ask your children questions about issues that may be bothering them. Really listen to what they have to say. Remember that their issues, no matter how minor they may seem to you, may be overwhelming your adolescent. Never make fun of or disregard your teenager's concerns, especially if they are making him or her unhappy.

In other words, simply talking to your kids about suicide may make them less likely to consider it, according to a study in the April 2005 Journal of the American Medical Association. This is different than the popular belief that talking to kids about suicide will only give them the idea.

Signs a Child May Be Thinking of Suicide

- Talks about suicide, death or dying
- Symptoms of depression (fatigue, change in appetite and weight, poor performance in school, feelings of guilt, irritability, anger or hopelessness)
- Changes in behavior, appetite and sleep
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Alcohol and/or drug use
- Engaging in risky behavior

- Giving away possessions and making arrangements to "take care of unfinished business"
- Inability to concentrate or think clearly
- Suicide notes

How to Talk to Your Kids About Suicide

- First, be calm. If your child thinks that you are upset, he/she may want to spare you further worry and may not share true feelings and thoughts with you
- Let your child know that you love her and that she is important to you
- Tell him you're concerned about how he's feeling and want him to know he can talk to you about anything
 - Ask her directly if she's ever thought of killing herself (Avoid asking, "Why are you sad?" as the child may not know why and may become frustrated)
 - Listen to his feelings and concerns
 - Tell her that you will help her or "we'll work on this together"
 - Let him know that it's OK to feel sad sometimes, and you too feel sad at times
- Help your child identify other adults that she can go to if she isn't comfortable talking to you about this—a guidance counselor, a grandparent, aunt, uncle or other adults
- Suggest your child meet with a professional counselor either on his own or with you to help him feel better.

Don't be afraid to ask your child, "Have you thought about hurting yourself?"

Even if you aren't worried about your child, look for opportunities to discuss this sensitive topic. Mention an article you read in the paper, a movie or TV show that you saw or lyrics to a song you heard. Ask if she is worried about herself or her friends.

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Ask if he knows whom he could talk to if he's worried or thinking about suicide.

Sometimes it's easier for you and your child to talk when you are side-by-side rather than face-to-face. Talk while riding in the car, fixing a meal together, taking a walk or playing a board game. Time spent talking to your child is time well spent.

In the event that someone you know is considering suicide and needs immediate help, call 911.

For further information, please call:

Anne Arundel County Crisis Warmline

410-768-5522

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline

1-800-422-0009

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Anne Arundel County

Mental Health Agency

410-222-7858

Anne Arundel County Department of Health

Adolescent and Family Services

410-222-6785

Or visit these Web sites:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

www.afsp.org

Anne Arundel County Network of Care:

www.networkofcare.org

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

www.sprc.org

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education
(SAVE)

www.save.org

Anne Arundel County Department of Health

www.aahealth.org

