

## Tips for Keeping Your Child Safe

### What do I need to know about youth suicide and depression?

- **Risk factors for exhibiting suicide behavior:**
  - Loss of a significant other
  - Previous suicide of a peer or family member
  - Substance use
  - Depression and other mental health issues
  - Problems at school
  - Access to firearms or other means of harming self
  - Access to medication
- **Students who are having suicidal thoughts may exhibit a variety of symptoms including, but are not limited to:**
  - Significant changes in behavior such as a change in appearance, change in grades, withdrawing from friends, changes in sleeping/eating habits
  - Making suicidal threats – either direct, “I want to die” or indirect, “Things would be better if I wasn’t here.”
  - Appears sad or hopeless
  - Reckless behavior
  - Self-inflicted injuries
  - Giving away prized possessions
  - Saying good bye to friends and family

**\*\*It is important to remember the signs and risk factors listed are generalities. Not all students who contemplate or die by suicide will exhibit these kinds of symptoms AND not all students who exhibit these behaviors are suicidal.**

### **What can I do to keep my child safe?**

- **ASK.** Talking about suicide does not make a student suicidal. Asking if someone is having suicidal thoughts gives permission to talk about it. Asking sends the message that you are concerned and want to help.
- **TAKE SIGNS SERIOUSLY.** Studies have found that more than 75% of people who die by suicide showed some of the warning signs in the weeks or months prior to their death.
- **GET HELP.** If you have concerns that your child is suicidal, seek immediate help from a mental health professional. Suicidal adolescents need to be evaluated by an expert in assessing risk and developing treatment plans. Parents can contact school counselors, psychologists, or social workers for a listing of resources. When you call to make an appointment for an assessment, tell the person that your child is suicidal and needs to be seen as soon as possible. You can also access emergency services at your nearest hospital. Make sure to follow through on treatment recommendations.
- **INFORM SCHOOL SUPPORT PERSONNEL OF YOUR CHILD’S NEEDS AND TREATMENT RECOMMENDATIONS.** We are here to help.
- **LIMIT ACCESS TO FIREARMS, PRESCRIPTION DRUGS, MEDICATIONS AND OTHER MEANS.**
- **DO NOT LEAVE YOUR CHILD ALONE.** It is important that parents surround themselves with a team of supportive friends and family members who can step in and help as needed.
- **REASSURE YOUR CHILD THAT LIFE CAN GET BETTER.** Many suicidal people have lost all hope that life can improve. They may have difficulty problem solving even simple issues. Remind your child that no matter how bad things are, the problem can be worked out. Offer your help.
- **LISTEN.** Avoid making statements such as “I know what it’s like” or “I understand.” Instead, make statements such as “Help me understand what life is like for you right now.”