

What Can a Parent Do?

- Take suicidal threats seriously. It costs nothing if you are wrong; it may be the difference of a life if you are right.
- Be an "askable" parent. Make it clear that problems can be shared and concerns will be listened to through open discussion.
- Act when you suspect that something is wrong with your child. Think the unimaginable and be relieved if you are wrong.
- Avoid the trap of denial that surrounds suicide, "Oh, he's just looking for attention."
- Recognize that depression is a very real problem for young people; it is not a problem that will go away on its own.
- Seek professional help when warning signs are detected. Be willing to participate in family counseling to support your child.
- Create a positive family climate.

What Can be Done for a Suicidal Youth?

- Ask, "What did you mean when you said, 'I wish I were dead!'?"
- Examine recent problems with your child. Assure him/her that you have sensed his/her pain and hurt, and promise to look together for solutions. Follow through on these promises.
- When a suicide is threatened, find out the plan for the suicide, the means considered being used, and the young person's access to the means.

- Assure your child that you will do what it takes to keep him/her alive; he/she must promise to work with you.
- Point out that most problems are temporary setbacks; suicide is forever.
- Discuss concerns with the school's counselor, school social worker, or psychologist.
- Take an actively suicidal child to:
 - Therapist, who can see him/her immediately.
 - Community Mental Health Agencies in Baltimore County.
 - Hospital emergency room with a psychiatric unit.
- If uncertain, call the:
Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline
1-800-422-0009

Resources

Baltimore County Community Mental Health Agencies **1-800-888-1965**

DRADA (Depression and Related Affective Disorders Association) **410-955-4647**

NAMI (National Alliance for Mentally Ill) **410-467-7100**

SPEAK (Suicide Prevention Education Awareness for Kids) **410-377-7711**

Youth Suicide Prevention in the Family



Office of School Counseling

Baltimore County Public Schools
9610 Pulaski Park Dr. Suite 219
Baltimore, MD 21220
410-887-0291

YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

AWARENESS: A FAMILY MATTER

Why Should Parents Be Concerned?

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15-19 year olds. Nationally more children and adolescents die annually from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, and other medical conditions *combined*.
- In the United States, a young person completes suicide every hour and fifty-three minutes every day of the year.
- For every two murders in the USA, there are three completed suicides.
- Suicide is a devastating trauma to a family's unity.
- Suicide complicates grief by introducing blame, guilt, and second-guessing.
- Youth suicide is a largely preventable death. With increased awareness of the warning signs of youthful suicide, the chances increase that a suicide can be prevented.
- There are resources available to support families facing a suicidal crisis.

Warning Signs of Possible Suicidal Intent

Behaviors *If they talk about suicide, it is already on their minds.*

- Threats to take one's life
- Drawings or writings about one's death
- High risk behaviors, endangering one's life
- Dramatic changes in appearance, withdrawal from family/friends
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Changes in eating and/or sleeping habits
- Previous suicidal gestures/attempts
- Giving away prized possessions, making a will or plans for one's funeral

Attitudes *Depression is a killer emotion*

- History of depression; ninety percent of those who complete suicides suffer from it
- A sense of being overwhelmed by problems
- Angry at the world for wrongs suffered or feeling that others do not care about their problems
- Helpless to change a situation they see as hopeless
- Fantasies of revenge, poor communications about their own needs, impulsive, poor problem-solving skills
- In pain which they want to end immediately
- Perfectionistic, rigid thinker

Life Circumstances *Youthful suicides feel overwhelmed by life.*

- Difficulties with discipline in school and/ or with the law in the community.
- May have experienced abuse.
- Living in the midst of conflict in home or school.
- May have a learning disability.
- Rejected due to sexual orientation or may be a victim of bullying/harassment.
- Living in a home where firearms are readily accessible.
- Multiple losses.
- Suicide of a close friend/relative.
- Public embarrassment or rejection by a loved one.

What Should Parents Know About Suicidal Warning Signs?

Young people go through a number of changes and may express broad mood swings as part of normal development.

One warning sign may not be a clear indication of suicidal intention. But a pattern of hopeless feelings about self and a sense of helplessness in the face of stressors and life challenges should be discussed openly. Setbacks may become crises for vulnerable young people.