

Speaking about suicide with youth

Written by By Melissa Martin Guest Columnist
Friday, 14 February 2020 08:01



Talking to your child about suicide may be one of the most difficult and uncomfortable conversations you'll have, but it may also be the most important. Do not be afraid of the word "suicide." According to research, talking to kids about suicide does not cause or increase suicide. Please read that again. By talking about suicide prevention, kids will know parents are open to discussing serious topics and parents will provide support when needed.

Why discuss mental health matters with kids? Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the United States for kids ages 10-19. And 1 out of every 6 high school students has considered suicide in the past year. Depression and suicide affect people of every race, religious background, and income level. Kids need to know the warning signs of depression and suicide and how to get help. Most kids who attempt suicide have shown signs of depression.

"According to suicide prevention experts, asking a child directly about suicidal thoughts is usually the best thing a parent can do to help their child open up about their emotions. Even if their child is not struggling with suicide or depression, parents can model for their child that it is good to talk about serious emotional concerns with trusted adults and important to reach out to friends to have these conversations, too." More information can be found at: nationwidechildrens.org.

Conversation

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Together, parents/guardians can educate themselves on suicide information. Peruse valid websites for facts and statistics. Put techno devices down. Give your full attention to your child. Listen as much as you talk. Answer questions.

“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.” Read more from the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide at sptsusa.org.

Responses to Suicide Comments

If your child makes a comment about hurting himself/herself, wanting to die, or being unsure of living, take it seriously (but do not overreact). Start with these phrases to validate emotions and understanding of his/her emotional pain. “Sometimes kids feel so sad, mad or even hopeless that they feel like hurting themselves. Have you been feeling like that?” “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” “Do you have a plan about how you would kill yourself?” “We will get through this together. And you can and will feel better.”

Crisis Options: Parents can call a 24-hour crisis line and ask for assistance. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Parents can transport their child to the nearest hospital emergency room for a mental health assessment or call 911.

Non-crisis options: Schedule a visit with a pediatrician. The pediatrician can assess early warning signs of suicidal behavior in their patients, diagnose and recommend treatment, and provide referrals. Or schedule an appointment with a mental health professional.

The Center for Suicide Prevention and Research at Nationwide Children’s Hospital, Columbus, Ohio, was created in 2015 to address the growing problem of suicide among youth. Signs of Suicide is a nationally-recognized suicide prevention program offered by CSPR at Nationwide Children’s Hospital. SOS is the only school-based suicide prevention program listed on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices. Nationwide Children’s website has several articles

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with information about suicide prevention and intervention.

Resource

When Nothing Matters Anymore: A Survival Guide for Depressed Teens (ages 13 and up) by Bev Cobain. Full of solid information, it explains adolescent depression, reveals how common it is, describes the symptoms, and spreads the good news that depression is treatable. Personal stories, photos, and poetry from teens dealing with depression speak directly to readers' feelings, concerns, and experiences. It discusses treatment options, presents the facts about therapy, explains the differences between various types of helping professionals (psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, physicians, counselors, etc.). This book is a Suicide Awareness Voices of Education Reading List selection. Free Spirit Publishing House is a leading publisher of learning tools that support teens' social-emotional health.

Don't make suicide prevention a taboo topic. Talk about mental health with teens.

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