**Parent Information: Protecting Your Child from Suicide**

**Parents can help prevent suicide by watching for warning signs.** Watch for the following changes in your child’s behavior and activities:

* Making comments such as, “I wish I was dead,” “I wish I hadn’t been born.”
* Withdrawing from activities, avoiding family and friends.
* Acting differently, changes in eating and sleeping, doing risky things that cause injury to self or others, and abusing drugs or alcohol.
* Giving away personal things and saying good-bye to people as if they won’t see them again.
* For no apparent reason, quickly changing from very sad to very happy.
* Feeling hopeless after a loved one’s death, breakup with a girlfriend/boyfriend, disagreement with a best friend, problems at school, being bullied, teen pregnancy, or following a big disappointment.

**Parents can help by talking about suicide.** This is a sensitive topic. Most parents worry that talking about suicide will increase the likelihood of their child making that choice. However, most children who are suicidal have already thought about suicide. Talking does not make it more likely to happen. If you notice changes in your child’s behavior and activities, ask questions. “Lately, you do not seem like yourself, what’s going on?” “You are facing challenges, and I’m worried about you and how you are feeling.”

**Parents can help by directly asking about suicide.** These questions are difficult to ask, so it may help to practice saying these questions aloud before talking with your child. “Does it seem like things will never get better?”  “Are you thinking about suicide?” “Are you suicidal now?” If your child has thought about suicide, it is important to ask for more information. “Have you thought about how you would hurt or kill yourself?” “Do you have access to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?” “Where would you get \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?” (*fill in the blank with whatever method they mentioned, i.e., pills, gun, etc.*). “Have you thought about when you would kill yourself?” The more detailed the plan, the more serious the problem, and the more urgent the need for professional help. Ask for help. Your school’s counselor or school psychologist can help you. You are not alone.

**Tips for talking with your child**

* Keep your voice and facial expressions calm.
* Ask questions and listen to your child.
* Do not control the conversation, let your child talk. Do not interrupt, yell, threaten, or criticize.
* If you and your child become angry, take a break, calm down, and try again.
* Focus on offering support. Do not become angry because of your child’s anger and despair.
* Focus on the present and future, not the past.

If your child does not want to talk with you, reassure them that you care about them. Suggest speaking with another caring adult, such as a counselor, spiritual leader, or other professional.

**What to do if your child is suicidal**

* Don’t leave your child alone.
* Explain, “I care about you and I will get someone who will understand and help.” Do not make promises to keep this a secret. Do not criticize your child for feeling suicidal. Reassure them that you will do everything possible to keep them safe.
* Get help, either by calling 911 or taking your child to the nearest hospital emergency room.
* Remove or lock dangerous options in a safe place (particularly guns and medications).
* Reassure them, “You are not alone.” “Suicide is not an option.” “I will get the help you need.”