



PARTNERING TO HELP OUR STUDENTS

Suicide Prevention: Getting children the help they need

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people between 10 and 24 years of age. Young people who are contemplating suicide frequently show warning signs. Parents, teachers, and friends are in key positions to identify those signs and take steps to get help.

Laying the groundwork: Before a crisis situation or troubling event arises, parents should lay the groundwork for good communication with their children by communicating unconditional love and letting their kids know they can talk to their parents about anything.

What if there are warning signs? Parents should take any change in a child's behavior seriously. Doing so can help young people before they engage in behavior with irreversible consequences.

QPR – Question, Persuade, and Refer: QPR is a lot like CPR for people who are considering suicide. It is a tool that anyone can use to intervene in a crisis situation and get a person help.



- **Question:** Take any sign of suicide seriously. Calmly ask a child about it if you suspect something. The question should be very direct, such as “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” or “Are you thinking about suicide?” If it has crossed your mind, it may have crossed the child's mind.
- **Persuade:** If the answer to that question is yes, then persuade the child to get help. Stay with the child at all times. Remove any means for self-harm and do not leave the young person alone. Reassure him or her that there is help and offer hope. Do not judge or make accusations.
- **Refer:** Once you have persuaded the child to get help, the next step is to connect the child with a school counselor or social worker or a crisis resource in your community. Experts say QPR is not meant to be counseling, but rather it is a tool that can be used to identify when a person is in crisis and to connect that person to the appropriate help.

To be fully versed in the QPR technique, experts recommend taking part in a training opportunity. Individual online training is available for a small fee at www.qprinstitute.com.

Suicide Risk Factors: Characteristics associated with increased suicide risk include:

- Mental illness, including depression, conduct disorders, and substance abuse;
- Family stress/dysfunction;
- Environmental risks, including presence of a firearm in the home; and
- Situational crises, such as the traumatic death of a loved one, abuse, or family violence.

Suicide Warning Signs: The following observable behaviors may signal suicidal thinking in a young person:

- Suicide threats/notes;
- Previous suicide attempts;
- Alcohol and drug abuse;
- Statements revealing a desire to die;
- Sudden changes in behavior, personality, and/or friends;
- Changes in physical habits and appearance;
- Inability to concentrate or think rationally;
- Death and suicidal themes;
- Prolonged depression;
- Efforts to hurt oneself;
- Making final arrangements;
- Giving away prized possessions; and
- Access to weapons or medication.

Teach your children not to keep secrets: Peers should not agree to keep a friend's suicidal thoughts a secret and instead should tell an adult, such as a parent, teacher, school counselor, psychologist, or social worker. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources as soon as possible.

If your child wants to talk about suicide: Be prepared to seek help. Every community has resources; if you need a referral, your school staff can help...ask them. Listen to your child. In the moment, show you love her, and tell her you will help. Reassure her that you are not going to judge her. Provide hope.

If there is a suicide at your child's school and you want to "check in": Be prepared for questions. Reassure your child that he is not responsible, and that nothing he said or did caused it to happen. Be prepared to talk about the suicide multiple times during the first days and weeks, and later throughout the child's life. Consider a children's bereavement support group.

Communicate with your school support team: Know the school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other crisis team personnel in your child's school, who are trained to intervene when a student is at risk for suicide. These individuals conduct suicide risk assessments, inform parents, provide recommendations and referrals to community services, and often offer follow-up counseling and support at school.

Help your child feel comfortable: If your child does not show any suicide warning signs and you are not worried, you don't have to introduce the topic. Just talk with your child. When it matters most, your children need to feel comfortable talking to you.

Going beyond one-word answers: Often when you ask, "How was school today?", you get one-word answers like "Fine" or "Good." Check out these 28 ways to ask your teen "How was school today?" WITHOUT asking "How was school today?" at www.bit.ly/howwasschooltoday.

Remember: If you are worried, call 911 if it is an emergency, or call someone at your child's school or your local crisis center.



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