

Huntington Beach Union High School District
Parent University

“13 Reasons Why Not: Preventing Teen Suicide”

Presenters: Kylie Bernstein & Kayla Perkoski

Warning Signs

- Person talks about wanting to die, feeling hopeless, being a burden to others, etc.
- Concerning behaviors such as: increased use of drugs/alcohol, decline in academic performance, withdrawing from friends & family, giving away possessions, calling/texting to say goodbye, writing a suicide note, searching for ways to end his/her life
- Person feeling depressed, irritable, angry, anxious, humiliated, etc.
- Preoccupation with death and dying in conversations, social media, art, writing
- Sudden changes in appearance, hygiene, thoughts, and/or feelings

Risk Factors

- Mental Health factors: depression, anxiety disorders, personality disorders, Bipolar disorder, schizophrenia
- Substance abuse problems
- Chronic health conditions or diagnosis of a serious condition
- Traumatic brain injury
- Access to drugs, firearms, etc.
- Prolonged stress at work, from bullying, relationship problems
- Exposure to someone else's suicide or seeing/hearing graphic information about suicide
- Stressful life event - grief, divorce, losing a job
- Family history of suicide or previous attempts by the individual
- History of abuse or trauma

Parent Support to Promote Protective Factors

Prioritize the Positive - Be mindful that not all of your interactions turn contentious. You can prioritize interacting with your teen in positive ways by making time to do fun things together or chat about things that aren't controversial, that aren't difficult.

Minimize Conflict - Set limits, but the rest of the time focus on the positive connections. Parents have the opportunity to reassure struggling kids that they won't feel like this forever, and you can help do this by promoting positive experiences. When kids feel suicidal it's often because they feel hopeless and can't imagine things being better.

Spend Quality Time with Them - Set aside time each day to talk—time when you're focused totally on your teen. The simple act of connecting face to face can play a big role in promoting teen's mental health.

Help Them Find Effective Coping Strategies - Encourage them to utilize positive, healthy coping skills like music, exercise, writing, art, being involved in a sport or club, etc. Try not to take away any of their positive coping skills as a means of punishment for poor grades or bad behavior.

Allow Access to Mental Health Support – If you see that your teen is struggling, don't hesitate to offer support from a professional early on. Contact your insurance to see which therapists/psychologists are within your network or reach out to support staff at school.

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How to Respond As a Parent

Remain calm - Though you may be shocked and overwhelmed, it is important to try to stay calm. By remaining calm, you are creating a comfortable atmosphere for your teen to open up to you and reach out for your help.

Respond in an empathetic, non-accusatory way - If your child reveals suicidal thoughts to you, your instinct might be to say something like, “you shouldn’t feel that way”, but that comes across as critical and invalidating. Express empathy and support by saying things like “that sounds very difficult and painful”, “we’re going to get you some help”, “thank you for telling me, I know that must’ve been hard”. It is important not to judge, minimize or dismiss their problems. Instead, try to provide them with reassurance.

Be prepared to act - When a suicidal youth opens up to you, get involved and take action to get them help immediately. If someone is suicidal, do not leave them alone. Limit their access to lethal means for suicide like firearms, blades, and medication. Take them to the nearest hospital emergency room, call 911, call the Centralized Assessment Team, etc. (see Resources).

Do not try to play the hero - Though it is important to act immediately, it is better not to act alone. Helping a suicidal person is not easy; it can take a lot of time and energy and bring forth an array of emotions. Having the support of others can help you help someone else.

Do not promise confidentiality - Though an individual may ask you to guarantee confidentiality, try to avoid making this promise, and be prepared to break it if you do. Keeping a teen’s promise is not as important as saving their life.

Don’t fall into the “Not My Child” Syndrome - While it is true that certain factors increase the risk of suicide, it’s important to understand that suicide crosses all racial, economic, social and ethnic lines. No one is automatically exempted. All of us need to be aware of the warning signs of suicidal thought and know how to respond if the behavior of the youth causes concern.

Resources

National Suicide Prevention Hotline
Free – 24/7 – English/Spanish – Confidential
800-273-8255 or
<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

Crisis Text Line
Free – Confidential
Text SAFE (7233) to 741-741

Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center
Available 24/7
877-727-4747

Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Chat Line
<http://www.didihirsch.org/chat>

Crisis Assessment Team – OC
(will visit individual homes with the support of local law enforcement)
866-830-6011

For emergency situations, please call 911.

Contact Information

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