

Talking to your child about Suicide

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for Georgia's youth ages 15-17 years

"Contrary to myth, talking about suicide CANNOT plant the idea in someone's head! It actually can open up communication about a topic that is often kept a secret. And secrets that are exposed to the rational light of day often become less powerful and scary. You also give your child permission to bring up the subject again in the future."
- Society for Prevention of Teen Suicide

Warning Signs

01



- F**eelings expressing hopelessness about the future
- A**ctions Displaying severe/ overwhelming pain or distress
- C**hange Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, including: withdrawal from friends or changes in social activities; anger or hostility; or changes in sleep
- T**hreats Talking about, writing about, or making plans for suicide
- S**ituation Experiencing stressful situations including those that involve loss, change, create personal humiliation, or involve getting into trouble at home, in school or with the law. These kinds of situations can serve as triggers for suicide

02 Tips for the conversation

Timing is everything

Pick a time when you have the best chance to get your child's attention (e.g. a car ride)

Be honest

If this is hard for you to talk about be honest. By acknowledging your discomfort, you give your child permission to acknowledge his/her discomfort too

Think ahead

Think about and rehearse what you are going to say before the conversation occurs

Listen

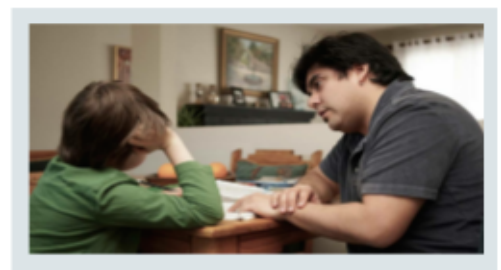
You've asked the questions, so simply consider your child's answers. If you hear something that worries you, be honest about that too.

Ask for a response

Be direct! ("What do you think about suicide?"; "Is it something that any of your friends talk about?"; "Have you ever thought about it? What about your friends?")

Under & Over Reaction

Don't over or under react. Overreaction will close off any future communication on the subject. ANY thoughts or talk of suicide should be taken seriously and addressed immediately or be revisited



03 When it's your child's friend's suicide attempt/ death by suicide

What to do:

Acknowledge rumors and put into context

Explain that although some of the rumors may be true, they are only part of the story and we have to be careful not to make judgments based on limited information. Emphasize that the most important piece of the story is the fact that the deceased felt so terrible or was thinking so unclearly that he or she did not realize in the consequences of what he or she was doing.

Underscore dangerous behavior of the deceased

Because children normally imitate or copy the behavior of peers, you may want to underscore the dangerous consequences of the deceased's behavior.

Introduce topic of help seeking

Ask which adults your child views as helpful, especially with difficult problems. If the list is short or nonexistent, make some suggestions. Good choices can include other adult family members, school staff such as teachers, counselors, coaches or the school nurse, clergy or youth ministers, a friend's parent and older siblings or even neighbors.

Other helpful tips:

Remain nonjudgemental about the deceased

Ask for his/her response and validate it

Keep channels of communication open

Avoid gossip about the causes

Share your reactions with your child

04 Resources

At School

The student services department includes 3 school counselors trained in suicide prevention. These counselors are available to talk to students and/or concerned parents at any point throughout the school day

Holly McShane,
hmcshane@habershamschools.com
706-778-7161 ext. 1129

Jalen Hulsey
jhulsey@habershamschools.com
706-778-7161 ext. 1128

Donnie Bennett
dbennett@habershamschools.com
706-778-7161 ext. 1127

At Home

Georgia Crisis & Access Line
1-800-715-4226

National Suicide Prevention Hotline
1-800-273-8255

Text HELLO to 741-741
A free 24/7 text line for people in crisis