What Can a Parent Do?

• Take suicidal threat seriously. It costs nothing if you are wrong; it may be the difference of a life if you are right.
• Be an “askable” parent. Make it clear that problems can be shared and concerns will be listened to through open discussion.
• Act when you suspect that something is wrong with your child. Think the unimaginable and be relieved if you are wrong.
• Avoid assuming that suicidal comments reflect attention-seeking behaviors.
• Recognize that depression is a very real problem for young people: it is a problem that requires direct intervention.
• Seek professional help when warning signs are detected. Be willing to participate in family counseling to support your child.

What Can Be Done For A Suicidal Youth?

Create a positive family climate:

• Ask, “What did you mean when you said, ‘I wish I were dead!’?”
• Examine recent problems with your child. Assure your child that you have sensed his or her pain and hurt, and promise to look together for solutions.
• Follow through on these promises.
• When a suicide is threatened, find out the plan for the suicide, the means being considered, and the young person’s access to the means.
• Assure your child that you will do what it takes to keep him or her alive; your child must promise to work with you.
• Point out that most problems are temporary setbacks; suicide is forever.
• Discuss concerns with the school’s counselor or psychologist.
• Take an actively suicidal child to: a therapist, who can see him or her immediately.
  community mental health agency.
  hospital emergency room with a psychiatric unit.
• When in doubt, call the Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline 1-800-422-0009 (open 24 hours/7 days a week).

Community Resources

Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center
410-531-6006

Howard County Mental Health Authority
410-313-7350

Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline
1-800-422-0009

NAMI (National Alliance of Mentally Ill)
410-772-9300

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Office of Student Services
Howard County Public Schools
10920 Route 108 • Ellicott City, MD 21042
410-313-6776
**Youth Suicide Prevention Awareness: A Family Matter**

Why Should Parents Be Concerned?

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds.
- Suicide is a devastating trauma to a family's unity.
- Suicide complicates grief by introducing blame, guilt, and second-guessing.
- In the United States, a young person completes suicide every hour and fifty-three minutes every day of the year.
- For every two murders in the USA, there are three completed suicides.
- Youth suicide is a largely preventable death.
- With increased awareness of the warning signs of youth suicide, the chances increase that a suicide can be prevented.
- There are resources available to support families facing a suicide crisis.

### Warning Signs of Possible Suicidal Intent

**Behaviors:** If they talk about suicide, it is already on their minds.

- Threats to take one’s life
- Drawings or writings about one’s death
- High-risk behaviors, endangering one’s life
- Dramatic changes in appearance, withdrawal from family or friends
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Previous suicidal gestures or attempts
- Giving away of prized possessions, making a will or planning for one’s funeral
- Poor communication about one’s needs

**Moods:** Depression, anger and feelings of despair may not be a teenage phase. Ninety percent of those who complete suicide suffered from depression.

- A sense of being overwhelmed by problems
- Feelings that others do not care about their problems
- Feelings of helplessness to change a situation they see as hopeless
- Fantasies of revenge
- Impulsive, poor problem-solving skills
- In pain, which they want to end immediately

### Risk Factors for Suicide

“While some life circumstances and stressors are not warning signs of possible suicidal intent, they may be factors associated with suicidal behaviors.”

- Difficulties with discipline in school or with the law in the community
- History of abuse
- Academic pressures that seem overwhelming
- Living in the midst of conflict in home or school
- Rejection due to sexual orientation
- Being a victim of bullying or harassment
- Living in a home where firearms are readily accessible
- Multiple losses
- Suicide of a close friend or relative

### What Should Parents Know about Suicidal Warning Signs?

Young people go through a number of changes and may express broad mood swings as part of normal development.

One warning sign may not be a clear indication of suicidal intention. But a pattern of hopeless feelings about self and a sense of helplessness in the face of stressors and life challenges should be discussed openly. Setbacks may become crises for vulnerable young people.