

SUICIDE

CHOCTAW COUNTY
BOARD OF EDUCATION
BY: TIKISHA BROOKS-GRAHAM

FACTS ABOUT SUICIDE

- ❑ More than 30,000 people in the United States die by suicide each year.
- ❑ Every 60 minutes more than 3 people die by suicide.
- ❑ Approximately 14 people between the ages of 14-24 die by suicide each day.

Facts about suicide cont...

- ❑ Suicide is the second leading cause of death for teenagers between the ages of 15-19
- ❑ Suicide is among the three leading causes of death among those age 15-44 (both sexes)

Suicide Warning Signs

- ❑ Preoccupation with themes of death or expressing suicidal thoughts
- ❑ Changes in sleeping patterns—too much or too little
- ❑ Sudden and extreme changes in eating habits, losing or gaining weight
- ❑ Frequent complaints of physical symptoms related to emotions such as stomach aches, headaches or fatigue
- ❑ Withdrawal from friends and family or other major behavioral changes
- ❑ Changes in school performance, lowered grades, cutting classes, dropping out of activities, no longer shows, interest in favorite things or activities

Suicide Warning Signs cont...

- ❑ Personality changes, such as nervousness, outbursts of anger or apathy about appearance and health
- ❑ Sudden cheerfulness after a prolonged period of depression
- ❑ Giving away prized possessions, making a will or other “final arrangements,” seems to be getting affairs in order
- ❑ Talks about feeling worthless and/or hopeless

Suicide Warning Signs cont...

- ❑ Use of drugs or alcohol
- ❑ Recent suicide of friends or relatives
- ❑ Previous suicide attempts
- ❑ Loss of significant social relationships within the last 12 months
- ❑ Making statement like “I want to die;” “I feel dead inside;” or “I want to kill myself” (actually talks about suicide)

Things a person might do:

- Give away prized possessions
- Possess or get a weapon such as a knife or gun
- Make a plan for committing suicide
- Show sudden mood swings (be very happy after being very depressed)
- Have attempted suicide before
- Make a will and put personal affairs in order
- Be self-destructive physically or in other ways
- Show a change in eating habits (eating too much or too little)
- Show belligerent, acting-out, or destructive behavior
- Neglect to take care of physical appearance
- Complain about physical problems (e.g. headaches)
- Get in trouble with the law
- Break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend
- write poems or make drawings about death
- Show a drop in grades or have frequent absences from school

Things that might have happened:

- Losing a relative or friend to death, divorce, or moving away
- Having family problems such as job loss or alcohol/drug abuse
- Losing money or prestige, having to move to a less desirable house or apartment
- Failing in a class or being held back a grade in school
- Having a boyfriend or girlfriend break off a relationship
- Finding out about a medical illness
- Experiencing parent's divorce

Things a person might feel:

- Depression, apathy, (don't care attitude).
- Irritability, restlessness, agitation, inability to relax
- Fatigue, low energy nearly every day
- Hostility, desire for revenge
- Indecision
- Lack of concentration
- a sense of being a failure or worthlessness
- Hopelessness, helplessness
- Dissatisfaction with everything and everyone
- A sense of being unloved, unwanted
- Extreme stress
- A lack of control
- A lack of support from any source

Things a person might say:

- ❑ Talk openly about committing suicide (“I think I’ll just end it all”)
- ❑ Ask questions about suicide (what would it be like, etc.)
- ❑ Talk about not being around in the future
- ❑ Talk about different ways to commit suicide
- ❑ Say things that don’t make sense or are confusing
- ❑ Say things that used to be fun, are not fun anymore
- ❑ Talk about revenge, “ getting even” with someone
- ❑ Say negative things about self, express self-blame, and guilt.

Determining the Degree of Risk by Using the SLAP TEST

- **S** How **specific** is the plan? Ask: “Do you have a plan?” if the child’s plan to commit suicide is specific and detailed, there is a greater risk for the child to carry out his/her plan.
- **L** How **lethal** is the means? Ask: “What means would you use?” Lethality is measured of how quickly death could get accomplished. The higher the degree of lethality, the greater the degree of risk.
- **A** How **available** is the proposed method? Ask: “Do you have the pills, gun, etc.?” If not, how would you get them? The more readily available the means, the higher the degree of risk.
- **P** What is the **proximity** to those who care? Are the people nearby who care about this person and could rescue him/her if necessary. The greater the distance the student is from those people who could rescue him/her in an emergency, the greater the degree of risk.

How to Help the Suicidal Child?

- 1. Listen.** A person in a mental crisis needs someone who will listen. Every effort should be made to understand the problems behind the statements. Do not assume that the child is simply trying to get attention. Do not tease the child about the seriousness of his/her stress. Do not preach. Do not impose guilt, because the child has enough self-created guilt already. Just listen and encourage him/her to talk to you. Listen and sympathize with what is said.
- 2. Take every complaint and expression of feeling seriously.** Do not dismiss or undervalue what he/she is saying. In some instances, the child may minimize the difficulty. Beneath an apparent calm, the child may have profound feelings.

How to Help a Suicidal Child cont...

- 3. Trust your own judgment.** If you believe someone is in danger of committing suicide, act on your beliefs. Do not let others mislead you into ignoring suicide signals.
- 4. Ask questions.** “Are you thinking about suicide?” Sometimes hearing these words can be a relief to a child. “How are you thinking about doing this/” “Do you have pills, guns, etc.?”
- 5. Do not act shocked or upset.** Get rid of the means of suicide, if possible. Buy time by taking the gun and pills away from the child. Remember, and acute suicidal state is temporary.

How to Help a Suicidal Child cont...

- 6. Do not be misled by the child's comment that he/she is past the emotional crisis.** Often the child will feel initial relief after talking about suicide, but the suicidal thoughts may return. At this point, follow up is crucial. Do not allow yourself to be sworn to secrecy.
- 7. Be affirmative and supportive.** Strong stable, guidepost are essential in the life of a distressed youth. Provide emotional strength by assuring the youngster that you will do everything possible to assist him/her. More importantly, show the child you care. Help him feel worthwhile and wanted again.

How to Help a Suicidal Child cont...

- 8. Do not debate or argue with the child.** Do not give false assurances that “everything will be all right.”
- 9. Do not leave the student alone.**
- 10. Obtain appropriate assistance and consultation.** Do not try to handle the problem alone. Follow the school system’s policy.

Tips for Parents

- ❑ **Know the warning signs!**
- ❑ **Do not be afraid to talk to your child.** Talking to your child/children about suicide will not put thoughts into their head. In fact, all available evidence indicates that talking to your child decreases the risk of suicide. The message is **“suicide is not an option, help is available.”**

Tips for Parents cont...

- ❑ **Suicide-proof your home.** Make the knives, pills, and above all, the firearms inaccessible.
- ❑ **Utilize school and community resources.** This can include school counselors, social workers, crisis intervention personnel, suicide prevention groups or hotlines, or private mental health professionals.

Tips for Parents cont...

- ❑ **Take immediate action.** If your child indicates he/she is contemplating suicide, or if your gut instinct tells you they might hurt themselves, get help. Do not leave your child alone. Even if he denies “meaning it” stay with him/her. Reassure your child. Seek professional help if necessary, drive your child to the hospital’s emergency room to ensure that she is in a safe environment until a psychiatric evaluation can be completed.
- ❑ **Listen to your child’s friends.** They may give hints that they are worried about their friend but be uncomfortable telling you directly. Be open. Ask questions.

Tips for Parents cont...

- ❑ Get to know the parents of your children's friends
- ❑ Communicate regularly with those parents
- ❑ Establish the four W rule:
 - Who
 - What
 - When and Where
- ❑ Talk regularly with your children about their choice of friends
- ❑ Support your child's positive involvement in a sport, art, or activity
- ❑ Act swiftly and certainly when something unacceptable happens
- ❑ Model adult behavior when you are in conflict with your teen.

Tips for Teachers

- ❑ **Know the warning signs!**
- ❑ **Know the school's responsibilities.** Schools have been held liable in the courts for not warning parents in a timely fashion or adequately supervising the suicidal student.
- ❑ **Encourage students to confide in you.** Let students know that you are there to help, that you care. Encourage them to come to you if they or someone they know is considering suicide.

Tips for Teachers cont...

- ❑ **Refer student immediately.** Do not “send” a student to the school counselor. Escort the child yourself to a member of the school’s crisis team and/or notify the principal, nurse, counselor and/or social worker.
- ❑ **Join the crisis team.** You have valuable information to contribute so that the school crisis team can make an accurate assessment of risk.
- ❑ **Advocate for the child.** Sometimes administrators may minimize risk factors and warning signs in a particular student. Advocate for the child until you are certain the child is safe.

Contacts and Numbers

- ❑ Weems Community Mental Health, Meridian, MS; (601) 483-4821
- ❑ Alliance Health Center, Meridian, MS
 - 1-601-483-6211 or 1-877-8533094
- ❑ Suicide Help Hotline
- ❑ Any Local Emergency Room
 - Rush Hospital, Meridian, MS; (601) 483-0011
 - Jeff Anderson Hospital, Meridian, MS; (601) 553-6000

**SUICIDE IS NOT
AN OPTION,
HELP IS AVAILABLE**