

## **How to Tell Whether a Person is Suicidal**

- Threatening to hurt or kill themselves
- Seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means to kill themselves
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide (including in schoolwork, creative writing, or artwork)
- Expressing hopelessness, no reason for living, or having no sense of purpose in life
- Having rage, anger, or seeking revenge
- Acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Having a dramatic change in mood (may even be a shift from being sad and depressed to happy, with a sense of resolve; often with no clear indication of how or why the shift in mood occurred)
- Sleeping all the time or being unable to sleep
- Being anxious or agitated
- Giving away prized possessions

## **How to Talk to a Young Person Who is Suicidal**

- Tell the person you are concerned about them and that you want to help.
- Express empathy for the young person and what they are going through.
- Respect the culture of the young person and respond in ways that demonstrate this respect. For example, consider issues such as eye contact, physical space, and language as well as the role and relationship you have with the young person.
- Clearly state thoughts of suicide are common and that help is available to discuss these thoughts, because this may instill a sense of hope.
- Tell the young person that thoughts of suicide do not have to be acted on.

## **How to Tell the Seriousness or Urgency of the Situation**

- Ask these three questions:
  - Have you decided how you would kill yourself?
  - Have you decided when you would do it?
  - Have you taken any steps to secure the things you would need to carry out your plan?

*\*\* Information taken from Mental Health First Aid for Youth*

## Assessment Interview

When working with a student who is displaying any signs of suicide ideology, it is important that you ask the following questions:

- Are you thinking about killing yourself?
- Tell me more.
- Do you have a plan?
- What is your plan?

It is extremely important that you ask the question, **“Are you thinking of killing yourself?”** It is not an easy question to ask, but asking this question might save a life. If a student is thinking of suicide, they will likely give you an honest answer. Most people who are suicidal want help.

**Avoid saying** things such as, “You aren’t thinking of killing yourself, are you?” The way this question is worded gives the impression that you are uncomfortable with the topic, and the person is likely to answer no.

If you ask someone if they are thinking of killing themselves and they are not, they will probably appreciate that you **cared enough to ask**. Either way, it is a risk worth taking.

There are always instances when a person might not answer truthfully. In a case such as this, you **did your best** by asking tough questions, providing him/her with resources, and letting him/her know you are concerned.

## **If a student reports that they are suicidal or self-injuring:**

- Teacher/counselor/other staff member should report this to the principal and counselor immediately.
- If the student needs medical attention, they should be referred to the nurse and/or emergency medical responders immediately.
- If the student is in immediate danger or possesses a weapon, 911 should be called.
- A counselor or other school official should ask the student if they are self-injuring and/or suicidal.
  - It is very important that you ask the question: “Are you thinking about killing yourself?”
  - If they are suicidal, ask them if they have a plan.
- NEVER leave a student who is suicidal alone.
- Parents should be contacted as soon as possible.
- If parents cannot be reached or if parents refuse to take the student to receive a mental health evaluation, police should be contacted.
  - Police will take the student into protective custody if they find that their safety is a concern.
- The [Emergency Notification Form with a Third Party Affidavit](#) should be filled out. The report should NEVER go into the cumulative folder, but a private file in the counselor’s office. A copy should also be sent to the district office to be kept in a private file.
- If a school official is concerned about the safety of a student during non-school hours, they should contact the family of the child and/or the police immediately. This cannot wait until the next day.
- Per your district protocols, a district-level administrator should be notified as soon as possible.