



Suwannee's HEART

*Helping Everyone Achieve
Resilience and Thrive*

It's a tough subject...but we have to talk about it! Why? Because it's too important to ignore. September is **National Suicide Prevention Month**. But then again, any month is the right time to learn about suicide prevention. By tackling this sensitive topic, we can prevent suicides and save lives. This happens through honest conversation and getting help for those who need it.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death worldwide for 15-29 year olds, and the 10th leading cause of death in the US for all ages. Suicidal thoughts can affect **anyone** regardless of age, background, or gender. Thoughts of suicide or suicidal behaviors are more common than deaths by suicide and are signs of extreme distress. Warning signs of suicidal thoughts and behaviors do not automatically mean that a person is going to attempt suicide. However, that doesn't mean these signs should be taken lightly. They should always be responded to in a serious and thoughtful manner. Warning signs of suicidal thoughts and behavior are not harmless and are not the result of trying to get attention. They should always be addressed and never ignored.

So, what are some common warning signs of suicidal thoughts and behavior?

- Talking about dying – any mention of dying, disappearing, going to sleep and not waking up, saying things like nobody will care or notice if I'm gone, talking about specific methods of self-harm
- Change in personality – sad, frequent crying, acting out in an angry or hostile way, withdrawn, irritable, anxious, tired, not caring about anything, losing interest in activities and hobbies, feeling disconnected, feelings of hopelessness
- Change in sleep patterns – insomnia, sleeping more than usual, nightmares, trouble waking up
- Losing control – acting erratically, harming self or others, engaging in risky behaviors

It is important to note that there are other warning signs in addition to the ones listed. Also, a person may not exhibit all of the possible warning signs but still be having suicidal thoughts.

How do I talk with my child if I'm concerned they may be having thoughts of suicide?

- Don't wait for your child to come to you. If your child appears to be struggling - ask what's wrong and offer your support. Then ask again... and again... You get it!
- Talk with your child about your concerns and ask directly about suicidal thoughts – this will not put the idea in your child's mind but will give them permission to honestly express how they are feeling
- Focus on concern for their wellbeing.
- Talk in a calm, non-blaming manner. Even though you may be panicky on the inside, don't let it show on the outside.
- Help them realize that you have empathy for what they are experiencing. You don't have to understand everything about how they are feeling to do this.

- Let them know how much you love and care for them, how important they are to you, and that they are not alone in their struggles.
- Reassure them that there is help for how they are feeling, and you are going to make sure they get it.

Preventing suicidal behavior is possible. Here are some things that parents and guardians can do to help protect their children:

- Communicate with your child about what's going on at school, with friends, what is important to them, what is going well and what is not going well in their lives on a daily basis.
- Interact with your kids in positive ways.
- Increase their involvement in positive family and community experiences.
- Monitor your child's whereabouts and communications –especially on social media- with the goal of keeping them safe.
- Get involved and know your child's friends.
- Communicate regularly with other parents in your community.
- Communicate regularly with your child's school to ensure optimal safety and care for your child in the school setting.

If you are concerned that your child may be having suicidal thoughts, do not wait! Reach out for help immediately. Talk with people at your child's school, like the school counselor, your child's teacher, a school administrator, or the school nurse who can provide support and guidance. School counselors and other school personnel can connect you with resources and make appropriate referrals for mental health services. Discuss concerns with your child's health care provider and ask for help finding mental health resources.

You know your child best. If you feel that something is not right or notice warning signs or the worsening of warning signs, take action and ask for help. If you think your child is in immediate danger, call 911 or a suicide prevention and intervention number. Here are three suicide hotline resources:

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-TALK \(8255\)](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml)

[Text GO to 741741](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml)

[TrevorLifeline - 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678-678](https://www.trevorproject.org/)

All of these resources are available 24/7/365, are free, and connect you directly to a trained crisis counselor. Below are some great resources for parents on suicide prevention and intervention.

- <https://www.ihs.gov/suicideprevention/howtotalk/>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/teen-suicide/art-20044308>
- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Ten-Things-Parents-Can-Do-to-Prevent-Suicide.aspx>

All of the faculty, staff, and administration in the Suwannee County School District care deeply for our students and have their physical, emotional, and mental well-being at heart. Don't hesitate to reach out to your child's school if you need assistance. You can also contact me and I will be happy to help or connect you with someone who can. Remember... we're in this together!

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