



Connecting with the Student's Parents/Guardians

After you have talked to an identified student the next step is to contact *and support* their parents/guardians. Parents/Guardians should be asked to come to the school and discuss the support they and their child need. Keep documentation of parental notification.

When talking to the student's family:

- Let them know you care and then share your concerns that this is very serious
- Support the student's family to take their child for an immediate evaluation by a mental health professional
- Help them to make sure that any lethal means, especially firearms and medications are not available

The family may be acute shock and denial about the child's intentions. Just remember that many people do not seek help – they do not know where to turn for help.

Help the student's family:

- With information
- Call their insurance company or family physician for a referral to a mental health professional while they are still in your office
- Understand the immediacy – if they hesitate ask them why and review this brochure with them

Some parents/guardians may have the following reactions:

- Acute personal shock and distress
- Totally paralyzed by anxiety, in denial
- Embarrassed
- Blamed, stigmatized
- Angry, belligerent and threatening

Parents may need support to:

- Overcome their emotional reactions
- Accept the seriousness of the situation
- Recognize the importance of finding professional help
- Understand the importance of removing firearms
- Establish some hope

If a Parent/Guardian hesitates they may be afraid, not un-concerned. Understanding this can help you engage them.

Sometimes the:

- Stigma of seeking mental health treatment may stop someone from seeking the help they need. It is important you understand that depression is a medical illness with physical causes, similar to diabetes or asthma.
- Belief that the youth may be experiencing 'normal' adolescence. Clinical depression is not a normal part of life at any time. Depression will cause ongoing problems in school, home, and with friends if not properly treated.
- Hope that the youth will just get over it.
- Depression, if left untreated, can result in suicide.

Resources

Preventing Youth Suicide Through Gatekeeper Training:
A Resource Book for Gatekeepers: <http://www.state.me.us/suicide/docs/guidelines.doc>

The Youth Suicide Prevention School-Based Guide:
<http://theguide.fmhi.usf.edu>

National Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifelines
1-800-273-TALK and 1-800-SUICIDE

Local Crisis Lines

Scranton Counseling Center: (570) 348-6100
Northwestern Human Services: (570) 282-1732
Dial 911 for immediate assistance

Mental Health Information and Advocacy



(570) 342-7762
www.theadvocacyalliance.org

National Alliance for Mental Illness
Scranton Area Chapter
(570)342-1047
www.namipascranton.org

Lackawanna-Susquehanna Counties
Mental Health/Mental Retardation Program
(570) 346-5741
www.lswmhm.org

Pennsylvania Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative
www.payspi.org

This information is provided as a complement to the Lackawanna County Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention and Early Intervention Grant Program.

Your School And Youth Suicide



Recognition and Intervention Guide

For
Teachers
And
Other
School
Staff



School Staff as Natural Gatekeepers

School's concern and responsibility lay with the welfare of students and school staff have the opportunity to intervene when students are in danger of suicide. Teachers and other school staff do not need to be mental health professionals to help a student in crisis, but as adults whose jobs put them in daily contact with students, all school staff are natural gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are individuals who by the nature of their job, or in their personal relationships or friendships, are in a position to observe high risk behaviors and take action when necessary.

A Gatekeeper refers to someone who:

- Knows basic information about suicide.
- Believes that suicide can be prevented.
- Learns basic suicide intervention skills.
- Has the confidence to respond.
- Can assist in the aftermath of a suicide.

School suicide prevention programs should also include training for students on depression and warning signs of suicide. Many suicidal children do not self-refer, but they do show warning signs to friends, peers, or trusted adults. If untrained, adolescents mistakenly will try to support a suicidal friend by themselves instead of supporting the friend and telling an adult. By learning some information on the warning signs of depression and suicide and basic intervention skills, students and staff will know how to identify a student who is at risk and intervene in an appropriate way.

Does Depression Cause Suicide?

Not all students who suffer from depression think about suicide, but there is a strong correlation between depression and suicide. Depression is a serious medical condition that affects how students think, feel, and act. It shapes how students handle stress, enjoy life, relate to one another, and are able to learn. Students cannot 'snap out of it' any more than they could snap out of diabetes.

Does Substance Use Influence Suicide?

Alcohol is a depressant. Many young adults attempt to self-medicate or numb the feelings of depression by drinking or using drugs, which only increases the risk of suicide by increasing depression, impairing judgment, and increasing impulsivity. Research has shown a strong link between depression, substance use and suicide.

How Do You Know if it is a Depressive Disorder or Just a Student Being Moody?

Pay attention to the following warning signs and symptoms of a student's depression.

Feeling:

- Sad, empty and hopeless for no reason, and these feelings last more than 2 weeks.
- Very irritable or angry most of the time
- Overreacting to things
- Worthless or guilty often
- Anxious or worried often
- Unable to get over a loss or death of someone important
- Constantly concerned about physical problems or physical appearance
- Frightened that his or her mind either is controlled or is out of control
- Fatigued
- Rarely appears happy

Changes:

- Showing declining performance in school
- Losing interest in things once enjoyed
- Appearing agitated or moody
- Experiencing unexplained changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Avoiding friends and wanting to be alone all the time
- Daydreaming too much and not completing tasks
- Feeling life is too hard to handle
- Hearing voices that cannot be explained

Experiences:

- Poor concentration and is unable to think straight or make up his or her mind
- An inability to sit still or focus attention
- Worry about being harmed, hurting others, or doing something "bad"
- A need to wash, clean things, or perform certain routines hundreds of times a day, in order to avoid an unsubstantiated danger
- Racing thoughts that are almost too fast to follow
- Experiencing suicidal thoughts



Connecting with the Student

All schools should have and all school staff should know their school's procedures for

response to a student who staff feel is at risk for suicide. If you have a student identified you can use the intervention information below to help him or her. Never send the student alone to the guidance office, etc., walk them there and do not leave them alone.

- Stay calm.
- Speak directly to them in a clear and concerned voice. Tell them what has been observed and don't be hesitant to voice your concerns without any blaming. Ex. "I am really concerned about your isolating yourself lately."
- Inquire about their feelings. Don't rush or over-react.
- Don't try to talk them out of their feelings, don't preach or minimize their situation. Let them know that you care. "I really care and see you are getting overwhelmed. I would not want you to make any bad decisions."
- Acknowledge what you are hearing and let them know you are taking their concerns seriously. Say directly, "I want to help." Don't give advice. Don't ask "Why?" Don't act shocked.
- Ask them directly if they are thinking of harming themselves. Example: "Sometimes, when kids are feeling overwhelmed they may think of harming themselves. Are you having any thoughts of hurting yourself?" You will not make a person suicidal by asking these questions. Most likely, they will feel relieved you asked. Suicidal students are in pain and they want their pain to end. Often asking questions allows a suicidal person to let off steam and take steps toward accepting help. Without intervention, suicide may be seen as the only solution to solving the problems.
- Never promise confidentiality. Tell them there is no confidentiality in such a serious issue, but support them and listen to their concerns about telling someone.
- Offer help and hope that alternatives are available. Tell him/her you are staying with them until someone from the school gets their parents/guardians. Tell them you will help their parents understand that they need help and that they are not in this alone.