

# Parent Tips for Keeping your Student Safe

## WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUTH SUICIDE?

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### Definitions:

- **Suicide Risk Factors:** Certain characteristics that are associated with increased suicide risk.
- **Warning Signs:** A trait, attribute, or characteristic of the individual that is a 'sign' of suicidal thinking. Observable behaviors that signal possible suicidal thinking.
- **Resiliency Factors:** Things that help people cope with stress. The presence of resiliency factors can lessen the potential of risk factors to lead to suicidal ideation and behaviors.

### Denver Public Schools Data from 2011-12 students grades 6 to 12 (HKCS):

- 25% of students report having feelings of depression in the past year
- 13% of students seriously considered suicide in the past year
- 8% attempted suicide in the past year

It is important to remember the signs and risk factors listed are generalities. Not all students who contemplate suicide will exhibit these symptoms and not all students who exhibit these behaviors are suicidal. Students from all types of families can become suicidal. Males are at higher risk of dying by suicide although females attempt more often than males.

### *Suicide Risk Factors:*

- Loss of significant other
- Social or academic problems at school
- Family or personal stress
- Substance abuse (drugs and alcohol)
- Depression and mental health issues
- Previous suicide or attempt by peer or family member
- Access to weapons/means of harming self
- Difficulties regarding sexual orientation

### *Possible Warning Signs:*

- Significant changes in behavior, appearance, grades, eating or sleeping habits, or withdrawing from friends.
- Making suicidal threats – either direct “I want to die” or indirect “things would be better if I weren’t here”.
- Suicidal notes and plans
- Prior suicidal behavior
- Appears sad or hopeless
- Appears angry and irritable
- Reckless behavior
- Self-inflicted injuries

## The Role of the School in Suicide Prevention

Children spend a substantial part of their day in school under the supervision of school personnel. Mental Health providers, which may include a school psychologist, social worker, school counselor and/or nurse who are trained to intervene when a student is identified at risk for suicide are available at school. These individuals conduct a suicide risk assessment, warn/inform parents, provide information about community services and, with your request, provide follow up counseling and support at school.

Youth who feel suicidal are not likely to seek help directly; however, parents, school staff, and peers can recognize the warning signs and take immediate action to keep the youth safe.

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### WHAT CAN I DO TO KEEP MY CHILD SAFE?

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**ASK:** Talking about suicide does not make a student suicidal. Asking if someone is having suicidal thoughts gives him/her permission to talk about it. Asking sends the message that you are concerned and want to help.

**TAKE SIGNS SERIOUSLY:** Studies have found that more than 75% of people who die by suicide showed some of the warning signs in the weeks or months prior to their death.

**GET HELP:** If you have concerns that your child is suicidal, seek immediate help from a mental health provider. Suicidal students need to be evaluated by an expert in assessing risk. Parents can contact school psychologists, social workers, counselors, or nurses for support. Parents may also want to consult with their insurance company to get a list of mental health providers covered by their policy. If there is immediate need for help you may take your child to the nearest emergency room or call 911.

**LIMIT ACCESS:** To weapons, medication, sharp objects, and materials that could be used for hanging oneself.

**DO NOT LEAVE YOUR CHILD ALONE:** Increase adult supervision. It is important that parents surround themselves with a team of supportive friends or family members who can stop in and help as needed.

**REASSURE YOUR CHILD THAT LIFE CAN GET BETTER:** Many suicidal people have lost all hope that life can improve. They may have difficulty problem solving even simple issues. Remind your child that no matter how bad things are, the problem can be worked out. Offer your help.

**LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGEMENT:** Avoid making statements such as “I know what it’s like” or “I understand”. Instead make statements such as “Help me understand what life is like for you right now”.

#### ***Resiliency Factors:***

- Family support and cohesion, including good communication
- Peer support and close social networks
- Being involved in school and community
- Cultural or religious beliefs that discourage suicide and promote healthy living
- Adaptive coping and problem-solving skills, including conflict-resolution
- General life satisfaction, good self-esteem, sense of purpose
- Easy access to effective medical and mental health resources

#### ***Resources:***

- Suicide Prevention 24 hour hotline English and Spanish 800-7273 8255
- Trevor Project 24 hotline for LGBTQ students 866-488-7386