

APPENDIX 2

Suicide Prevention

Here are some warning signs to look for when a child has suicidal thinking:

- Isolation and withdrawing from social contact, especially if it's sudden
- Being self-destructive or engaging in risk-taking behaviors
- Looking for and/or acquiring means to commit suicide, such as getting a gun or a lot of medication
- Extreme mood swings
- Frequently talking about death or dying
- Saying things like, "I wish I were dead," or, "I wish I had never been born."
- Giving away possessions for no particular reason
- Expressing hopelessness or a feeling of being trapped with no way out
- Changes in sleeping, eating, or other patterns
- Making a point to say goodbye to people
- Beginning to use alcohol and/or drugs, or using them more frequently
- Changing obvious characteristics of their personality
- Becoming extremely agitated, upset, depressed, and/or anxious

The number one suicide method used by adolescent girls is pills. Pay close attention to what access they have to pills and other possible methods.

Adolescent boys typically look for more violent methods. Once again, pay attention to resources available to them, especially if the child is facing despair.

What to do if a kid is having suicidal thoughts:

Stay calm.

This is easy to say but very hard to do because you care about the kids in your life so much.

I get it. If a kid tells us they're thinking of killing themselves, our knee jerk response, especially as parents, is to immediately start explaining to them why they shouldn't feel that way. You may make statements such as:

"You have so much to live for."

"Your life is good and you have so many people that love you."

"You have hopes and dreams."

Although it seems like this would help, it doesn't. Remember, a brain in despair cannot easily process logically. **When we approach an emotionally activated teen from a place of logic, we unintentionally reinforce their negative feelings.**

For example, it reinforces beliefs like:

"I am broken."

"There is something wrong with me."

"I shouldn't feel this way, but I do."

"The world is better off without me."

"There is no fixing it."

We've unintentionally added feelings of guilt and shame to the despair they are already facing.

Resist the urge to convince them with logic. Instead, simply meet them exactly where they are at that moment.

The best things to do and say are:

- Mirror and validate their emotions.
- Offer empathy.
- Share and express your care and love for them.
- Use attachment language such as “You are lovable” and “You can trust me to be there for you.”
- Thank them for being honest with you.
- Offer to get help together.

Get help.

When a teenager is facing suicidal thoughts, do not navigate it alone.

For immediate help, contact the *National Suicide Prevention Hotline* by calling 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) or visiting [SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](https://www.SuicidePreventionLifeline.org). These professionals are trained to help you and your child de-escalate from a crisis moment to a place of safety and sustainability.

For ongoing help, seek out a mental health professional, like a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, who can help both you and your child in the long term.