

Addressing Worrisome Behaviors

As parents, your role in suicide prevention is crucial. You know your child's moods and behaviors better than anyone else. If certain behaviors concern you, it's important to take these worries seriously. Here are guidelines to follow when addressing worrisome behaviors with your child:

- **Don't worry about overreacting.** Sit with your child and let him or her know about your concerns. ("You said something that worries me." or "You don't seem to be yourself lately.")
- **Be specific about your concerns.** ("I've noticed you aren't spending as much time with your friends and you seem annoyed when they call you." or "You spend hours doing your homework, but every time I check on you, you're just staring into space." or "Your teacher called and said you're failing English because you're late to class almost every day.")
- **Expect your child to discount your concerns.** ("All the kids are having trouble getting homework finished." or "My friends are annoying." or "That teacher fails everybody.") Explain that you're not concerned about everybody in the class. You are concerned about your child. Be prepared to offer more than one example; the more evidence you have, the harder it will be for your child to minimize your examples.
- **If your child says anything that even hints at thoughts of suicide, ask about it.** For example, statements like "Sometimes I'm not sure life is worth living." or "I just can't take it much more." *must* be explored further! *You cannot plant the idea of suicide in your child's mind by asking about it!* In asking about thoughts of suicide, you open up the lines of communication as well as introduce the idea of help-seeking behavior by asking to hear more about your child's distressing thoughts.
- **Act immediately if you have concerns about suicide.** Get your child to a mental health professional as soon as possible for an evaluation. There are several ways to do this. Refer to the list of local resources you received from the school.
- **Whatever resource you choose, indicate the urgency of the situation.** Make sure to use the phrase "at risk for suicide." ("I'm concerned that my son may be at risk for suicide and I'd like to schedule an evaluation as soon as possible.") Although the evaluation might determine that your child is not at immediate risk for suicide, this is an assessment you'd like to have made quickly, and it is a decision that is best left to a trained mental health professional.