

## Suicide Threat – What to Do and Say

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Where possible, it is strongly recommended that school staff have the underlying concepts and procedures embodied in these guidelines explained to them by a psychologist or a professionally trained counselor. However, if someone wants to talk to you about their feelings of depression or about suicide, or if it is suspected that someone may be suicidal or depressed, the following general guidelines will help, even if you have not had the formal counsellor training.

- Always treat talk about suicide seriously, don't believe that "it's just attention seeking". Do not assume your child/student would not commit suicide.
- Do not swear to keep it a secret; suicide information is one of the secrets you cannot keep. It's not worth the risk. You must report a child who is in danger of harming him/herself. You may lose the confidence of the student but you may save a life.
- Do not give quick advice or say that "everything will be alright".
- Be an active listener. Do a lot of listening, little talking. Let the person know you are hearing what they are saying. Ask what is going on and do not act shocked at what the students tells you.
- Remember that it is okay to ask the person if they have been thinking about suicide. It won't give them an idea that they have not been thinking about.
- Help the person explore his or her own feelings. Do not add to his/her possible guilt by saying things such as "think how your friends and family will feel."
- Don't "discount" their feelings or crisis by making comments such as "things aren't that bad," or "that's not true, you have lots of friends."
- Show and describe your concern and caring to the person.
- Don't be afraid to talk openly about the suicidal thoughts. Try to determine whether or not the person has a plan or has attempted suicide.
- Do not debate whether or not suicide is wrong or right. To do so may add to guilt or feelings of worthlessness.
- If the risk seems high or immediate, do not leave the person alone or send on his/her own to an agency or other resource person. You can call for assistance.
- You may often be a help just by being there for the person to talk to. Many suicidal crisis are immediate and short term. By talking and listening, you may swing the ambivalent person from feelings of "self-death" to self-life".

- Remember. Even though the risk of suicide may be part for the individual, the person may continue to need assistance – yours as well as that of a professional.

When you suspect that a student may be suicidal, you may become nervous and anxious. This is a normal feeling. It may help if you remember the following:

1. Believe or trust your suspicions that the student may be self-destructive.
2. Communicate your concern for the well-being of the student. Be an active listener and show your support.
3. Be direct. Talk openly and freely and ask direct questions about the student's intentions. Try to determine if the student has a plan for suicide (how, where, when). The more detailed the plan, the greater the risk.
4. Get professional help. Encourage the student to seek help from a school counsellor, minister or someone who can help solve their problems. If the student resists you may have to get the necessary help for them.
5. Remove guns, lethal medication, alcohol, etc., from the student's access.