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Suicide-Proof Your Teen (as Much as You Can)

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Mar 1st 2011 11:00AM

Filed under: [Opinions](#)

Okay, here's the terrible news: A [2009 study](#) of New York City public high school students found one in 10 had attempted suicide, and 3.4 percent got so far as to require medical attention. I wish I could say I'm shocked by this, but I know two teens from wonderful families who made a recent [suicide](#) attempt.

One is no longer with us.

So the issue becomes: What should we parents be doing about this? Three things:

The first is to sort of "suicide proof" our homes, says Alan Ross, executive director of [The Samaritans of New York](#), a suicide prevention center. This may seem drastic, but it makes sense. Just like we babyproof when our young kids are in danger of accidents, we can protect our older kids by making it a lot harder for them to harm themselves. That means locking up medicine, toxic liquids like drain cleaners, and, especially, guns. Don't make it easy to die.

Then, says Ross, "Be attentive." By this he means to be on the lookout for any signs of a change in our kids. Everyone has good days and bad ones, of course. But when the bad days last for two weeks -- or when we can see that there has been a change in our child's eating, dressing, or sleeping habits, or something else new, like constant headaches, it is time to be on the alert.

Being alert means that, even if you haven't done it until now, it is time to have "The Talk" with our kids. No, not the talk about sex. The one about suicide.

It's easiest to open this conversation by comparing mental health to physical health. So you can start by pointing out that being sick is normal. When someone gets a cold or a flu or even pneumonia, they know to get some help. For a cold, they take a cough drop. For pneumonia, they'd see a specialist.

Similarly, tell your kid you can have the mental equivalent of a cold, flu or pneumonia. Sometimes when you feel really bad, you might even think of suicide. (Yes, actually say that word out loud. Break the taboo!)

Tell your children that when they feel bad, mood-wise, they can always ask for help from you, a teacher or some other trusted adult. Throw in the fact that, "If you have a friend who feels this way," your child should inform an adult, too. Even if your kid promised not to. Better a broken secret than a dead friend.

Once you let your kids know that they can reach out for help, tell them the truth: Seeking help is a sign of intelligence and strength. It's the opposite of weakness.

Ignoring suicide doesn't make it go away. Take action.

CLICK [HERE](#) FOR MORE INFORMATION. IF YOU OR YOUR CHILD NEEDS TO TALK TO SOMEONE, CALL, TOLL-FREE, 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or 1-800-SUICIDE.

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