



The Talk No One Wants to Have...or Thinks They Will Ever Need to Have

Suicide.

There – I said it. No one wants to hear it or talk about it, but the reality is, it still happens. We live in a world that is all about “instant gratification” and as such – maybe death to this world has lost its sense of permanency and possibly feels like the quick-fix answer for young people when they experience a broken heart or their life is in utter turmoil.

Most parents know when they have kids that at some point they’ll have “the talk.” The one about the birds and the bees that incites awkwardness. Or some parents will leave a book with confusing anatomical drawings in our rooms. (Thanks Mom.) Even still, there are some parents who just hope their kids “figure it out.”

We talk to our kids about sex – or at least we make sure they get a class on it in school - but do any parents consider talking to their kids about suicide in the same way? How many parents are willing to let their kids “figure out” suicide?

Neither one of these topics are comfortable – and just like no one wants to think about their 13-year-old having sex one day (unless it is in a marital relationship filled with love when they are 30 years old) no parent ever wants to entertain the thought that their child might struggle so deeply that one day they would contemplate ending their life as an escape from their emotional pain.

Why should I talk to my kids about suicide?

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. Around 45,000 people die every year by suicide. Comparatively, in 2017 there were around 17,200 reported homicides in the United States. That number of suicides is over 2.5x greater than the amount of homicides. Let that sink in...

The CDC reports that about 17%, or about one out of every 6 high-school students in 2017 in the United States *seriously considered attempting suicide.* About 13% of high school students made a suicide plan. And about 7% of high school students reported attempting suicide.

The reason you should talk to your kids about suicide is because they’ve already thought about it.

What should I say?

If you suspect they’re suicidal: Be compassionate. Try to understand the situation. Empathize. Ask directly, “Have you had any thoughts of killing yourself?” If the answer is yes, ask if they have

made a plan, how they would do it or if they're already committed to the idea. If they do have a plan or are committed, call 911, your local emergency room or call the Suicide Prevention lifeline at 800-273-8255. This is **NOT** a time to worry about how your peers will view you as a parent. Your child NEEDS HELP. Their need for help should **ALWAYS** trump what others think about them or about you!

If they've thought about suicide, but don't directly have plan, get them to a therapist as soon as possible to start therapy. Let them know they can talk to you if they're feeling suicidal. Give them access to the Suicide prevention lifeline – 800-273-8255. Hug them and tell them you love them. Create a word or phrase that you share that means – “I'm struggling, and I don't know what to do.” The phrase you come up with together may be something like, “Winter is a difficult season”. Give them permission to use this phrase to communicate that they are in a dark place. It might be easier for them to tell you your “phrase” than it is for them to articulate that they are contemplating suicide.

DO NOT: marginalize their problems : “You'll get over this soon because it's not a big deal”.

DO NOT: compare them to others : “I was never suicidal and my problems were even worse!”

A good rule of thumb when talking to someone who is feeling suicidal is that:

you should be doing the listening and they should be doing the talking.

If someone *they* know has committed or attempted suicide: Be compassionate. Try to understand the situation. Empathize. If you suspect it, ask if they are also feeling suicidal. Some research suggests that those who experience a friend or peer who commits suicide, will have an increased likelihood for a future suicide attempt.

DO NOT: marginalize the relationship: “Did you even know him that well?”

DO NOT: cast judgment or shame on the person who took their life.

You might be asking yourself, “If I talk to my kids about suicide, won't I just be putting that idea in their head?”

No. That myth has been busted. Talking about suicide beforehand actually lessens the likelihood of your child attempting or committing suicide.

Don't forget, in these situations... **you should be doing more listening and less talking.**

If you or someone you know is at risk of suicide please call the U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255, text TALK to 741741 or go to [SpeakingOfSuicide.com/resources](https://www.speakingofsuicide.com/resources) for more additional resources.