

Parent Handouts

When Your Child Expresses Suicidal Thoughts or Behavior

This paper is designed to support you with the information you need as you and your child work together toward wellness.

You are not alone. It is not uncommon for adolescents to consider suicide as a possible solution to their difficulties. The reasons for this are many and varied. What is most important, for you and your child, is knowing there is help available. With support, recovery is possible.

If you think that your child may be contemplating suicide, you can best help him/her by paying attention, listening, and acknowledging what they are saying or doing. Remain calm and get them to the help they need. It is uncommon for someone in their emotional state to resist seeking help. There can be many reasons for this: stigmatization, fear of being restrained or locked up, etc. They may plead that you do nothing. They are in crisis and may be incapable of making a rational decision. They may say they are fine and they did not mean what they said or did. Or they may be feeling their situation is hopeless and nothing can help. Whatever may be occurring for them, they will look to you for support. Assure them that help is available.

This is a life and death situation. Accepting any reason for not getting help is too dangerous. Though you and/or your child may fear what will result from acknowledging these suicidal thoughts or actions, the risk of not seeking help is too great.

Attached are Warning Signs and Risk Factors that a suicidal person may be experiencing. This is included to help you identify specific behaviors you may have been noticing. Though someone has expressed suicidal ideation, no one person will show all these behaviors. They may not show any of the specific behaviors listed; even so, it is important for them to seek help.

Seeking Assistance:

There are differing situations where your child's distress may become apparent. Your child may reveal their suicidal thoughts to you, a friend, or a trusted adult. Whoever becomes aware of your child's distress must immediately seek assistance. In seeking assistance, your child's safety is the first consideration. The child should never be left alone during the crisis. If your child has a physician or therapist, call to alert them of the

situation. Also, the Stanislaus County Suicide and Crisis hotline can be called at 800-273-TALK (see “Mental Health Resources” for additional hotlines and information).