

Information for the PEN/HOPE Event
October 29th, 2014

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If you notice warning signs in your adolescent (friend, spouse, family member, etc) here are some steps you can take:

1. Talk directly to your child about your concerns about them. Ask how they are doing and really allow them to answer. Offer them hugs. Ask more than once. Have tea with them. Truly listen to how your child is feeling. Ask open ended questions such as “Tell me more about what life is like for you right now?”, “How can I best support you right now?” Recognize that they might not open up immediately but patiently allow them to talk when ready. Don’t be afraid that asking about depression or suicide will cause your teenager to start thinking about these things—if they already are, your willingness to talk about it will be relieving and model for them that you can talk about difficult things.
2. Pay attention to signs of depression and take them seriously. Studies have shown that more than 75% of people who die from suicide showed some of the warning signs in the weeks or months prior to their death. Perk your ears to phrases like “I just wish it all would end”, “I can’t go on like this.” “I can’t take it anymore.” Ask your child what he/she means. Often, adolescents use phrases like this to make sure us thick-headed adults understand what it is like to be them. Teenagers talk in extremes. But, it is important to make sure that is all it is for your child. Just ask a couple of follow up questions and find out what he/she meant.
 - a. For those of you with younger children (under 7th grade), the research recommends that you use phrases like “Have you ever had sadness that just felt too big” and teach them early how to talk about emotions and how to express their feelings to a trusted adult.
3. Listen to your gut! Untreated depression is the leading cause of suicide so get it checked out! If your child was describing that his left arm was numb, his chest hurt, and he was having trouble breathing you would take him immediately to a doctor with an expertise just to make sure he wasn’t having a hard attack. Look at symptoms of depression in the same way—don’t expect yourself to do the diagnosis; connect your teenager with a mental health professional such as a therapist, school counselor, psychiatrist, pediatrician, faith based advisor (ask crowd for other suggestions here or reference HOPE resource list) and ask them to assess your student for depression.
 - a. Reference “Suggestions on how to choose a community based therapist”.
 - b. Give your teenager as much control as possible over the process.
 - i. “Would you prefer to talk with a male or female?”
 - ii. Consider giving the option of several initial appointments and allow your student to pick the person he/she feels is the best match.

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- c. Things to expect—may meet with both you and the student, or each individually. May take family history, ask about developmental milestones, etc.
4. If you are concerned that your child is having suicidal thoughts, get immediate help from a Mental Health Practitioner. It is essential that a trained professional helps to assess the level of suicide risk and sets up a treatment plan with you and your child.
 - a. Parents/guardians can contact School Prevention/Interventionists, Social Workers, Counselors, and Psychologists for help with this process and a list of resources.
 - b. Second Wind Fund of Boulder County offers at least 8 sessions at no cost for youth who are at risk and are underinsured (i.e., have no insurance, cannot afford insurance co-pays, etc). You can speak with a school professional like those listed above for help getting connected with Second Wind.
 - c. It is advisable for parents to contact their health insurance company to get a list of what hospitals and mental health practitioners are covered by their insurance plan. For families who have Medicaid call Mental Health Partners, go to the nearest emergency room, or call 911. For those who have private insurance contact Centennial Peaks Hospital or a Hospital Emergency room. Each of these entities has someone available 24/7—you can call them if you have even a glimmer of worry and want to bounce it off someone else.
 - d. Sometimes it will be determined that a person needs to be hospitalized which is based on the assessment by the Mental Health practitioner and includes risk factors and protective factors.
5. If there is any concern about thoughts of suicide or self-harm, you can do all you can to limit your child's access to weapons such as guns, prescription drugs, medications, sharp objects and other means. This often helps adolescents feel that the adults are helping to keep them safe. Though your teenager might object out loud at first, we often hear that adolescents appreciated this action immensely.
6. Supervise your adolescent closely and get a group of caring family members or friends to provide support to your child and to you in this time.
7. Give your adolescent hope that life can get better. Reassure her/him that life can improve and help with problem solving and helping her/him to access solutions.
8. Be gentle with yourself. Having a child experiencing some depression symptoms can feel like uncharted waters and can be stressful to navigate. You are being an incredible parent just to be here tonight and to learn about what to look for. Often, open conversations with parents can be just the thing to help a student feel reassured when dealing with difficult thoughts and emotions. So good job!