

LANNY:

You may not know... but suicide is the third leading cause of death among adolescents...

MAUREEN:

...and the second leading cause of death among college aged youth.

LANNY:

Kids generally are not in crisis.

However... some small percentage of kids may be in this type of crisis.

MAUREEN:

...and the question is... what can YOU... as a parent, do?

LANNY:

Hello... I'm Lanny Berman...

MAUREEN:

...and I'm Maureen Underwood.

LANNY:

The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide wants to address some of your questions about teen suicide... that's why Maureen and I are here.

We'll be answering questions from parents just like you.

We've found that information and education are essential components of youth suicide prevention.

MAUREEN:

We'll clarify some of the misinformation about suicide and provide practical, helpful suggestions... that you can use with your kids and their friends.

Joining us today is a group of concerned parents...

that you can use with your kids and their friends.

Joining us today is a group of concerned parents... who'll be asking us some questions about teen suicide.

Jill is our first parent.

Hi Jill... how can we help you?

JILL:

Hi Maureen... ..hi Lanny...

JILL (continues):

I hear what you're saying about suicide being the 3rd leading cause of death for kids.

But, my son is basically a good kid with normal teenage problems.

Are you telling me I need to start worrying that he might kill himself?

MAUREEN:

Obviously... not every child is at risk for suicide.

But we've known too many parents who felt the way you do... ...that their kids were just having normal teenage problems... and missed what they later realized were 'warning signs' of suicide.

Suicide can happen... it's a real danger for adolescents.

So educate yourself about the things that may signal your child could be at risk.

LANNY:

Here's a good way to organize your thinking about youth suicide's warning signs...

FACTS... ..F...A...C...T...S... FACTS.

F stands for feelings.

Feelings of hopelessness... anger... worthlessness... emptiness... anxiousness... or excessive worry...
...these are examples of feelings that should really concern us.

A indicates actions... ...including things like trying to get access to a gun or pills... ...risky or dangerous behaviors... ...increasing drug or alcohol use... ...and, getting into fights.

C indicates changes in moods, attitudes or behaviors.

For example... kids who were active may become withdrawn... ...quit athletic teams... ...stop paying attention to personal appearance... ...daydream more... ...or start to cut class.

It would be impossible to list all the potential behaviors you might see... so concentrating on simply recognizing changes in your child's behaviors is the real key.

MAUREEN:

Some kids actually make "Threats"... ...which are expressed by the letter "T".

These can be specific verbal statements... ...like "I'm tired of living"... ...or "I'm thinking of killing myself"... ...or worrisome innuendos in text messages... blogs... or school assignments.

Whether specific or vague... what these threats tell us... is that the child is thinking about death or suicide... ...and that's what should concern you.

Finally... "S" refers to situations that may serve as triggers for a suicide or suicide attempt.

These are situations where your child's coping skills are really challenged... and he or she may not see a viable solution.

LANNY:

So... if you notice anything that makes you concerned... ask your child specifically and directly.

If you hear anything that makes you uneasy... get a consultation... from a mental health professional.

It's the same thing you would do if you were worried that your child had a physical problem... ...this is really no different.

We have another question... this time from Jerry...

LANNY:

...this is really no different.

We have another question... this time from Jerry...

JERRY:

Lanny... I have a question for you....

Did you say I should talk to my son about suicide?

Look... I'm afraid if I bring up suicide... it's gonna plant the idea in his head!

Isn't it better if I don't say any thing at all?

LANNY:

Well, no....

Unfortunately... a lot of people get confused by this.

Just like you would want to talk about drug or alcohol use with your son... ...it's really important to address the issues of suicide.

It's a myth that talking about suicide can plant the idea in someone's mind.

Kids hear about suicide from a variety of sources... this is nothing new to them.

And in fact... talking about it can be a real relief.

JERRY:

Great... thanks for your help!

LANNY:

Who do we have next?

JUAN:

Hi Lanny & Maureen... I'm Juan.

My question is for Maureen.

Are suicidal thoughts a normal part of being a teenager?

MAUREEN:

That's an interesting question, Juan.

Many teens will acknowledge that they've had a suicidal thought at one time or another.

Thinking that life isn't worth living, though... or that you'd rather be dead is disturbing... especially in adolescence... ...and if you get any hint that your child may be having these thoughts... ...it's essential that you ask them.

For many kids... thoughts about dying remain just that... simply thoughts.

In a small percentage of kids, however... these thoughts may be accompanied by a plan.

That's an extremely dangerous sign that requires immediate intervention.

And again... that's why it's so important to ask your child about suicide... if you have even the slightest reason for concern.

I hope that answers your question, Juan.

I believe Karen is next?

MAUREEN:

I hope that answers your question, Juan.

I believe Karen is next?

KAREN:

Yes... Hi Maureen.

A classmate of my son recently did take his own life.

MAUREEN:

I'm sorry to hear about that...

KAREN:

Thank you.

He and my son were on the same soccer team.

I'm worried about my son but I don't know what to say or do.

MAUREEN:

What you're describing is an example of what's called 'exposure'.

That's the risk that comes from being exposed to the death of a peer or even a role model.

First thing you should do... is talk to your son about his classmate's death.

KAREN:

Oh, that's tough.

I wouldn't even know how to start.

MAUREEN:

Try this...

Open the door of conversation by telling him how you feel about his classmate's death.... ...then ask him how he feels.

Don't be surprised if he tells you he doesn't know... or has no reaction at all.

It can be hard for teens... even for grow-ups... to find words to adequately capture the feelings of grief.

Remind your son that there is always an alternative to suicide.

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Encourage him to talk to you if he gets worried about his own thoughts or feelings... ..or if he's concerned about one of his friends.

And find ways to revisit this conversation... because feelings about a friend's suicide may take a while to settle and don't go away quickly.

LANNY:

Good advice, Maureen.

LANNY:

Good advice, Maureen.

Who do we have next?

GEORGE:

Hey Lanny, George here..... ..my daughter Samantha's school counselor suggested I take her to get some mental health counseling.

Apparently she made some comment about life being too hard or complicated or something like that.

I'm not even sure exactly what she said.

Isn't the counselor overreacting?

LANNY:

Usually school counselors base these kinds of referrals on their professional experience.

This recommendation was most likely developed in response to concerns from Samantha's teachers... or a conversation the counselor had with Samantha herself.

The first thing I recommend you do is talk to the counselor to find out why she's concerned.

Try not to be defensive... ..remember... the school is obviously concerned that something you may not be aware of is going on with Samantha... ..and they think she needs some professional help.

It's important for you to understand why the counselor is making this referral... ..because you'll need this information when you speak with a mental health professional.

Most mental health agencies will have releases you can sign... that give them permission to talk with the school directly.

The school's input can be critical to make sure that Samantha gets the services she needs.

>MICHELLE:

Lanny & Maureen?

I'm Michelle and my son has a drinking problem and is depressed.

His doctor prescribed medication for him.

Why would you give drugs to someone who has a problem with an addiction?

LANNY:

I can understand your concern, Michelle...

...but a prescribed antidepressant medication... which I assume is what your doctor recommended?.....

MICHELLE:

Yes you're right ... that's what it is.

LANNY:

Well that's really different from street drugs or alcohol.

Prescribed medications are not designed to create the feeling of being 'high'.

They're designed to help address your son's symptoms of depression and help him function normally.

MICHELLE:

Look... I know you're the experts... ...but I read that antidepressant medication can cause kids to become suicidal.

Why in the world would my son's doctor prescribe it for him?

LANNY:

That's a great question Michelle... because it's been in the press a lot lately.

You're right... there's some research that shows... a small percentage of youth had thoughts about suicide... and some made attempts when on the medication... ...but for a much larger percentage of kids the medication was helpful.

Those kids had at least moderate to severe depression.

For kids with milder depression... the drug benefits may not outweigh their risks.

MAUREEN:

That's right... ...so that's why, Michelle... ...it's important for you and your physician to carefully monitor your son's behavior as the medication is being introduced... and with any adjustments that may occur later.

Learn about the ways in which medication helps...
...and the warning signs of potentially harmful side effects.

It's also important to encourage your child to tell you if he experiences anything out of the ordinary while on the medication... ..and if he does... you should contact your physician immediately.

Try and find a good counselor or therapist... who can address the issues that led to their child's depression... in the first place.

MICHELLE:

Thanks...that helps me understand it better.

LANNY:

You know Maureen...

in my experience... many parents ask a similar type of question.

What they don't realize... is that they should
It's best to combine medication with talk therapy...
...especially with cognitive behavioral therapy... ..for
kids who are moderately to severely depressed.

If a parent notices anything unusual that concerns them... ..they should contact the prescribing physician and the therapist immediately.

MAUREEN:

Absolutely.

Lauren... I think you're next?

LAUREN:

Hi Maureen.

My daughter Christine got a text message from a friend... saying she's thinking about taking her life.

Christine asked me for advice and I was clueless.

Can you help me!

MAUREEN:

The first thing to tell her is that you're glad she shared this information with you...

... and you'll take care of it from here.

Your next step is to pick up the phone and contact this girl's parents... to let them know what's going on.

Wouldn't you want to be called if it was Christine sending the messages?

LAUREN:

Yeah, you're right I would.

But what do I say to them.

MAUREEN:

Lanny what do you think?

LANNY:

If it were me, I would say... "Christine got a disturbing text message from your daughter talking about taking her life... ..and I thought it was important that you know... so that you can talk to your daughter about it".

MAUREEN:

That's great advice Lanny.

Lauren, in doing this... you're also showing Christine that you're there for her when she's facing difficult situations.

Our next question is from Todd....

MAUREEN:

Lauren, in doing this... you're also showing Christine that you're there for her when she's facing difficult situations.

Our next question is from Todd....

Todd?

TODD:

This is for Lanny... My son just graduated high school and is going away to college?

He had problems with anxiety in high school... and I'm worried about his transition to college.

Is there anything I can do to make it easier for him?

LANNY:

It's wise for you to be thinking about this ahead of time, Todd.

College counselors have told us... that one of the biggest problems they face is when parents and incoming students see college as a new beginning... and want to forget about their previous mental health history.

These families tend to minimize the fact that the transition to college itself is stressful... ..and for vulnerable students in particular... it will bring up some of the same old feelings and issues that challenged them in the past.

Students with depression... anxiety... suicidal ideation... or past suicide attempts... ..or even recent history of loss in the family... ..present a higher risk.

So before going off to college... it's important to talk to your son about campus and community mental health resources.

Having that information beforehand... may help your son and you feel more comfortable that support is available and accessible to help him with this transition.

MAUREEN:

Lanny... these were all really important questions.

MAUREEN:

Lanny... these were all really important questions.

I want to thank our parents for their thoughtfulness and willingness to share such personal concerns.

LANNY:

We hope that we've addressed some of your questions about adolescent suicide.

If you have additional concerns... please review the resources we've listed for you at the end of this program.

MAUREEN:

Thanks so much for watching.

>SCOTT & DON:

Hi... I am Scott Fritz... ...and I am Don Quigley...

SCOTT:

We're the founders of the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide.

We hope this program has been helpful to you... ...and provided you with valuable information that we didn't have before we lost Stephanie and Sean to suicide.

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We realize our experts gave only short answers... to what can be really complicated questions.

But what we wanted to do in this program... ..is demonstrate how important it is for you... as parents... ..to ASK those complicated questions.

DON:

And you have to keep asking them...

...until you get the answers that help you make educated decisions... about your child's mental health needs.

We want to stress ... really listen to your kids... and look for any changes they may be going through.

And if you seek professional help for them... ..do some research... ..and... as we just said... ..ask that mental health professional those complicated questions... ..so you know what they are recommending... ..and why they are recommending it.

SCOTT:

Also... look at our website [SPTS NJ\(dot\)org](http://SPTS NJ(dot)org).

There's information for parents... kids and educators... and we're continually adding resources.

DON:

We hope you'll find the information and links helpful.

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And thanks again... for taking the time to watch this program.