



# DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS: TALKING TO YOUR TEEN ABOUT DEPRESSION, SUICIDE, AND COPING WITH STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

J. STERLING MORTON DISTRICT 201

YOUTH CROSSROADS, INC.

# OBJECTIVES



Things your student might be facing



Signs to look out for in your student



Talking to your child



What you can do to support your child



School Community support services



Local Community Support Services

**EXAMPLES OF  
DIFFICULT  
SITUATIONS  
TEENAGERS  
FACE**

Peer conflict

Family conflict

Social media

Loss (loved one, friendship, or pet)

Divorce

Transitions

Academic pressure

Community violence

Homelessness

Financial instability

Natural disaster

## COMMON REACTIONS TO DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

- Shock and denial
- Anger, irritable
- Fear
- Anxiety, worry
- Sadness
- Hopelessness
- Guilt and regret



# SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Fatigue or loss of energy

Social withdrawal, napping,  
withdrawal from usual  
activities, boredom

Low self-esteem, feeling  
guilty

Making critical comments  
about themselves, having  
behavior problems at home  
or school, being overly  
sensitive to rejection

Decreased ability to  
concentrate, indecisive

Poor performance at  
school, drop in grades,  
frequent absences

Unexplained aches and  
pains

Recurrent suicidal thoughts  
or behavior

# SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Depressed, irritable, sad, or empty mood for at least 2 weeks

Irritable or cranky mood

Decreased interest or enjoyment in once-favorite activities and people

Withdrawal from friends and family, relationship problems

Changes in appetite, eating too much or too little, significant weight loss or gain

Sleeping too much or too little

Having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, having trouble getting up in the morning

## Emotional

- chronic feeling of extreme sadness
- hopelessness
- helplessness
- irritable
- easily angered

## Psychological

- negative outlook in life
- lower self-esteem
- loss of interest in activities
- indecisive
- slowed thinking
- difficulty concentrating

## Physical

- Headaches
- Muscle aches
- Exhaustion or fatigue
- Change in appetite or weight
- Chest pain

## Behavioral

- tendency to be less social/isolated
- difficulty in concentrating/decision making
- difficulty in being able to have a good night sleep

MORE THAN SAD

# WAYS PEOPLE DEAL WITH STRESS

## Healthy

- Talk to a friend
- Take a walk
- Write in a journal
- Listen to music
- Exercise
- Meditate
- Do something creative
- Talk to a trusted adult
- Sleep
- Use a stress ball

## Unhealthy

- Sleep
- Keep it bottled up
- Smoke cigarettes
- Drink alcohol
- Use other drugs
- Self-injure
- Yell at people
- Punch a wall



WITH THE RIGHT  
SUPPORT,  
YOUTH ARE  
INCREDIBLY  
RESILIENT



# ACTIVE LISTENING



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# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENT

- 
- You don't have to have the perfect words
  - Be consistent, honest and reassuring.
  - Validate their feelings.
  - Don't panic in the absence or presence of strong emotional responses
  - Reassure the person that it is normal to experience difficult emotions and there are no right or wrong emotions
  - Talk about symptoms of stress, trauma, grief, etc.

# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR STUDENT

(CONTINUED)

- Leave the door open for further communication
- Don't give up if they aren't responsive
- Assure they have someone to talk to for support
- Avoid saying *"you'll get over it"*, *"it isn't that bad"*, or *"I've been through worse"*
- Encourage your child to get help if needed. Seeking help is a sign of strength

# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEEN ABOUT SUICIDE

01

Do bring it up naturally

02

Don't worry about putting ideas in their heads

03

Do counter the stigma

04

Don't try fix it

05

Do "listen, listen, listen:"

## THINGS YOU CAN SAY

Can you tell me more  
about what is happening?  
How you are feeling?

Have you had feelings like  
this in the past?

Sometimes it helps to  
talk to someone. I'm here  
to listen. How can I help  
you feel better?

Do you feel like you want  
to talk to someone else  
about what you are going  
through?

I'm worried about you.

## THINGS YOU CAN SAY (CONTINUED)









I'm sorry for what you are going through. I am here to support you.

I understand if you aren't ready to talk to me- but I will keep checking in on you.

You are not alone.

We can get through this together.

# WHAT CAN I DO AS A PARENT?

-  Be available to your student, and find more opportunities to communicate
-  Make opportunities to share memories or look at photos of the person who has died
-  Acknowledge and believe the young person's pain and distress whatever the situation - large or small
-  Give honest, adequate and appropriate information
-  Include and involve the child in appropriate decision-making and in what is happening
-  Acknowledge feelings and give support when the child is overwhelmed by feelings
-  Provide opportunities to remember, create a memory box and make a memory book, draw, paint, make a collage, write stories, poems, collect photos
-  Provide information about grief, stress, anxiety - books, web sites



# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

**Before talking to your student, consider how these conversations may spark things in your own life:**

- Have you experienced tough things?
- Do you have judgements or expectations for how people should respond in crisis?
- How is your own emotional health?

**Think through where your relationship is at with your student at that moment.**

- Are there other resources or support people you can lean on if it becomes too overwhelming for you?
- What other things are you dealing with right now?



Teachers



Social workers



Psychologists



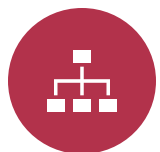
Counselors



Deans



Parent liaison



Administration

# SCHOOL RESOURCES

# COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Youth Crossroads

Pillars

Psychiatric hospitals

Faith communities

Suicide hotline 1-800-273-8255

For additional resources & contact information see handouts on tables

# THANK YOU

## SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

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