Starting the Conversation

Talking with your child about suicide is as important as talking about drugs and alcohol and safe driving. However, it can be difficult to bring up this subject with your child. Below are tips for talking with your child about suicide.

1. **Pick a good time.** You want your child's full attention, so choose a time when there are minimal distractions and a reasonable degree of privacy.

2. **Be conversational.** Remember that your goal is to have a conversation with your child, not deliver a lecture. It always helps to have a "reference point"— such as an event or a news story or the school's *Lifelines* classes—to start the conversation.
("I was reading in the newspaper that the rate of suicide for teens has increased . . ." or "I noticed on the school's Web site that the school is having a suicide prevention workshop for the teachers . . .")

3. **Be honest.** If this is a hard subject for you to talk about, acknowledge it. ("You know, I never thought I'd be talking with you about suicide. It's a topic I've never been really comfortable with . . .") By acknowledging your discomfort, you give your child permission to acknowledge his or her discomfort, too.

4. **Be direct.** Ask open-ended questions to clarify your child's responses. ("Tell me how you feel talking about suicide." "What do you think about suicide?" "What have you learned about suicide in school?")

5. **Listen to what your child has to say.** You've brought up the topic. You're interested in his or her responses, so simply listen to your child's answers. Don't interrupt or interject your opinion unless asked.

6. **If you hear something that worries you, ask for more information.** ("You say that one of your friends has talked about suicide. Tell me more.")

7. **Open the door to revisit the conversation.** Suicide isn't a one-time discussion topic. Once you've made it okay to talk about, it should be easier to bring up again. If you've heard something that concerns you, make sure to ask about it again.