Talking with Your Child about Suicide
For Families of Middle School Students (6th–8th Grade)

Middle school students are more aware of mental health and social dynamics; they need direct, honest conversation and clear guidance.

1. Invite an open, respectful conversation

- You might start with: "You've probably heard that something serious happened to a student at school. What have you heard?"
- "How are people talking about it in your grade or online?"

Listen first, then gently correct any misinformation.

2. Be direct and truthful, without graphic detail

- You can say: "A middle school student tried to take their own life and is in the hospital in very serious condition. People are worried and sad. Out of respect for the student and their family, we're not going to talk about private details or the 'how' of what happened."

Name the reality without dramatizing it.

3. Normalize complex reactions

- You might say: "There's no 'right' way to feel about this. People might feel shocked, scared, angry, guilty, numb, or even disconnected. All of those reactions can come up when something like this happens."
- Ask:
    - "How are you feeling about what happened?"
    - "What kinds of conversations are happening with your friends?"

4. Emphasize mental health, safety, and help-seeking

- Connect this to mental health directly: "When someone tries to end their life, it's a sign of mental health struggles. It doesn't happen because of one comment, one friend, or one event—it's usually a lot of things building up, often over time."
- Make expectations clear: "If you ever find yourself thinking about hurting yourself or feeling like life isn't worth living, that's not something you keep inside or share only with friends. That's a signal to tell an adult immediately—me, another trusted adult in our family, a teacher, a counselor, or a doctor."
- Reassure them: "You will never be in trouble for asking for help with your mental health."

5. Talk about friends and the "helper role"

Middle schoolers often worry about what they "should have done" or "should do" for friends.

- You might say: “You are not responsible for another person’s decisions or mental health. You can be a caring friend, listen, and encourage them to get help.”
- Offer concrete guidance: “If a friend talks about wanting to die, hurting themself, or ‘not being here,’ tell an adult right away—even if your friend asks you not to. That’s not betraying them; that’s protecting them.”

6. Directly address social media and group chats

- You might say: “Posting or sharing details about what happened—even if it seems supportive—can actually be harmful and can spread misinformation. It can also make things harder for the student’s family and friends.”
- Encourage them to:
  - Avoid posting or reposting about the situation.
  - Leave or mute group chats that become graphic, dramatic, or blaming.
  - Bring you posts or messages that are confusing, scary, or guilt-inducing.

7. Encourage ongoing conversations and check-ins

- You can frame it like this: “We don’t have to figure out all your feelings right now. I’m going to keep checking in because I care about you, and this is a lot to process. You can always come to me, even if it’s late or feels awkward.”

8. Know when to seek more help

- Ask your child—and yourself—to watch for signs that extra support is needed:
  - Persistent sadness, anger, or numbness.
  - Withdrawing from friends or activities.
  - Major changes in sleep, appetite, or school engagement.
  - Talking, writing, or joking about death or suicide.
  - Giving away important possessions or saying things like “Everyone would be better off without me.”

If you notice these signs, please reach out to a mental health professional or our counseling team right away. In a crisis, you can contact the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** (call or text 988) or go to the nearest emergency room.