## Talking With Your Child About Suicide

We understand that many of you may wonder how to talk about this news at home. The guidance below may help you navigate those conversations with your child.

1. **Begin by asking what they've heard**
   - You might start with: "You may have heard that something serious happened to a student at school. What have you heard?"
   - This gives you a chance to correct rumors and understand what's on your child's mind.

**2. Share simple, honest information**

- **For lower school children**, you might say: "A student at our school hurt themself on purpose and is in the hospital. The doctors are working very hard to help them. It's very serious, and a lot of people feel sad and worried." We have put together additional resources for both Primary and Intermediate students. (link)
  - Child Mind Institute | Transforming Children's Lives
  - Talking to Your Kids about Suicide | Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide
  - How to Talk to Kids About Suicide - The Kids Mental Health Foundation
- **For middle school students**, you might say: "A middle school student tried to take their own life. They are in the hospital and very sick. Adults at school and at home are taking this very seriously and doing everything we can to support students." We have put together additional resources talking with Middle School students. (link)
  - Resources for Parents and Caregivers - The Kids Mental Health Foundation
  - Supporting Children After the Suicide of a Classmate - Child Mind Institute
- *Try to avoid sharing graphic details or information about how the student was hurt.*

**3. Normalize feelings and questions**

- You can reassure your child that a wide range of reactions are normal: "You might feel sad, scared, confused, angry, or even like nothing has changed. All of those feelings can be normal when something hard like this happens."
- Invite questions and answer as simply and honestly as you can. It's okay to say, "I don't know," or "That's something private that we're not going to talk about in detail."

**4. Reassure them about safety and support**

- Children often want to know: "Could this happen to me or to someone else I love?" You might respond: "When adults learn that someone is thinking about hurting themself, we take it very seriously and get help right away. There are many people whose job is to help keep kids safe—at home, at school, and at the hospital."
- Avoid making promises that nothing bad will ever happen, but emphasize that there are systems and people in place to help.

**5. Emphasize that big feelings should never be kept secret**

- You might say: "If you ever feel like you don't want to be here anymore, or like you might hurt yourself, that is not a secret you keep. That's something you must tell an adult right away—me, another grown-up in our family, a teacher, or a counselor. You will never be in trouble for asking for help."

**6. Gently discourage rumors and social media sharing**

- You can explain: “Talking about guesses, sharing details online, or posting about this student can make things harder for them and their family. The kindest thing we can do is focus on being supportive and respectful.”
- Encourage your child to take breaks from social media and to come to you if they see posts that are confusing or upsetting.

**7. Keep the conversation going**

- This does not need to be one big, perfect conversation. Often, several shorter check-ins work better:
    - “I’m going to keep checking in, because this is a lot to hold.”
    - “How are you feeling about what we talked about yesterday?”

**8. Teaching Coping Strategies**

*Discuss openly coping strategies for dealing with big emotions*.

*Younger students:*

- Deep belly breathing (“smell the flower, blow out the candle”)
- Squeezing a stress ball
- Drawing a “feelings thermometer”
- Using a calm corner or quiet break

*Older students:*

- Grounding strategies (5-4-3-2-1 senses)
- Stretching or movement breaks
- Quick check-ins: “Name how you feel from 1–10”
- Journaling or drawing

*Children cope better when they’re not exposed to:*

- Rumors
- Graphic details
- Social media speculation

If you notice changes in your child’s mood, sleep, appetite, school engagement, or if they talk about self-harm or not wanting to be alive, please reach out to a healthcare provider or our counseling team right away. In an urgent situation, you can also contact the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** (call or text 988) or go to the nearest emergency room.