

# SUICIDE PREVENTION IN THE CLASSROOMS

Dear Parent / Caregiver,

This year, school staff are continuing to teach students about mental health and how to seek help if they are worried about themselves or a friend. We are using a program called SOS Signs of Suicide. The program teaches students about this difficult topic and encourages them to seek help.

SOS has been used by thousands of schools for over 20 years. School City of Hobart has used this program for the last several years for grades 6-12. Studies have shown that it effectively teaches students about depression and suicide while reducing the number of students' suicide attempts.

Through the program, students learn:

- that depression is treatable, so they are encouraged to seek help
- how to identify depression and potential suicide risk in themselves or a friend
- to ACT (Acknowledge, Care, and Tell a trusted adult) if concerned about themselves or a friend
- who they can turn to at school for help

Students will watch age-appropriate video clips and participate in a guided discussion about depression, suicide, and what to do if they are concerned about a friend. At the end of class, students will complete an exit slip that asks whether they would like to talk to an adult about any concerns. School staff will conduct brief meetings with any student asking to talk.

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's participation in this program, please contact the school or any of our SCOH school counselors.

Sincerely,  
School City of Hobart

## SUICIDE PREVENTION FOR OUR STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Schools are a key setting for suicide prevention for our youth. SCOH supports suicide prevention aid for students and their families. Maintaining a safe school environment is part of our school's overall mission, all while promoting emotional well-being and connectedness among all students.

Youth depression is a serious mental health problem that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest in activities as well as having a serious impact on families. It affects how your child thinks, feels, and behaves, and it can cause emotional, functional, and physical problems.

**According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the eleventh leading cause of death in Indiana and the second leading cause of death for Hoosiers between the ages of 10 and 34 years.**

**In 2020, the Indiana Youth Institute reported that the percentage of Hoosier middle and high school students who considered attempting suicide ranged from 11.8% (or 1 in 9 sixth-grade students) to 19.3% (or 1 in 5 tenth-grade students).**

Issues such as peer pressure, academic expectations, and changing bodies can bring a lot of ups and downs for teens. But for some teens, the lows are more than just temporary feelings – they're a symptom of depression.

Teen depression isn't a weakness or something that can be overcome with willpower – it can have serious consequences and requires long-term treatment. For most teens, depression symptoms ease with treatment such as medication and psychological counseling.



# SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Teen depression signs and symptoms include a change from the teenager's previous attitude and behavior that can cause significant distress and problems at school or home, in social activities, or in other areas of life.

Depression symptoms can vary in severity, but changes in your teen's emotions and behavior may include the examples below.

## Emotional changes

Be alert for emotional changes, such as:

- Feelings of sadness, which can include crying spells for no apparent reason
- Frustration or feelings of anger, even over small matters
- Feeling hopeless or empty
- Irritable or annoyed mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Loss of interest in, or conflict with, family and friends
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of worthlessness, not feeling enough, hypercritical of yourself or a sense of guilt
- Fixation on past failures or exaggerated self-blame or self-criticism
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure, and the need for excessive reassurance
- Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions and remembering things
- Ongoing sense that life and the future are grim and bleak
- Frequent thoughts of death, dying or suicide

## Behavioral changes

Watch for changes in behavior, such as:

- Tiredness and loss of energy
- Insomnia or sleeping too much
- Changes in appetite – decreased appetite and weight loss, or increased cravings for food and weight gain
- Use of alcohol or drugs
- Agitation or restlessness – for example, pacing, hand-wringing or an inability to sit still
- Slowed thinking, speaking or body movements
- Frequent complaints of unexplained body aches and headaches, which may include frequent visits to the school nurse
- Social isolation
- Poor school performance or frequent absences from school
- Less attention to personal hygiene or appearance
- Angry outbursts, disruptive or risky behavior, or other acting-out behaviors
- Self-harm – for example, cutting or burning
- Making a suicide plan or a suicide attempt

# HOW TO TALK TO MY CHILD?

## How can I talk to my teen about mental health and suicide?

Having a conversation with your child about mental health and suicide can be overwhelming. Asking, "How are you feeling, I am here to listen?" can begin the discussion. Listen intently and without judgment. Ask open-ended questions, i.e. those that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Resist the urge to offer quick fixes or solutions to their challenges, which tends to shut down further dialog. Validate and support their feelings while showing concern and support. Acknowledge the despair they're feeling without minimizing their pain. Showing that you care even if you feel angry or confused about what they're considering or discussing.

### Phrase to Start a Conversation

- "I feel like you haven't been yourself lately. I am concerned about you. Can we talk?"
- "I want to respect your personal life, but I'm worried about you."
- "I know you've been having a tough time recently. Tell me more about this. Can you share what has been going on?"
- "I really care about you and I can tell something is wrong. Can you tell me how I can help?"

### Phrases to Aid in Conversation

- "How long have you felt like this?"
- "Have you been feeling hopeless?"
- "How are you coping with what has been going on in your life?"
- "You are not alone with this. I'm here for you."
- "I may not know exactly how you feel, but you matter to me and I want to help."
- "Can you think of anything I could do to help you?"
- "I know it doesn't seem like it now, but you won't always feel like this. Things will change."
- "I want to call someone to help us."

### Phrases to Avoid

- "You don't really want to do that."
- "It can't be that bad."
- "You have so much to live for."
- "You can't do that to your family."



HOW ARE YOU  
FEELING?  
I'M HERE TO  
LISTEN.

# WHEN AND WHERE TO SEEK HELP

It can be difficult to tell the difference between the ups and downs that are just part of being a teenager and teen depression. Talk with your teen. Try to determine whether he or she seems capable of managing challenging feelings, or if life seems overwhelming.

When to see a doctor?

- If depression signs and symptoms continue, begin to interfere in your teen's life, or cause you to have concerns about teen suicide or your teen's safety, it's time to reach out.
- Depression symptoms likely won't get better on their own – and they may get worse or lead to other problems if untreated.

## Where to go for help?

- Dial 988; The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline 24/7 (A simple, short number for anyone experiencing mental health-related distress).
- Contact your child's pediatrician, primary care physician or mental health professional.
- Contact SCOH where there are licensed mental health professionals as well as school counselors who are here to refer if needed.
- SCOH can also share mental health resources in our area depending on need.
- Reach out to a close friend, teacher, coach, school nurse or family member.



Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a volunteer Crisis Counselor



# FREE PHONE APPS



## Got Your Back

Got Your Back is a digital platform for suicide awareness, prevention and education. There are tools custom-built for the user to help cope with anxiety and depression including messaging tools for people in your squad making them aware that you are NOT OKAY; one-touch access to crisis centers and hotlines; and mindfulness and calming exercises to help guide the user through moments of anxiety. It also includes a suicide safety plan feature.



## NOTokay

notOK is a free digital panic button to get you immediate support via text, phone call, or GPS location when you're struggling to reach out. The app takes the guesswork out of asking for help when you're feeling vulnerable. You upload the contact info of your closest friends and family into your "trusted circle" in the app. Then, when feeling like you need help, you tap the "notok" button that sends an SOS message to your trusted circle with your GPS location included.



## Virtual Hope Box

Virtual Hope Box helps users access immediate reminders of hope in moments of stress. Users can upload personally meaningful photos, videos, songs, and quotes. They can also choose puzzles, relaxation exercises and guided meditations, and "coping tools" (self-created cards, activity planning alarms, and a phone contact list) in the app to consolidate many resources in one app. It also includes a suicide safety plan feature.



## Suicide Safety Plan

Suicide Safety Plan helps users cope and stay safe when they're experiencing suicidal thoughts. The app allows users to program useful information, including personal warning signs, coping strategies, contacts, and more. It also allows users to easily contact help and provides them with educational resources to help them make the most of their safety plan.



## A Friend Asks

A free app for youth that helps provide the information, tools, and resources to help a friend (or yourself) who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. It includes suicide warning signs, do's and don'ts, and a direct link to the 988 Crisis & Suicide Lifeline.