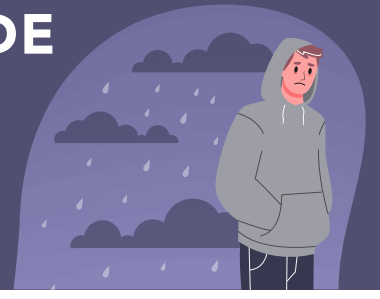


WHEN STUDENTS TALK ABOUT SUICIDE

As a teacher, you may be the one person in a student's life with whom they feel safe to talk about their thoughts of suicide. Educators often worry they will not know the right thing to say. The following guidance may help you feel more comfortable talking about suicide.



DETECT

Pay attention to common signs that a student may be experiencing distress:



- Trouble focusing on school work
- Decline in school performance
- Sadness, irritability, behavior change, or other mood changes
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Reckless, risk-taking, or self-injurious behavior, especially if out of character



- Changes in appetite or sleep
- Alcohol or other substance use
- Statements about hurting oneself
- Giving away their valuable possessions
- Thinking, writing, drawing, or searching the web or social media about death or suicide



CONNECT

When you detect that a student is experiencing distress, the next step is to connect with them individually. Use the following tips to help guide your discussion:

COMMUNICATE

- **Engage** the student using words they can understand. Take them seriously. You may say, "I've noticed you've been writing a lot about death lately. Can you tell me more about that?"
- **Be honest** and ask direct questions. You may say, "I'm worried about your safety. Have you had thoughts of hurting yourself or wanting to die?"
- **Listen** to what a student is going through; this can be more powerful than telling them what to do.
- **Pay attention** to your tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions. The presence of a calm and empathetic adult conveys support.
- **Communicate** your support and willingness to help.



ASSIST

- **Address safety**, fears, and concerns, but make no promises for confidentiality; the only promise you can make is to support the student while necessary safety precautions may need to be taken.
- **Answer questions.** If you don't know the answer, let the student know that you will find out for them.
- **Monitor reactions** and nonverbal communication. Invite the student to check in again or connect them to other helpful adults.



PROTECT

Take immediate steps to protect the student if you suspect they are thinking about suicide. Do not dismiss suicidal language as "just a phase" or "attention seeking."

- Remove any potentially harmful objects.
- Do not leave the student alone. Ensure they are supervised by a staff member, not a peer.
- Collaborate with administrators or crisis team members for further evaluation and referral.
- Be familiar with your district's policies and procedures for parent contact and next steps.
- After attending to a student's safety, take time to care for yourself.