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**SOCIETY** *for the*  
**PREVENTION** *of*  
**TEEN SUICIDE**

## PARENT AWARENESS SERIES:

# When A Friend Of Your Child Attempts Suicide

This is one of those questions we wish our children would never need to ask! Unfortunately, even in elementary school, kids seem to be hearing about suicide and if they ask us about it, we may not be quite sure what to say to them.

The place for parents to start is with some basic understanding of suicide itself. Just the word "suicide" can be so frightening that we can't imagine that there might be a way to comprehend it, let alone talk about it. But if we put our fear aside and begin to think about suicide in a different way - for example, as the ultimate solution to a problem someone feels they just can't solve in any other way - it may begin to make a little more sense. In addition to thinking that suicide is the solution to that problem, the suicidal person is usually in a 'crisis mode' of thinking. What that means is that the feelings of panic and emotional pain they are experiencing have affected their ability to problem solve in a productive way. Life crises, big or small, affect most of us in negative ways - shift us into 'fight, flight, or freeze' positions that are often extreme and unhelpful. On top of that, suicidal thinking also has an irrational quality. Somehow, the idea of death feels like the only logical way to solve the problem. And, as you probably have already learned from parenting experiences, it's nearly impossible to help someone who is being irrational understand the flaws in their logic. Finally, suicide can feel like the only way to send a message to someone - normal channels of communication feel closed.

There are a couple of other things to know about suicide before we answer this mom's questions. The first is that, even an attempt can have an impact on peers. As you probably already know, kids do imitate each other's behaviors. That's why it's so important to talk to your child if you're aware of any type of potentially unsafe behavior with their peers. You'd raise the topic if you learned that friends of your child were drinking or using drugs or doing other dangerous things - well, suicide is no different. Which brings us to the last important thing to understand about suicide: asking about suicide can't plant the idea in someone's head. In fact, it can have the opposite effect - it gives your child permission and opportunity to talk about something that's probably very upsetting - and it opens that door of communication that may have felt closed!

***"My daughter came home from school yesterday and told me that one of her friends has been hospitalized for making a suicide attempt. Another student in her class was hospitalized for an attempt about 3 months ago. As a parent, I'm worried about the effect these attempts might have on my daughter. Will they make her think about suicide too? What do I say when she asks me why they would do something like this?"***

***- Mother of 14 year old girl***