

Talking to Your Kids About Suicide

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Gather your courage to talk to your children. As parents, we want to protect our children from terrible things. But it is also our obligation as parents to be honest with our kids when tragedy does strike.

When talking about suicide, you'll want to keep your conversation at a level that's appropriate for your child's developmental level. The younger the children, the more vague and short your descriptions can be, while older children will have more questions and want more details. Be honest if you don't have all the answers to their questions by saying "I don't know" or "We may never know." I can say with assurance though that hiding what is going on from your children if it is publicly known will do more harm than good in the long run. You'd rather have your children know that you are a person that they can talk to about tragedies, rather than a person who hides from them.

Explain suicide in a way they can understand. One of the hardest things for children to understand is why someone would try to take their own life. Kids usually have experienced the death of a loved one to an accident or illness. While difficult to cope with, there are usually clear answers to how or why the person died. When talking about suicide, you can explain what depression is and then tell your children that sometimes people feel so sad or upset that their mind is in a sense suffering from an illness. Even though the person may have looked happy or good on the outside, they had a sickness in their mind that made them not be able to cope with their sadness in a way that was healthy. With kids, I have often compared it to a seemingly healthy person dying suddenly from a heart attack. Although they looked healthy on the outside, something was going wrong on the inside that we did not know about. Be sure to include in your explanation that there was nothing that your child did that caused this or anything that they could have done to prevent it.

One explanation that I like from [Suicide Awareness Voices of Education](#) is "Our thoughts and feelings come from our brain, and sometimes a person's brain can get very sick – the sickness can cause a person to feel very badly inside. It also makes a person's thoughts get all jumbled and mixed up, so sometimes they can't think clearly. Some people can't think of any other way of stopping the hurt they feel inside. They don't understand that they don't have to feel that way, that they can get help."

Encourage them to talk to trusted adults. After learning of a suicide attempt, children will naturally have questions and want to talk more about what's going on. Encourage your children to talk with you, their teachers, school counselors, or other trusted adults.