

WARNING SIGNS

Topic: Recognizing children's early signs of emotional trouble

The Facts

- 20% of teens between the ages of 12 and 20 suffer from depression (Treatment for Adolescents with Depression Study, 2004).
- For people 15 to 24 years of age, suicide is the third leading cause of death. (CDC, 2004)
- 80% of people who seek treatment for depression are treated successfully. (SAVE, 2005)
- Suicide can be prevented through education and public awareness. (SAVE, 2004)

Start a Conversation with Your Kids

1. Make sure your children understand that depression is a medical condition that, like any other illness, can be treated. Ask if they have ever felt depressed and how they pulled themselves out of that depression. Did they seek any help? Did they know where to find help? Did they consider asking you for help? Why or why not?
2. Ask your children if they can recognize and identify any of their own "warning signs" that occur in various situations: when they are upset, when they are tired, when they are not doing well in school, are curious or are in new or uncomfortable settings.
3. Work together to create a vocabulary for expressing their feelings with words. If your children are young, color pictures of different emotions and label them for future help.

Advice From the Experts

- Talk about depression and suicide openly. Realize, and help your child to understand that depression is medical condition that can be treated, like any other illness.
- Honor your child's feelings and accept them. Denying their feelings takes away what little confidence they might have in understanding themselves. Above all, take their feelings seriously. For younger children, help them develop a vocabulary of emotions to express their feelings.
- Do not judge your child or his or her feelings. Listen.
- Get involved in his/her life and be available to listen, be there, help, etc. Make sure your child knows you will be available always.
- Never dare your child to act on his or her suicidal threats.
- Stay calm. Showing shock often will show your child you never tried to read the signs he/she sent.
- Refuse to keep suicidal thoughts or actions secret. Seek professional help immediately.
- For help, contact any of the following: a mental health agency, a private therapist or counselor, a school counselor or psychologist, a family physician, a suicide prevention or crisis center.

