

## Suicide Prevention Awareness for Parents/Caregivers

California *Education Code (EC)* Section 215, as added by Assembly Bill 2246, (Chapter 642, Statutes of 2016) mandates that the Governing Board of any local educational agency (LEA) that serves pupils in grades seven to twelve, inclusive, adopt a policy on pupil suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. The policy shall specifically address the needs of high-risk groups, including suicide awareness and prevention training for teachers, and ensure that a school employee acts within the authorization and scope of the employee's credential or license.

The Palmdale School District Board of Education has adopted a Suicide Prevention Policy and recognize that Suicide is a serious public health problem that takes an enormous toll on families, friends, classmates, co-workers, and communities, as well as on our military personnel and veterans. Suicide prevention is the collective effort of all adults that support and work with students, including parents/caregivers, families, local community organizations, mental health practitioners, and related professionals. The aim is to reduce the incidence of suicide through education, awareness, and services.

### SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE

Many people who feel suicidal do not want to die. If they can get through the crisis, treatment works. There are programs and practices that have been specifically developed to support those who are in a suicide crisis. In an effort to address the needs of our school communities, Palmdale School District has collaborated with mental health agencies throughout the Antelope Valley to provide high quality, direct mental health services to students and families. For a mental health referral form please contact the student's school.

Warning Signs: Warning signs are observable behaviors that may signal the presence of suicidal thinking.

- Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, helplessness
- Significant changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts, and/or feelings
- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Suicide threats (direct and indirect)
- Suicide notes and plans
- History of suicidal ideation/behavior
- Self-injurious behavior
- Preoccupation with death
- Making final arrangements (e.g., giving away prized possessions, posting plans on social media, sending text messages to friends)

Risk Factors: While the path that leads to suicidal behavior is long and complex and there is no "profile" that predicts suicidal behavior with certainty, there are certain risk factors associated with increased suicide risk. In isolation, these factors are not signs of suicidal thinking. However, when present they signal the need to be vigilant for the warning signs of suicide.

- Access to means (e.g., firearms, knives, medication)
- Stressors (e.g., loss, peer relations, school, gender identity issues)
- History of depression, mental illness, or substance/alcohol abuse
- History of suicide in the family or of a close friend
- History of mental illness in the family

### Here's What You Can Do:

LISTEN:

- Assess for suicide risk.
- Listen without judgment.

- Ask open-ended questions, such as: Tell me what happened? How long have you been feeling this way? Have you thought about suicide?

#### PROTECT

- Take action immediately.
- Do not leave your child alone. You or a trusted adult should supervise/ monitor your child.
- Consider developing a safety plan at home and at school.

#### CONNECT

- Go to your child's school for support from school administration, school psychologist, social emotional learning specialist, or counselor.
- Contact Department of Mental Health, law enforcement, or child protective services, as needed.
- Help your child identify adults they trust at home and at school.

#### MODEL

- Remain calm.
- Establish a safe environment to talk about suicide.
- Be aware of your thoughts, feelings, and reactions as you listen without judgment.

#### TEACH

- Learn the warning signs and risk factors and provide information and education about suicide and self-injury.
- Teach your child how to ask for help and identify adults they can trust at home and at school.
- Teach healthy ways to cope with stress, including deep breathing, writing/drawing, exercise, or talking.
- Seek options for school and community resources, including referrals to school based mental health services.

#### **I think my child needs help?**

If you believe that your child is thinking about suicide, approach the situation by asking. Asking is the first step in saving a life and can let them know that you are here for them and will listen.

Reach out to your child's school and discuss your concerns with administration and/or support staff for referrals.

If you need IMMEDIATE help, call 911.

For a psychiatric emergency, contact the Department of Mental Health 24-hours ACCESS Center at (800) 854-7771.