



THE ROLE OF HOPE IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

A new school year commonly brings a new sense of hope for kids. Your children may be feeling hopeful that they will learn a lot, do well in class, make a sports team, or earn a top spot in orchestra. Visualizing themselves accomplishing these things can lead to an increased sense of happiness, satisfaction, and hope.

That hope can also provide protection against suicide risk. Individuals who practice and nourish hope tend to feel more motivation even in the face of discouragement. Hope is crucial in suicide prevention because hope is what helps someone decide to stay. Fortunately, hope is a learnable skill. Below are a few ideas for how you and your children can build hope to help protect against suicide risk.

Steps for Building Hope:

- * Visualize. Help your child look to the future and see in their minds what it would be like to achieve their hopes. Help them ponder how this bright future feels. You can also create a picture of these hopes to hang somewhere you and your child can see it every day.
- * Notice others' hope. Read about others' hope. Talk to hopeful individuals about their hopes and successes.
- * Write in a hope journal. Detail your hopes in a notebook. For hopes that involve a goal, be sure to break the goal into small steps. You may need to make several plans for a goal, and remember to give yourself grace if that goal needs to shift or change along the way.

SIGNS OF HOPELESSNESS

Below are a few warning signs that could indicate hopelessness in children.

- * Increased irritability
- * Decreased interest in activities
- * Unusual changes in eating or sleeping habits
- * Excessive feelings of guilt
- * Substance use
- * Trouble concentrating
- * Complaining of frequent aches and pains
- * Being self-critical

If you notice these signs and they last for a week or two, consider taking the following steps:

- * Talk with your children. Regularly check in with them on how they're feeling and what's going on in their lives. Express your concern when needed and ask questions kindly.
- * Talk with other adults. There are many adults in your children's lives: teachers, coaches, church leaders, and extended family. Ask if they've noticed any abnormal behavior from your children.
- * Talk with a mental health professional. Without your children, meet with a mental health professional to discuss your concerns and get more information on how to help your children.

