Suicide Awareness for Parents
Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among young adults in Washington State
  - Youth suicide rate is 10% higher than the national average
  - 2 in 7 youth have symptoms of depression in Snohomish County

On average, each week in Washington
  - Two youth kill themselves
  - There are 17 youth hospitalizations because of a suicide attempt
Myths About Suicide

- Talking about suicide may give the person the idea
- It doesn’t happen to people like us
- You can’t stop it
- People who talk about it don’t do it
- Most attempts are just to get attention
- Once the person starts feeling better, the risk goes away
Suicide: Why?

- Suicide is not event driven
- Suicide is a response to intense emotional pain
  - Grief / Loss
  - Feeling like a burden
  - Feeling alienated
  - Depression / Anxiety
  - Hopelessness
Top Reasons Teens Give for Having Suicidal Thoughts or Intent

- Trauma and abuse – past and present
- Real or imagined pressure to be “perfect”
- School Failure
- Bullying
- Not being accepted for who they are
- Not feeling cared for or loved
- Addiction
  - Cutting
  - Drugs / Alcohol
  - Eating Disorders
The brain of most adolescents will not reach full development until age 25 – this makes the way they think unique.

Effects on thought and behavior
- Unstable mood
- Trouble establishing cause and effect or making predictions
- Difficulty understanding the consequences of actions
- Impulsivity/risk taking
- Rely less on experience and memory when making decisions
Youth Brain Differences

- Teens have less ability to correctly identify emotion in others (looking at facial expressions)
  - Increases the likelihood that teens will interpret their parents as more angry than the parents actually feel
  - Increases the chance the teen will believe their parents will be angry if they mention suicide
Why They Do Not Ask For help

- Fear that school counselors will tell their parents

- Parents don’t “think anything is wrong with me. They tell me to ‘get over it’ and think I’m just looking for attention”

- I don’t want people to “freak out”

- I don’t want to be taken to the hospital
Why They Don’t Ask For Help

- It will make things worse for my family
- I don’t want to scare my mom and make her cry
- No one cares about me
- They (parents and counselors) don’t know the “real” me. They only see the happy person I pretend to be
  - Connected to the pressure to be perfect
Risk factors indicate the teen is at greater risk for a suicidal crisis (ideation, attempt, and/or completion) than other teens who do not have the risk factor(s) in question. The greater number of risk factors present, the greater the chance the youth will become suicidal.

Warning signs tell us that a suicidal crisis may be in progress. The youth may already have a plan and intend to act on it.
Risk Factors

- Mental health disorders: Bipolar, depression, anxiety, OCD, Schizophrenia, & certain personality disorders
- Substance use
- Poor coping skills
- Feeling alienated
- Impulsivity / Aggressiveness
- History of trauma or abuse
- Grief / Loss
- Easy Access to lethal means
- Lack of protective factors
- History of past attempts
- Family history of suicide / mental illness
Warning Signs

- Detailed plans
- Talking about a desire to die or kill oneself
- Investigating or collecting means (internet searches, collecting pills)
- Expressed feelings of hopelessness, feeling trapped, or talk of unbearable emotional pain
- Talking about being a burden
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Appearing anxious, agitated, or acting reckless
- Sleeping changes
- Withdrawing and isolating
- Expressed rage or revenge talk
- Extreme mood swings
Protective Factors

- Restricted access to highly lethal means
- Feeling safe asking for help
- Access to mental health services (therapy / counseling and medication or either alone)
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution, & coping with problems in a non-violent way
- Cultural & religious beliefs
- Natural supports
Is Suicide Contagious

- The short answer: Yes and No
- Studies indicate the youth at risk for suicide contagion are youth already at risk for suicide
- After a peer suicide, those at greatest risk are youth who:
  - Have a history of attempts
  - Are already dealing with stressful life events
  - Are preoccupied with thoughts of death and dying
  - Have experienced other losses
- The closer the relationship to the person who died, the greater potential for negative impact
- Respond to risk factors and warning signs and seek help if you are concerned
Possible Reactions to a Suicidal Crisis

PARENT
- Panic and anxiety
- Fear
- Denial
- Helpless

YOUTH
- Panic and anxiety
- Fear
- Helpless and hopeless
- I must be crazy to have thoughts of suicide
Basic Components of Suicide Intervention/Prevention

- Information from the Maine Suicide Prevention website
  - Show you care
  - Listen carefully
  - Ask about suicide
  - Ask directly in a caring non-confrontational way
  - Get help
  - Stay with the person, call the crisis line for guidance
Creating a Safe Environment to Discuss Suicide

- Manage your own reactions to suicide
  - Be self-aware
  - Understand how what you say impacts your child
    - Don’t make them feel stupid, crazy, or like a burden

- Maintain a collaborative relationship
  - **Listen** thoroughly to your child’s story to attain a shared understanding (empathy) of his/her suicidality and the reason they think suicide will help
  - Accept your child’s feelings without judgment
Ways to Ask

- Ask early
- Ask directly:
  - Are you thinking about suicide
  - You look really down. Sometimes when people are sad they have thoughts of suicide. Are you having any thoughts of suicide
  - Sometimes when people are (fill in the blank) they are thinking of suicide. Are you
Why Talking About Suicide Helps

- Talking helps the person think about new ways to see their situation and to see how their feelings connect.
- Negative emotions can be released by talking about why dying by suicide sounds like a solution.
- People learn about their feelings by hearing themselves talk.
- It relieves internal stress and pressure.
What to Do

- You don’t have to assess your child alone
  - Call the crisis line for 24/7 consultation with a Mental Health Professional

- Reassure your child you are going to help them and you are not disappointed or angry with them

- It is good to show concern and emotion, but stay in control – take charge and do not allow fear or denial to defeat you
Making the Environment Safe

- Ask if they have a suicide plan and if the means are available
  - Remove or restrict access to the means

- Collaboratively identify ways to improve safety
  - Ask: “What will make you feel safe?”

- If the means for the suicide plan are available in your home, secure them. Secure all medications (Rx and OTC) and sharps; reduce access to hoses and ropes in the garage

- All guns in your home should always be secured. If you don’t own guns ask: How long would it take to get a gun
Consider Counseling/Therapy

- Too urgent to wait weeks, but not urgent enough for the ED
  - Call the crisis line 24/7 to discuss options
- Private insurance
  - Call the number on the back of your insurance card or visit your carrier’s website
- Apple / Medicaid
  - Call Access to Mental Health 888-693-7200
  - Monday – Friday 8 am to 5 pm
  - Complete the online form at www.oaww.org 24/7
An Idea for the Future

- What if we, as parents and as a community, put the same effort into suicide safety as we do into driver safety
- What if we didn’t wait to see risk factors and had preventive talks with our kids about suicide the same way we do about drunk driving
- Imagine a future where we don’t feel ashamed of asking for help or getting help for our children
References

- Maine Suicide Prevention Program: Frequently Asked Questions For Parents @
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
  [http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
- Washington State DOH website
  [http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InjuryandViolencePrevention](http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InjuryandViolencePrevention)
- Snohomish Health District website
  [http://www.snohd.org/Portals/o/Snohd/Living/files/AssessmentResultsFINAL8x11.pdf](http://www.snohd.org/Portals/o/Snohd/Living/files/AssessmentResultsFINAL8x11.pdf)
- Headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation
Additional Resources

- Suicide Prevention Resource Center
  http://www.sprc.org/basics

- With Help Comes Hope (a Lifeline project for people living with suicidal thoughts)
  http://lifelineforattemptsurvivors.org/

- National Alliance on Mental Illness, Snohomish County
  http://www.namisnohomishcounty.org/

- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
  http://www.nctsn.org/resources

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
  http://www.samhsa.gov/suicide-prevention