

Powerful Parenting for May 25, 2022

We hope you find this information useful, inspiring, challenging, helpful, sobering, insightful, etc. If you want to be added or taken off this list, just let us know. If you know someone who could benefit from it, pass it along. If you have any comments, concerns, want to be added or deleted from this list, e-mail david@claytonbaptistchurch.com.

Practical Ways to Help Teenagers Who Are Struggling With...

SUICIDE is the second leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 10 and 34. Suicide is a heavy subject. Many fear that bringing up the topic, or even the word, will cause someone to think about it. However, this is not the case. Talking openly and honestly about suicide makes students feel safe and more supported. Some students will be more upfront about thoughts of suicide, while others may hide their plans.

A brief note on self-harm. Self-harm can result because of a few factors. For some, it serves as a distraction from intense emotional pain. For others, it can be because they have a feeling of numbness and self-harm brings the result of feeling something. It can also become a way of communicating to others that they are hurting and desperate for help. However, it's not always a form of communication. Some will be very secretive about self-harm and are solely focused on bringing some sort of temporary relief. Because it brings temporary relief, it can be reinforcing, and students can continue to come back to the behavior to deal with painful or overwhelming feelings. One of the most common triggers for self-harm is the feeling of rejection. Self-harm does not always mean suicide; however, the behavior is a sign for deep pain that could lead to suicidal tendencies and attempt.

5 Tips for Walking with Students Who May Be Suicidal

1. Talk about it. If you think a student is suicidal, talk about it. You won't give them ideas or put the thought in their head. Students need a calm voice that is more interested in understanding their feelings rather than a fearful, anxious, or critical voice. Things to ask:

* "Are you feeling suicidal?"

* "Do you have a plan?"

* How detailed is the plan, do they know how they would do it, what's the time frame, do they have access to things like firearms, meds, etc.?

* Determine the severity of their current state. Do they need to go to the ER?

2. Show Love. Students need to feel, hear, and see that they are loved. Repeatedly, tell them how much you care about them and love them.

3. Be Empathetic. Remember to validate the students' feelings. Make statements and comments that express empathy instead of telling them how they should feel.

4. Stay in Touch. Get friends, teachers, coaches, youth ministers, small groups leaders to call, text, use social media, meet up for coffee, or go on a walk. Keep relationships going.

5. Parents are critical. Many students are afraid to tell their parents or talk with them about what they are feeling. Others can be a safe person the student can bring along to talk with the parent. Parents are primary in getting students help.

DEPRESSION. Alongside of anxiety, depression is also one of the most diagnosed disorders in the United States. Depression involves severe symptoms that affect how a person feels, thinks, and handles daily activities like eating, sleeping, and/or working or school. In 2020, it was estimated that 4.1 million adolescents between 12-17 had at least one major depressive episode (NIMH, Major Depression, 2022). How can we show up for them? Here are a few ways...

- 1. Encourage Professional Help.** You don't have to have all the answers, but having a trusted list of professionals to refer to is key. Counseling, Medical Professional, and/or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy are all things a student could benefit from.
- 2. Be Supportive.** Validate their emotions, not unhealthy behavior.
- 3. Be Compassionately Curious.** Ask questions gently and patiently. Don't try to solve the problem, simply be present.
- 4. Notice the Positive Things.** Make sure to notice the small things, encourage them in that.
- 5. Partner with Adults in students' lives.** Don't keep this a secret. It's not a "scarlet letter." Sometimes students will tell a teacher, coach, or youth worker something they are reluctant to share with a parent. Use all your resources!
- 6. As much as possible, keep students engaged in life.** Let others help you with this.

ANXIETY. In 2021, the CDC officially declared a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health. The Coronavirus pandemic has only increased and intensified the situation around mental health. Even more so than adults, adolescents and young adults are fighting for their lives behind hidden doors, unsure of where to go, or who to talk to. Janet Haag (2019) brings painful statistics to the frontline that, "1 in 5 Americans have a diagnosable mental health condition. 50% of these conditions show up by age 14; 75% by age 24, so it should come as no surprise that 1 in 5 youth ages 13-18 lives with significant mental health challenges, depression and anxiety topping this list." Anxiety is the most common mental health illness diagnosed in the United States. Here are some practical ways to care for students:

- 1. Help the student slow their breathing.** Slow, deep breaths are key. Practice breathing WITH them. Check out apps like Calm or Headspace.
- 2. Walk and Talk.** Sometimes students just need to step away from everything and take a break. Go on a walk around the building with them, to a park, etc.
- 3. Talk openly about anxiety.** The goal isn't to get rid of their anxiety, but manage it. Find other people who are further along on their anxiety journey that can be an encouragement to the student.
- 4. Talk with Others.** Teachers, coaches, youth workers and others can help students and parents walk this road.
- 5. Seek professional help.** The list could include counselors, outpatient clinics, health care facilities, etc.