

## October 10<sup>th</sup> Event – A Community Conversation about Suicide

*The following questions were submitted but not able to be addressed at the October 10<sup>th</sup> event. The answers have been provided by a team of mental health professionals from LPS.*

### **Q: What would you tell your child to do or specifically say to someone who has told them they want to die?**

One first step is clarify “are you thinking about suicide?”. It is okay to encourage your child to ask questions to their friend like “are you serious?” or “what makes you feel that way?”. But the most important thing is to not just assume someone is joking and to tell a **caring trusted adult** right away. Depending on their age, you might give more or less detailed information on how to respond, but **it is always important to make sure kids know who to tell** if they are worried about a friend. It is helpful to encourage your child to talk directly to an adult instead of making an anonymous report, but in some situations (like seeing an online posting of someone and not knowing their full name, etc.) it might be necessary to make a report to [Safe2Tell](#).

### **Q: What is the best way to support families who have lost children to suicide?**

Every family is different and moves through the journey of grief in their own way. Many families say that they feel isolated and that people avoid talking to them. Just being a good friend is the most important thing you can do. Reach out and touch base without being overbearing. It's normal to worry about what to say and if you should avoid talking about the child who died. However, talking about their child/brother/sister can be a helpful way to move through the stages of grief. In general, be understanding, stay connected, and don't be afraid to ask them what helps them to feel supported.

### **Q: What does depression look like at various developmental stages in children and adolescents? Can children “recover” from depression?**

It is important to understand what depression is. Depression can be caused by any combination of factors that relate to physical health, life events, family history, environment, genetic vulnerability and biochemical disturbance. Depression is not a passing mood, nor is it a condition that will go away on its own without proper treatment. Depression can look several different ways. The classic signs of depression include changes in appetite and/or sleeping (either more than usual or less than usual), low energy, a lack of interest in things that have previously been interesting, isolation, tearfulness, pervasive sadness, and a case of the “blahs” that goes on for longer than two weeks. Some less obvious signs that happen frequently in children and teens are increased sensitivity and reactivity, crankiness or irritability, social isolation, angry outbursts and tantrums, complaints of various physical pains, and difficulty concentrating.

And yes, children, teens and adults can recover from depression! Healing can be a combination of many things that helps people move through depression. Play therapy, individual therapy and/or family therapy have all been proven to be helpful. Regular sleep patterns, healthy eating and physical activity and time outdoors is also very important. For some people, medication is a necessary and temporary support to help get their biochemistry back in balance.

**Q: What LPS resources are available to families who have a child experiencing significant mental health challenges?**

Every LPS school or program has a mental health professional on staff to support students. These include Counselors, Psychologists, or Social Workers who are trained in crisis intervention, social emotional support, and community resources. These professionals can help work with the student and family to determine which school interventions or services might be applicable. They can also connect you with other more specialized resources such as the LPS Collaborative Intervention Program, which helps students and families to access mental health assessment and services in the community.

**Q: How can parents or caregivers who care about students participate in suicide awareness and assistance training?**

First, remain positively connected to your child. Listen well, ask open ended questions, and get to know what is going on in their life and the lives of their friends. Trust your gut. If you are worried about your child or another child you know, reach out and connect them to help. If you aren't sure what signs of concerns are, there are many training programs available. LPS offers SafeTALK, a three-hour training for suicide awareness and ASIST, a two-day intensive training on how to intervene with a suicidal person. For more information on these trainings, contact the [LPS Office of Social, Emotional & Behavior Services](#).

**Q: Is there anything we can do if we ask a student/child if they are struggling with suicidal thoughts but they say no and we don't feel safe leaving them?**

Most importantly, it is important to let the child know that you care and that it is always okay to talk to you if they are struggling. If you aren't convinced that the child is going to be safe, you can use the [Colorado Crisis Services](#) network by calling the [24 hour hotline](#) for advice or taking the child to the [24 hour crisis walk in center](#) for evaluation. Also, when anyone is struggling with suicidal thoughts, it is important to be aware of restricting the possible means of them harming themselves. This would include dangerous objects, medicines, weapons, etc. and not leaving someone alone until they have talked to a mental health professional. The Colorado Dept. of Public Health has developed a [helpful document about safeguarding your home for suicide prevention](#).

**Q: We have seen more and more mental issues in younger children. We have seen kids as young as ten being suicidal at our school. How young is it acceptable to talk about suicide with kids?**

We know that kids develop understanding about suicide based on their age, developmental level and individual personality. General education about how to be healthy and how to deal with difficult feelings is important for younger students. By 3rd or 4th grade, most students have heard the word suicide and begin to form ideas about what it means. We can all help students by teaching them how to talk about their feelings, how to keep their body healthy and what to do if they see or hear something that is scary or unsafe. When a suicide impacts the child or their friends and family, it is important to be honest and allow them to ask questions but to avoid giving too many details that might put traumatic images in their mind. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention offers a helpful document entitled [Talking to Children About Suicide](#).

**Q: Can suicide and mental health issues affect anyone? Can you speak to the differences in impact in various racial/ethnic, religious, sexual orientation or socioeconomic groups?**

We know that suicide impacts all cultures in all countries of the world. Some research has shown that particular cultures and communities experience lower rates of mental illness and suicide (such as South America) but there is not substantial understanding of why. Research also confirms that young people who identify as LGBTQ are at a greater risk for suicide and report a higher amount of suicide attempts.

**Q: Can we hear more about culture change as it relates to Sources of Strength?**

The focus of Sources of Strength is to help students build culture change through activities that focus on strengths, hope and healing. This occurs through activities and events that student leaders promote throughout the school to help create a positive and resilient culture. Adult Advisors are trained and then help guide Peer Leaders who provide leadership to the activities and events in the school. You can find out more about Sources of Strength at <http://www.sourcesofstrength.com>.

**Q: How can students get involved in Sources of Strength?**

Students should reach out to their School Counselor or Principal to ask about how they can get involved with Sources of Strength. Since it is new to LPS, each school is at a different stage of implementation. Students can volunteer to participate but ultimately the peer leaders are chosen by staff in order to get a diverse and representative group of students. All students can support Sources of Strength by participating in the activities and events and helping spread the culture of positivity, strength, and resiliency.

**Q: How can community members support the implementation of Sources of Strength in LPS?**

One way is to ask students what they know about Sources of Strength and make connections to organizations and people in the community who are natural supports for them. Even just reinforcing the language of strengths is helpful. Parents can also get involved in PTOs or other groups that might help support the efforts of the students and staff who are leading the initiative in their school.