



## Adolescent Suicide Information for Adults who Care About Adolescents November 2006

### Why does it matter?

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people aged 15-24
- Males are four times more likely to die of suicide than are females
- Females are more likely to attempt suicide than males (Source: The Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent Suicide, 1999)

### Who is affected?

- Suicide can affect anyone; it does not discriminate between socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity or sex
- The number one cause of suicide is untreated depression.
- Of the many millions of Americans who suffer from depression in any given year, 80% can be effectively treated, but only 30% seek help and of that number, slightly more than half are accurately diagnosed and receive appropriate treatment.
- Depression is a total body illness that affects a person's thoughts, feelings, behavior, physical health and appearance.
- Ninety percent of adolescent suicide victims have at least one diagnosable, active psychiatric illness at the time of death---most often depression, and substance abuse. (Source: Suicide Awareness-Voices of Education)

### What are the warning signs?

- Talks about committing suicide
- Has trouble eating or sleeping
- Experiences drastic changes in behavior
- Withdraws from friends and/or social activities
- Loses interest in hobbies, work, school, etc.
- Prepares for death by making out a will and final arrangements
- Gives away prized possessions
- Has attempted suicide before
- Takes unnecessary risks
- Has had recent severe losses
- Is preoccupied with death and dying
- Loses interest in their personal appearance
- Increases their use of alcohol or drugs

### What can you do?

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or feelings are good or bad. Don't lecture on the value of life.
- Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
- Don't dare him or her to do it.
- Don't act shocked. This will put distance between you.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
- Offer hope that other options are available but do not offer glib reassurance.
- Take action. Remove means, such as guns or stockpiled pills.
- Get help from persons or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention. (Source: American Association of Suicidology)

### What to do if a person asks for help:

- Stay: Do not leave the person alone unless there is risk of harm to yourself. You don't need to say much and there are no magic words. Your voice and manner will show your concern. Avoid arguments and advice giving.
- Listen: what might seem trivial to you can be overwhelming and consuming to the person in pain.
- Get Help: Be a link, a lifeline...call for help. (Source: yellowribbon.org)