

TALKING WITH YOUR STUDENT ABOUT SUICIDE

What to Say and Do

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of depression. These may include feelings of sadness, excessive sleep or inability to sleep, weight loss or gain, physical and emotional fatigue, continuing anxiety, social withdrawal from friends or school, misuse of drugs or alcohol and related symptoms. Intervene and get professional help and resources if necessary.
- Ask them about what they are feeling, thinking and doing. Open communication helps students talk freely about their concerns and seek support. Make yourself available to talk with your student often. Avoid being critical or judgmental; listen, don't immediately "fix" the problem.
- Provide support if your student expresses thoughts related to suicide or shares stories of suicide attempts. Guide him/her to professional staff who can give assistance.
- Listen and pay attention to language related to hurting themselves or others, wanting to "go away" or "just die," or similar ideas. Such expressions always should be taken seriously. Respond with support and access resources to provide further counseling or guidance.
- Encourage your student to be attentive to their peers and quickly report to a university staff member any threats, direct or indirect, that suggest the possibility of suicide. Students often are aware of such threats among their peers before others and can serve to support peers and provide resources. Talk about the idea that being a true friend means not keeping secrets that could lead to someone being dead.

Adapted from North Dakota State University