
Aspiranet

~September 2023~

Monthly Regulation Topic

Suicide Prevention

September is National Suicide Prevention Month and therefore an important reminder to review suicide risk factors, warning signs, as well as preventive and protective factors for reducing risk. Resource parents can help with the following strategies to reduce their child's risk of suicide and promote their mental health:

- **Encourage your foster child to talk with you.** Although many parents are afraid to ask their foster children if they have considered suicide or methods of self-harm, asking youth if they have thought about suicide does not increase their risk. In fact, a child may feel relief and reassurance knowing that in this foster home it is okay to talk about these feelings. Your interest can counter the child's feeling that no one cares or understands.
- **Listen:** Truly listen to what your child or youth has to say. Remind them that you or another caring adult will be there to listen when they are ready to talk. Remain open and non-judgmental. A child might want to open up to you but be afraid to do so unless asked. Take their problems seriously. Some children and youth may feel threatened by your concern and may become upset or deny having problems due to difficulty with trusting others. Validate their feelings and struggles with statements such as, "I can hear you're really angry".
- **Provide Reassurance:** Let your child or youth know that help is available, that they are not alone and that you will support them through it. Reassure them that sharing their difficult feelings or struggles will not result in them being removed from your family. Let them know that Aspiranet and other professionals are there to help as well.
- If you are concerned that your foster child may be considering suicide, ask some specific questions in a way that does not judge or threaten the child. You may want to be very direct and simply ask the question:
 - "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
- Or you can start the conversation indirectly by asking one of the following questions:
 - "Do you ever wish you could go to sleep and never wake up?"
 - "Sometimes when people feel sad, they think about hurting or killing themselves. Do you ever have thoughts like that?"

Warning Signs for Suicide

The following may indicate risk for suicide; especially if the behavior is new, recently increased, and/or seems related to a recent painful event, loss or change:

- a. Increase in suicidal ideation, talk or behaviors.
- b. Increase in verbal statements of hopelessness, expressions of feeling trapped, or having little purpose in life.
- c. Expressions of seeking revenge or rage.
- d. Change in family social support, increased conflict with parents or withdrawal from friends.
- e. Change in abuse of drugs or alcohol.
- f. Recent disclosure of sexual or physical abuse.
- g. Rejection of family, friends or social support related to gender identity or sexual orientation.
- h. Increase in bullying (either as victim or aggressor).
- i. Significant change in sleep patterns; inability to sleep or constant sleep.
- j. Recent loss of a loved one (death, divorce, break-up, etc.).
- k. Recent hospitalization or discharge from hospital for suicidal thoughts, talk or behaviors.
- l. Contagion (recent suicide in community, school, family, etc.).
- m. New diagnosis of a mental health condition (particularly depression, PTSD or eating disorders).
- n. First episode of psychosis.

Immediate Intervention

Please notify Aspiranet as soon as possible if you observe these behaviors or your foster child discloses any of the above. If you have concerns that a child or youth in your care is expressing suicidal thoughts or behavior, **contact Aspiranet immediately**. Aspiranet has specific tools to screen and assess suicide risk and determine a plan to address risk and safety, including the possibility of contacting a psychiatric assessment team for further assessment, if needed. Please contact your Aspiranet Social Worker during normal business hours or the Aspiranet On Call Social Worker after hours.

For situations of **immediate** suicide risk **call 911**. Provide constant supervision of the child/youth to monitor their safety until emergency services arrive.

Also available 24 hours/7 days a week is National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255). This service is available to individuals who are considering suicide, as well as to those providing support to suicidal individuals.

When there is a concern regarding suicide, check your home to be sure that all potentially dangerous items are locked and inaccessible, including firearms, knives, scissors, razors, rope, belts, medications, toxics, etc.

Protective Factors

Protective factors are characteristics and conditions that reduce the likelihood of suicide. Protective factors that can help youth through the trials of adolescence and reduce the impact of suicide risk factors include:

- Supportive relationships with caregivers
- Connections to family, friends, & community (extended family, teachers, peers, social workers, mentors, coaches, clergy, etc.)
- Safe environment (home and school)
- Positive peer relationships
- Problem solving and coping skills

One the most important protective factors for children and youth is feeling connected to parents/caregivers.

Resource Parents play a key role in your child/youth's well being and assisting with a sense of "connection" by doing the following:

- Being emotionally supportive of your child/youth
- Listening to your child/youth
- Engaging in enjoyable activities together
- Ensuring your child/youth's health and mental health needs are met

Aspiranet Suicide Screening & Safety Planning

In order to screen for possible suicide risk, Aspiranet Social Workers screen all children age 12 and older within the first week of placement, annually, and whenever needed, using specific suicide screening and assessment tools. Depending on the level of risk and if risk is immediate, Aspiranet will utilize the following to address the child/youth's risk and safety:

- If needed, further assessment by a Psychiatric Assessment Team or at a hospital emergency room: to determine if child/youth needs to be hospitalized for safety reasons.
- Safety Plan: developed to reduce safety risks within your home, plan for supervision, and identify those to contact for assistance as well as youth's coping skills. It's very important that Resource Parents and the youth agree to follow the safety plan, and therefore, the youth and Resource Parents are asked to participate in developing the safety plan.

As always, please share all your observations, concerns, and questions about the children and youth in your care with your Aspiranet Social Worker in order for you and children/youth in your care to receive the best support and services.

Adapted from: <https://www.sprc.org/> ; <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/blueprint-for-youth-suicide-prevention/risk-factors-protective-factors-warning-signs-of-youth-suicide/>

Please sign and return this page to your Aspiranet Social Worker for training credit.

My signature below indicates that I have completed the September 2023 "Suicide Prevention" training.

Signature Resource Parent #1

Date

Print Name Resource Parent #1

Signature Resource Parent #2

Date

Print Name Resource Parent #2

Aspiranet Authorized Signature

Date

Training credit: ____ minutes