

## **COMMUNICATING WITH THE STUDENT AT RISK FOR SUICIDE** (Adapted from Willamette ESD)

<b>MAKE SURE TO....</b>	<b>MAKE SURE NOT TO...</b>
<i>Be Accepting.</i> Even if you do not agree with the student's perceptions of the problems or solutions, it is important that you compassionately accept those perceptions as theirs for the moment and acknowledge their right to them.	<i>Act shocked.</i> This may be interpreted as rejection.
	<i>Be judgmental</i> about what the student is saying.
<i>Use Active Listening.</i> Take the time to listen carefully to the student and focus on the student's feelings. Validate with the student your understanding of what the student is saying and feeling by paraphrasing what they are telling you. Attend to your own perceptions and intuition.	<i>Minimize the student's problems or reactions.</i>
	<i>Argue about the moral aspects of suicide.</i>
<i>Use Constructive Questions.</i> The use of constructive questions can help the student separate and define problems, remove confusion, and provide some clarity on the availability of options.	<i>Tell the student to go see a counselor and then avoid any further contact with them</i>
	<i>Try to make the student feel guilty</i> about the pain their suicide would cause family or friends; that pain may be exactly what they are trying to accomplish!
<i>Be Resourceful.</i> Help the student define alternatives and explore other sources of support. Explore previously used coping strategies, <u>affirming</u> positive efforts and actions and identifying further options.	<i>Treat the student as different or fragile</i>
	<i>Remove normal behavioral expectations for the student</i> (nevertheless, to decrease or eliminate identified stressors can be extremely helpful to a student who is feeling overwhelmed.)
<i>Get Help for Yourself.</i> The best way to get help for yourself when you have talked to a student at risk for suicide is to share such information with others while maintaining confidentiality. It may be helpful when faced with such a decision to ask yourself, "If the student committed suicide tonight, whom would I wish I had told today?"	<i>Agree to keep student's suicide ideation, threats, or attempts confidential.</i>

### **CONCEPTS TO EMPHASIZE** (adapted from Willamette ESD)

When speaking with a student who is at risk for suicide, it is important to communicate a number of the following key ideas:

- Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.
- Emphasize that all people experience emotional highs and lows in their lives.
- Emphasize the temporary nature of problems and that the crisis will pass in time.
- People don't often want their life to end- they want their problem to end.

"Problems must be handled one at a time." Focus on problem solving and help the student explore options. Try to take a positive approach by emphasizing the student's most desirable alternatives.

"There is hope for the future." Immediately upon sensing the possibility of suicide, it is important to introduce the concept of hope to the student. Focus on the future.

"People care." Tell the student that you care, and offer support. Those who attempt suicide may feel worthless, alone, and unloved. Letting the student know that they are not alone and that you and others care is important.

"There is help available." Assure the student that you will help him or her in addition to referring them to another resource person. Sometimes students are referred to a counselor and then abandoned by the person making the referral. If a student picks you to talk to, then there is already some trust in you. While the student may be seeing an outside professional, he/she could still benefit from your support and understanding.