

## Teen Suicide

Teen suicide is a subject that most of us would like to avoid so when it affects our own family members, sometimes our denial can prevent us from seeing the signs. It is so easy to fall into the common stigma that teen suicide only occurs in troubled broken families or in children who have been abused or neglected. It is hard to believe that it could happen to *my* child. However, teen suicide can happen in all socioeconomic levels and even in the “healthiest” of families. Teen years are difficult even in the best of situations. Trying to fit in and find your place in the world is a tough thing especially with the surge of puberty hormones. So spend time talking to your teen. Ask your teen what is bothering them. Listen with an open mind and probe deeper into any feelings of sadness. Don’t be afraid to ask the hard questions: “Have you ever thought of hurting yourself or had feelings of not wanting to live anymore? Do you have any plans to escape and end it all?”

It is important that mental illness is regarded as any other disease process such as diabetes or asthma. Like any illness, signs and symptoms need to be identified and addressed. Warning signs may include a drop in grades, lack of personal hygiene, expressions of sadness, anger, irritability, anxiety or boredom. Other behaviors to watch for include withdrawing from friends/family, changes in appetite or sleeping habits, loss of interest in regular activities, and using of drugs or alcohol. Report right away if your child is hurting themselves, or talking about suicide or wanting to die. Go to the nearest emergency room if you think your child is a suicide risk. If you are uncertain, your pediatrician can help you assess the risk and refer you to the proper psychiatrists and therapists. Of course safety proofing your home is essential. Limit your child’s access to harmful items such as guns, medication, knives, etc. Most important know that help is available to both you and your child. You do not need to be alone in this.