

## QUESTIONS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE

### **Q- Mom, can we talk?**

A-This is a question that will either make parents and caregivers ecstatic or run for the hills. When your child or teen comes to you with this question it is important that you make time for them. Be open and listen to what they have to say. They could want to talk about why chocolate is bad for your dog or about how they have been feeling sad lately. No matter the question, always be sure that your child knows they can talk to you and that they will be loved and supported.

### **Q- Why is mom sad all of the time?**

A-Young children often do not understand mental health. Depending on the age they can understand general emotions based off of what they have felt. While they may not understand the entirety of it, it is important to be open with children about mental health when it impacts them directly. If a family member is experiencing depression and a child asks about it, ask them what they have noticed. “Mommy sleeps a lot.” “Billy doesn’t want to play with me anymore.” “Dad yells a lot more.” Explain that mommy has a sickness called depression that makes her feel sad a lot and that she is getting help from a doctor that will make her feel better soon. Reassure young children that they cannot catch depression from someone and that they did not cause it. It is important that your child know that they can talk to you about how they feel and ask any questions they may have. Some older children may not want to talk about it a lot. If you think your child needs additional support in understanding or coping with a family member’s mental health issues, contact a mental health professional.

### **Q- My friend told me that she has been going to therapy because she is depressed. I don’t know what to say to her because I don’t want to say the wrong thing. What should I do?**

A-Your child may feel unprepared to talk about mental health but you can help them feel confident to talk to their friend. Make sure your child understands that it is not easy to talk to someone about mental health issues because there is a lot of misinformation and stigma surrounding it. They must be considered a good friend if she is opening up to them. Express that they should keep their friend’s information confidential and not to talk to other friends or classmates about it. Your child can support their friend by letting her know that, even though they don’t know a lot about depression, they care about her and are there to talk whenever she needs to.

### **Q- I feel like I can’t do anything right lately and like I’m just not good enough. I feel like nothing seems to help. What should I do?**

A-This is a very serious question and can signal that your child may be experiencing symptoms of a mental health issue. Ask your child when they started feeling this way and to give examples when they felt like they were not good enough. Sometimes kids may be facing troubles with friends or with a class in school that parents are not aware of. Reassure your child of how much they are loved and how talented they are. Consult or make an appointment with a mental health professional to rule out things like depression or anxiety. If your child is making concerning statements, be direct and ask they have thought about not wanting to be alive anymore or ending their life.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE** *(continued)*

**Q- My friend hasn't been talking to me a lot lately and when she does talks about not wanting to be alive anymore. Should I talk to her about it? I don't want to make her mad.**

A-Your child has already taken one of the most important steps when a friend discloses ideas of suicide, talking to a trusted adult. It is your job to reassure your child that they did the right thing by asking you and explain that their friend is talking about something very serious that needs to be shared with people who can help her. It is likely that your child will respond with some push back to the idea of sharing with others. Your child does not want to upset their friend. As the adult, you should contact the school or the friend's parents if you have their contact information. If it is an emergency, contact police and give him the friend's personal information and your concern. Start a dialogue with your child about depression and ask them who they would talk to if they felt that way. Remind your child that you are always there for them.

**Q- What is suicide?**

A-Suicide is a very sensitive topic and one that can be difficult to discuss. Many experts suggest that less is more with young children who have not been affected directly by suicide. If your child hears about it in passing or on television, explain that it means that someone died because they have a disease that makes them very sad. If you are talking to an older child you can explain that someone can have a disease called depression that makes them very sad all of the time and they do not think there is anything that will make them feel better. Because they feel this way, they do something to themselves to end their life so they can end their sadness. For children who have been impacted directly by suicide, you can add that it is not their fault, they did not cause it, and they could not have stopped it. Start a discussion with your child about who they would talk to if they ever felt very sad and remind them that you are always there for them.

**Q- Mom, what is a therapist? Why do we have to take John to the therapist after school sometimes?**

A-Most young children do not understand the complicated terms related to mental health. When talking to young children, keep the conversation simple and relate it to something they have experienced. You can relate it to your child going to the doctor when they don't feel well. "John has not been feeling good lately and the therapist talks to him and helps him feel better just like the doctor helps you feel better."