

# Guidance Guide

## Suicide Prevention

*By Allison Parr-Plasha, M.S.S.A., L.S.W., C.P.C.C., Guidance Counselor*

A few weeks ago I attended a conference on suicide prevention. Although the conference was important and helpful, it was also disheartening. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people ages 10-24 years old. Statistics also indicate that there has been a significant increase in the suicide rates of 9-14 year olds in the last decade.

When I started in the field over twenty years ago, the stigma of asking for help when struggling with mental health issues was alive and well. I assumed early in my career that this stigma would dissipate if not disappear because of the statistical evidence that indicates that counseling/asking for help works for most people. Tragically though, the stigma remains. As a result, so many children, young people and adults are not getting the help they so desperately need. In my opinion, many people do not need to be walking around depressed or anxious. It is often very treatable. And when it comes to many of us, including our children, it is preventable.

We will **all** need extra support for our emotional well-being at some point in our lives. To deny this fact is to perpetuate the mental health problems that are on the rise. No one dies from allowing themselves to feel, rather the dramatic and tragic consequences of suicide, depression and anxiety often stem from the rigid avoidance of what makes us human, our emotional selves.

So how can we help our children? Pay attention to your own biases about asking for help. What kind of messages are you sending to your children? Let your children know that we all need emotional support at some point and that there are trained professionals that specialize in working with adults and children. If you have a therapist, consider normalizing this and letting your children know. You don't need to give them details. We see our family doctor for well-visits and when we aren't physically feeling well and we can see a therapist or someone in

the helping role when we are not feeling well emotionally and are in need of extra support.

Encourage increasing your children's EQ (emotional quotient). Talk about your feelings and encourage your children to talk about their feelings. Never dismiss their feelings. Feelings don't always make sense and they certainly aren't always logical. Reassure them it's okay to be sad or angry and they don't have to know why they are experiencing uncomfortable emotions. Our Middle Schoolers' hormones are changing dramatically which can impact mood. If you child has a hard time expressing their emotions, give them paper and see if they can draw/paint their emotions. Have a journal close by and see if your older child would be willing to write out their feelings. Feel free to pass notes between each other and express your emotions through writing.

I was a huge fan of the movie Inside Out. It's an excellent movie about emotions and could be a great tool to use with your children when helping them identify what they are feeling.

Working as a college psychotherapist for ten years taught me that all the intelligence in the world will get you nowhere if you are not emotionally healthy. I witnessed students who were at the top of the class in high school fail out because they didn't know how to manage their feelings.

*Continued on reverse*



If your child is experiencing significant distress and you feel like all of your efforts in the home are not working, ask for help. If you feel like your efforts are working, but you or your child could use extra support, ask for help. If there are big changes in your household that are stressful, ask for help.

And if your child isn't showing outward distress but is still going through a significant change (i.e. divorce, loss of loved one, a new move, etc.), ask for support (prevention).

Your child spends a lot of time in school. Part of asking for help is letting the school be made aware of their current concerns/stressors so that we can be an extra set of eyes and ears and offer the extra support we all need in times of distress.

Please don't hesitate to get a hold of me if you have any questions or concerns.

## *Erie Day School Motto*

May I live each day being mindful of the goodness that surrounds me.

May I always stretch my mind and heart so that I live my life in wisdom and love.

May I be a loyal friend to others and willingly help those in need, and may I always honor and respect the earth of which I am a part.



# Erie Day School

*Learning today, leading tomorrow.*

Erie Day School  
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If you have any questions, comments or additions to the *Guidance Guide*, or know someone that should be included on the email distribution list, please contact Allison Parr-Plasha at 814-452-4273 or via email at [aplasha@eriedayschool.com](mailto:aplasha@eriedayschool.com)

Erie Day School  
1372 West Sixth Street  
Erie, PA 16505  
814-452-4273  
[www.eriedayschool.com](http://www.eriedayschool.com)