

Mental Health Safety Guide for Parents

Creating connections between adults and students is critical towards maintaining a safe and healthy school environment. Students need at least one positive connection with an adult they can trust and turn to for advice or support without fear of shame or reprisal. Maintaining an open line of communication between students, parents and school staff ensures that troubled students get the help they need before contemplating a dangerous act.

The following list includes some of the key warning signs of mental illness identified by the *American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. These signs usually aren't one-time occurrences but persist over several weeks.

- Marked change in school performance.
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities.
- Marked changes in sleeping and/or eating habits.
- Many physical complaints.
- Sexual acting out.
- Depression shown by sustained, prolonged negative mood and attitude, often accompanied by poor appetite, difficulty sleeping or thoughts of death.
- Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Intense fear of becoming obese with no relationship to actual body weight, purging food or restricting eating.
- Persistent nightmares.
- Threats of self-harm or harm to others.
- Self-injury or self-destructive behavior.
- Frequent outbursts of anger, aggression.
- Threats to run away.
- Aggressive or non-aggressive consistent violation of rights of others; opposition to authority, truancy, thefts, or vandalism.
- Strange thoughts and feelings; and unusual behaviors.

The Safe School Initiative, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service, identified the following warning signs as being related to acts of targeted school violence:

- Talk of feeling bullied, persecuted or injured by others.
- Experienced or perceived major losses in their lives.
- Revenge fantasies, creating plans, "hit lists", or making "wait and see" comments.
- Violent fantasies which may be expressed through verbal statements, artwork or personal writing or in the content of reading, movies, websites or game play.
- A fascination with weapons or explosives.
- Cruelty to animals.
- Access to weapons.

If you observe any of these signs in your child, a friend of your child or if your child reports his/her concern to you about another student, please contact the school administrator or counselor immediately. If you suspect a young person may pose a danger to themselves or others, and it is after school hours, please contact the Escondido Police Department.

Students and parents are an important part of prevention efforts. Together we can maintain schools that are safe, comfortable and conducive to student learning.