Youth in Fairfax County are not immune from the pressures in life. The Fairfax County Youth Survey, given annually to all Fairfax County Public Schools students in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades, provides important information on student behaviors and experiences along with the risk and protective factors that influence their well-being. The students’ responses underscore the need for increased awareness of depression and suicide prevention, and to provide guidance on how to intervene and seek help.

- 29% OF STUDENTS REPORTED DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS
- 16% OF STUDENTS REPORTED CONSIDERING SUICIDE
- 4% OF STUDENTS REPORTED ATTEMPTING SUICIDE

Parents and guardians play an active role in keeping their children safe. Knowing the warning signs and seeking out immediate help for their children when something is wrong is one obvious way. Less obvious, but equally important, is being proactive in building your child’s resiliency (or the ability to bounce back from adversity) to help keep things right.

All youth have the capacity for resiliency and parents and guardians can foster its growth. Adopt a resiliency attitude by communicating to your child that what is right with them is more powerful than anything that could be wrong. Focus on strengths rather than weaknesses and help your child see how these assets can be used in solving problems. Surround your child with environmental protective factors (see page 2) that build resiliency and form a protective web around your child in times of adversity. Most of all, it is vital to ensure that your child has at least one caring, trusted, and supportive adult in their life. This can be you.

Facts About Youth Suicide: Erasing the Myths

- Most suicidal individuals have a desire to live. They are just unable to see alternatives to their problems or pain.
- Suicide is preventable. Most suicidal individuals give warning signs regarding their suicidal intentions. Thus, there is a need to take all signs seriously.
- Suicide cuts across all social and economic boundaries.
- Asking individuals if they are thinking about suicide does not increase the risk of suicide. It actually helps determine if immediate help is needed.
- Individuals that have made a suicidal attempt are at an increased risk for future attempts.
Warning Signs of Suicide: Take All Signs Seriously

- Noticeable signs of serious depression
  - Unrelenting sadness or hopelessness
  - Angry mood with chronic irritability
  - Constant pessimism
  - Limited interest in usual activities
  - Lack of energy or motivation
  - Social withdrawal or isolation
  - Feeling worthless or guilty (with no apparent reason)
  - Changes in eating or sleep patterns (too much or too little)

- Recent impulsiveness or taking unnecessary risks
- Expressing thoughts of death or suicide (talking or writing)
- Making a plan
  - Giving away prized possessions or making a will
  - Attempts to obtain means of seriously harming oneself

Building Resiliency

Resiliency is the capacity to overcome adversity by responding in healthy and productive ways to successfully meet life’s challenges. Building resiliency in youth is a critical strategy in the prevention of suicidal ideation and behaviors.

Parents and guardians can promote resiliency by surrounding their children with these six environmental protective factors*:

- Provide care and support
- Set high, but realistic, expectations for success
- Provide opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution to others
- Increase positive bonds and connections
- Set and maintain clear boundaries
- Develop needed life skills

*Resiliency in Action - www.resiliency.com

Resources on the Web

FCPS Resiliency Website  
www.fcps.edu/dss/ips/resiliency/index.shtml

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
www.afsp.org

Stop a Suicide Today - www.stopasuicide.org

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education  
www.save.org

24 Hour/7 Days Emergency Services

911 - in an acute crisis, call 911

Crisis Link Suicide Hotline  
703-527-4077 or 1-800-SUICIDE

Mental Health 24-Hour Emergency Services  
703-573-5679

Woodburn Community Mental Health Center  
3340 Woodburn Road - Annandale, VA 22003  
703-573-0523

How You Can Prevent Suicide: Tips for Parents

- Know the warning signs of suicide
- Keep the lines of communication open
  - Consider having a weekly family meeting to discuss activities, school, friends, successes, and to provide a forum for problem-solving
  - Talk with your adolescent about depression and suicide, and let him or her know help is always available

- Make it a priority to know your child and your child’s friends
  - Actively involve yourself in the activities in your child’s life

- Learn about school and community resources
  - Seek out help through your school psychologist, school social worker, or school counselor at your child’s school or your family doctor if you have concerns

- Suicide-proof your home
  - Make knives, pills, and above all else, firearms inaccessible

- GET HELP IMMEDIATELY if your child indicates he or she is contemplating suicide
  - Do not leave your child alone
  - Seek out professional help from emergency services