PART I: How Parents Can Prevent Bullied Kids from Suicide
An expert gives parents tips on suicide prevention in their bullied child, assuming that the parent already knows of the bullying.

Bullied kids (ranging from adolescents to teenagers to college students) who commit suicide is a topic that’s been appearing more and more lately in the news.

In many of these cases, the parent is well-aware of the bullying, even to the extent of getting counseling or therapy for their child, such as was the case of Rebecca Ann Sedwick, 12.

Her mother, Tricia Norman, was acutely aware of the cyberbullying of her daughter, and took several measures to resolve the problem, including homeschooling her and then enrolling her in another school. Norman also filed two complaints to the original school.

Despite the proactivity of the mother, Rebecca committed suicide by jumping off a silo. Could this have been prevented?

What can parents do that will turn a bullied child away from the idea of suicide?
For this article, I consulted with Jane Timmons-Mitchell, PhD, child clinical psychologist, and senior research associate at the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education; The Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, at Case Western Reserve University.

To help prevent a bullied child or teen from suicide:
Timmons-Mitchell first recommends restricting access to lethal means. Though in the case of Rebecca, this would not have mattered, we can safely bet that in many cases of suicide or attempts at ending one’s life, it can make all the difference in the world, since sometimes, the tormented victim takes lethal action in his or her own home.

We have to wonder if Jordan Lewis, 15, would be alive today had he not gotten a hold of his father’s handgun at his home and killed himself, leaving a suicide note explaining that he could no longer tolerate being bullied. Though a kitchen knife can be lethal, it’s a lot easier for a distraught individual to grab a gun and pull the trigger than to start gashing himself.

Timmons-Mitchell doesn’t say to get rid of your weapons, but to at least use a gun safe for your gun. For prescription drugs, she says to lock them up in a place unknown to your kids.

“Find out if your child has a mental illness, like depression,” says Timmons-Mitchell, who heads the StandUp Bullying Prevention Program. “Most youth who die by suicide have a mental illness, and often it is unknown or untreated.”
Has your child’s school suggested a mental health assessment for your son or daughter? If so, take it seriously; follow up on it, urges Timmons-Mitchell. Don’t blow this off and think you have everything under control. Many parents of bullied teens, who killed themselves, believed they had the problem under adequate management.

Timmons-Mitchell next says that parents should supervise activities. “ Teens think that they deserve a lot of private, unsupervised time, especially in cyberspace,” she begins. “If you have a concern about your teen’s behavior, restrict unsupervised time, or find a way to monitor the activities.”

A tip-off to the type of depression that signals a serious problem is when a teen or younger child retreats from an activity that they previously were passionate about, warns Timmons-Mitchell.

“Often, a depressed teen will ask to stay home to play videogames,” notes Timmons-Mitchell. Be alert to a sudden shift in interests.

To help prevent your bullied teen or child from choosing suicide, you must be extra vigilant as far as learning the who, what, where and when with your child’s socializing, says Timmons-Mitchell.

Have the transportation plans, arrival times and departures laid out (sounds like air travel plans, but seriously, parents who are worried about suicide need to be extra vigilant).

Trust your gut instincts. If your gut tells you that certain kids just aren’t “good” for your own child, then restrict him or her from interacting with those suspicious kids.

Talk to your teenager or younger child about suicide. One of the biggest myths about suicide is that talking about it will put such ideas into a vulnerable person’s head. The opposite is true: Patiently and non-judgmentally engaging your bullied child into deep discussions about the value of life can be very effective at redirecting the teen or adolescent’s train of thought in the right direction.

If this means you must be up all night in conversation, when you have to be at work early the next morning, then so be it. Your workplace will survive without you.

**Additional Ways to Help Prevent Suicide in Bullied Kids**

Seek a sanctuary-type environment for your son or daughter. This means a place where nobody judges, excludes, questions or criticizes. A high quality martial arts school is a bully-free zone that often offers social activities outside of classes. Having attended a number of martial arts schools, I know this to be a fact.

“A very good way to involve kids who may be experiencing depression is through faith-based activities,” says Timmons-Mitchell. “A large place of worship usually has many active programs and adults who are ready to mentor, and it doesn't cost anything.”
PART II: Why Don’t Most Bullied Kids Commit Suicide?
Just how prevalent is suicide among bullied kids, and why don’t more of them engage in this course of action?

The suicides of bullied kids have been a strong topic in the news over the past several years, and it seems as though this kind of tragedy has increased in frequency of actual occurrence, not just frequency of reporting, but one good fair question is to wonder why don’t more victims of bullying commit suicide.

“Since estimates are that one in six kids are bullied (17%), and only less than one percent of kids die by suicide, most youth who are bullied do not die by suicide,” says Jane Timmons-Mitchell, PhD, whom I interviewed for this article. She is a child clinical psychologist, and senior research associate at the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education; The Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University.

Why don’t all bully victims turn to suicide?
Certainly there are differences in the bullied kids who take their lives (or attempt to but fail simply due to a miscalculation) and the ones who frequently only think about this, and the third group: the ones who rarely, if ever, consider this as an option.

Some bullied kids are at higher risk for a suicide attempt than others, says Timmons-Mitchell, who heads the StandUp Bullying Prevention Program. Many bullied kids imagine the idea of “ending it all” and think things like, “If I did it, nobody would miss me,” but like Timmons-Mitchell states, only 0.01% choose this permanent solution to a temporary problem.

“Protective factors can neutralize risk factors, and this is probably what happens,” she says. Have you ever thought of killing yourself? What stopped you from attempting this?

Perhaps it was a goal “to live for,” says Timmons-Mitchell.

Here are some other factors that explain why not all or most bullied kids attempt suicide:
Having positive friends, a supportive family, doing well in school, avoiding drugs and alcohol, and “being engaged in extracurricular activities that involve interpersonal contact, such as sports, music, clubs,” says Timmons-Mitchell. She adds that when kids have pride in their unique skills, this “can lessen the likelihood” of a suicide attempt.

Another factor that cannot be ignored is the availability of the lethal instrument. What if Morgan Musson’s stepfather’s painkillers had been hidden that fateful evening when she
decided to end her life via drug overdose? Would this 13-year-old victim of bullies have grabbed a kitchen knife? Would she have walked to the nearest busy street and jumped in front of a car? Would she have simply curled up on her bed and cried herself to sleep and awakened the next morning instead of being dead the next morning?

What if bully victim Jordan Lewis, 15, never found his father’s handgun? Might he have instead simply wrote in a diary and then binged on ice cream, then at the most suffered indigestion instead of dying from a gunshot to the chest?

Timmons-Mitchell says that “separating kids from lethal means, such as guns and substances, decreases the likelihood of dying by suicide. Even kids who are depressed don’t always make an attempt if the means aren’t readily available.”

It’s easy to say that if a child is determined enough, they’ll find a way, such as Rebecca Ann Sedwick, 12, who went as far as climbing to the top of a grain silo and jumping to her death. But let’s face it: Sometimes the inconvenience of carrying out a plan is all it takes to cancel the plan. And maybe by next day, the plan of suicide won’t be as appealing.

Source:
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-85296/Suicide-girl-aged-13-bullied-6ft.html

PART III: Bullied Kids Who Commit Suicide vs. Ones Who Don’t: Comparison

Find out the differences between bullied kids who commit suicide and the ones who would never entertain this idea, let alone attempt it.

Is there a difference between the bullied kids who make a suicide attempt (whether they succeed or not) and those who would never consider such an extreme act?

To find out, I consulted with Jane Timmons-Mitchell, PhD, child clinical psychologist, and senior research associate at the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education; The Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University.

Timmons-Mitchell points out that most bullied kids do not commit or attempt suicide. So is there something unique about the ones who do?

They may be reacting to a recent incident, she says. This could be a dramatic escalation in the bullying such as an alarming threat, or a physical altercation with one of the bullies. It could be a sudden increase in the number of bullies ganging up on the victim.

A breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend could send someone over the edge, but this isn’t a bullying incident; it’s heartbreak. However, in a teen or adolescent who suffers from
daily harassment and especially threats at the school place, one incident of heartbreak can be all it takes to make them hastily make a permanent decision.

“If a bullied kid has undiagnosed or untreated depression, or is abusing substances, these factors might differentiate between those who exhibit and do not exhibit suicidal behavior,” explains Timmons-Mitchell, who heads the StandUp Bullying Prevention Program.

**Risk Factors that Can Separate Bullied Kids Who Commit Suicide from Those Who Don’t**

Timmons-Mitchell provides the following risk factors for suicide from the Adverse Childhood Events scale:

- An abusive home life: recipient or witness
- Neglect from parents
- Divorced or separated parents
- Family member has done prison time
- Family member has mental illness
- Family member has a substance abuse problem
- Unmet basic needs (food, clothes, etc.)

What about protective factors that can suppress a suicidal plan in a bullied child?
- A supportive family
- Participation in extracurricular activities
- Setting future goals
- Supportive friends who support those goals
- An adult role model and mentor (who isn’t necessarily a parent)

One has to wonder how often a bullied child, who commits suicide, regrets taking this action while they are dying or about to die (such as while falling from a leap from a high height).

I’m reminded of a true story I saw on a TV show called, “It’s a Miracle.” It also appeared in the Reader’s Digest, but I can’t find it anywhere online. But it’s a remarkable story of a man, plagued by debt and relationship problems with his young daughter’s mother, who decided to kill himself by jumping off a bridge over a major city river.

He survived and reported that the moment he jumped, he regretted it as he plummeted. While thrashing in the water (he couldn’t swim), he didn’t know that in the distance, a woman in a large rowboat full of women had seen him leap.

He had desperately wanted to end his life, then regretted this while flailing in the water, while the women who began rowing towards him for the rescue were fighting for their lives: They were breast cancer survivors.

They were in a rowing group for BC survivors and had been struggling to row the boat, oars going every which way, signals getting crossed, the canoe going in endless circles.
But once they realized that in the distance the thrashing figure was a man who had fallen from the bridge, the oars magically moved in perfect unison and the canoe charged straight ahead at full speed. The man ultimately “adopted” the women as his mothers.

**Suicide vs. Survival in the Bullied Child**
If you’re a bullied teen or adolescent who’s been contemplating suicide, you have a chance to avoid an irreversible decision. Don’t be one of the bullied kids who commits suicide. Be one of those kids who survives the bullying.

**PART IV: Parent Checklist to See if Bullied Teen Is at Suicide Risk**
*Here’s a checklist that parents can use as a guideline to see if their bullied teenager is at risk for attempting suicide.*

Feeling suicidal and actually attempting it are not the same point on the continuum, so here is a checklist to see if your bullied teen is at an increased risk for making a suicide attempt.

**Suicide Risk Checklist for Bullied Teenagers:**
- Depression and other forms of mental illness. Does your teen seem to be depressed lately? This can manifest in the form of excessive sleep, weight loss in the absence of an intentional diet, withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities, episodes of crying, listlessness, apathy and a disposition of sadness or bleakness.

- Increased time playing video games and other seemingly aimless computer activities. More than four hours a day of screen time correlates to depression in teens, says Timmons-Mitchell, who heads the StandUp Bullying Prevention Program.

- A drop in school attendance.

- A drop in grades.

- An unexplained or puzzling quitting of a sports team or other structured activity that your teen has always been passionate about.

- Increased time spent alone or online.

- Increased irritability.

- Expressions of hopelessness.

- Making alarming comments like, “I just want to die,” or, “The world would be better off without me.” Such comments need to be considered within the context they’re being spoken.

A teen boy might say, “I just want to die,” after tripping in front of the girl he wants to ask to the prom. This doesn’t mean he might be suicidal. But if a bullied teen says with a
haunting sincerity, “Maybe I SHOULD kill myself like all those Facebook posts say,” then this is cause for serious exploration.

- Concerns that are being expressed by teachers, friends and others in close proximity to the teenager.

- Sudden shift from depression to happiness. Though this may seem like an improvement, the happiness may actually be the result of figuring out a solution to all the bullying and misery: suicide. The teenager now has the solution, and is thus quite chipper.

- Giving away prized possessions. This is a big alarm bell. Though it may have some valid context, such as the family is moving into a smaller house, and the teenager seems to have outgrown the prized possessions, such as a tattered teddy bear or an art project she made in the seventh grade, the giving away of valued possessions should never be ignored if it seems to be out of the blue, and especially if the possessions carry a lot more prize than some old art project or stuffed animal, such as an expensive piece of jewelry.

Though this checklist isn’t the be-all end-all, it’s a good place to start when gauging the suicide risk of a bullied teenager.