

Suicide Warning Signs

1 in 10 high school students indicate they have attempted suicide. Most measures of suicidality in teens have increased over the last 10 years. Parents should know the warning signs, learn how to start a conversation and know what to do in a mental health crisis.

Signs of Suicide

Most people who attempt suicide give some warning, but this is not always the case. Pay attention to your child's behavior for warning signs.

Talking, writing, or drawing about death

Talking about:

- Having no reason to live
- Being a burden to others
- Not being here tomorrow

Feeling hopeless, desperate or trapped

Looking for ways to attempt suicide

Giving away possessions

Loss of interest in the things they care about

Behaving recklessly

Anger, irritability, violence

Source: CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2021 Report, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>

Protective Factors Against Suicidality

Behavioral changes and social support can help prevent crisis and lower the risk of teens attempting suicide. Develop a plan to make sure your child has some or all of these protective factors in place.

- Coping and problem-solving skills
- Connections to family, friends, school, and community
- Supportive relationships with caregivers
- Access to health care
- Limited access to lethal means
- Strong sense of personal and cultural identity

Source: CDC Suicide Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/factors/index.html>

Tips for Starting a Conversation

Many children experiencing suicidal thoughts are unable to reach out for help due to feelings of guilt, shame or fear. Do not wait for your child to start the conversation.

- Choose a time to talk when your child feels safe and comfortable.
- Speak in a calm and straightforward way.
- Watch your child's reactions and slow down or restate if your child becomes confused.
- Listen openly and let your child tell you about their feelings and worries.
- If talking is difficult, ask them to write something or share an example.

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DO

- use “I” language in talking about feelings.
“I feel worried that you quit the soccer team.”
- start with specific signs you have noticed.
“I heard you moving around the house last night. Are you having trouble sleeping lately?”
- ask directly if your child is thinking about suicide or self-harm.
“Have you been having thoughts of suicide?”

Source: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention <https://afsp.org/>

DON'T

- dismiss how they're feeling as routine or as something that will get better on its own. Instead, **reassure them that you support them and will help them find help.**
- ask questions that will only give you a yes/no answer. Instead, **ask open-ended questions** such as, *“When do you notice that your thoughts are the most intense?”*
- promise confidentiality. Instead, say, *“It's really important that you be honest with me about what you're feeling. I may need to tell someone else who can help you, so you don't have to feel this way anymore.”*

Getting Help for Your Child

You can reach out to a professional, like a licensed mental health counselor, a guidance counselor at your child's school or your child's pediatrician.

Free Resources

988 available 24 hours/day

- Call or text (988)
- National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline offering mental health crisis support.

NAMI HelpLine

Mon-Fri, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. ET

Call: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

Text: “HelpLine” to 62640

Chat: nami.org/help

Email: helpline@nami.org

Nationwide peer-support service offering information, resources, and referrals to local support networks.

If You Believe Your Child Is Considering Suicide

Do not leave them alone.

Remove harmful objects. Give them space and do not make them feel trapped.

Listen, express concern, and reassure.

Focus on being understanding, caring and nonjudgmental.

Guide them to professional help.

If they already have a therapist or other health care professional, call them. If not, research possible resources.

Ask questions to get more information.

- Are you having thoughts of suicide?
- Do you have a plan?
- Would you be willing to talk to someone?

Resources for starting a conversation

<https://nami.org/Your-Journey/Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults/Kids/How-to-Talk-to-Your-Child-About-Their-Mental-Health>

