



WAYS TO TALK TO CHILDREN

Identifying and Addressing Suicide

Tips to Promote Child Well-Being and Resilience

Discussing Suicide

Suicide is an emotional, overwhelming, and most times scary topic to discuss with anyone, let alone a child. So if comments or thoughts regarding suicide are expressed, most likely without warning, it can be an unnerving experience and leave you as a parent/caregiver feeling concerned and uncertain as to how to help. You may be worried about what to do, what to say and whether you are improving the situation or not by your efforts.

We have put together some information to assist you in navigating an experience like this.

Identifying the Risk Factors and Warning Signs

One of the first steps to understanding suicide and whether someone may be considering this, is knowing the risk factors and warning signs that may be present for that individual. Knowing these means improved awareness and earlier detection/intervention when needed.

Risk Factors:

- Identity challenges: gender or sexual orientation
- Mental health concerns: anxiety and/or depression
- Substance use, misuse, or abuse
- Major loss (relationships ending or death)
- Peer pressure/bullying/cyberbullying (either as the victim or bully)
- Public humiliation or shame
- Severe chronic pain, medical condition, or illness
- Impulsivity and aggression
- Access to weapons
- Family history of suicide

Warning Signs:

- Perception that crisis is inescapable
- Verbal threats, "I want to die, no one cares, no one will miss me when I'm gone."
- Drastic mood swings that feel like personality changes
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Reduced self-esteem
- Loss of interest in hobbies
- Decline of academic performance
- Inability to concentrate/make decisions
- Frequent school absences
- Intentional oppositional/defiant behavior
- Weight loss or gain
- Paranoid tendencies and/or secrecy
- Self-harm or threats of harm
- Reckless behaviors: driving, substance use, law-breaking
- Increased isolation/disconnection from peers
- "Final arrangement" behaviors - deleting social media posts, giving away possessions
- Suicide notes - letter, social media post, text



The Suicide Prevention Lifeline "do's and don'ts":

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| ✓ be willing to listen, non-judgemental | ✗ don't act shocked - this just creates distance |
| ✓ get involved, become available | ✗ don't dare him/her to attempt/do it |
| ✓ be direct, take action to remove means | ✗ don't tell the individual to "get over it" |
| ✓ get professional support for you and child | ✗ don't make empty/uncontrollable promises |

Five Action Steps for Communicating with Someone Experiencing a Suicidal Crisis

1. **Ask** - "are you thinking about suicide?" shows that you're open to speaking about it in a non-judgemental and supportive way.
2. **Be there** - whether physically present, or on the phone, checking-in or constant communication increases feelings of connection and decreases feelings of isolation.
3. **Keep them safe** - "do you have a plan" will assist in understanding their thoughts regarding self-harm and help to mitigate danger. Remove means to cause harm, and remain with them or collectively move to a safe space until support arrives.
4. **Help them connect** - initiating support that is ongoing and sustainable is crucial to continued wellbeing and maintaining mental health. Research support groups or individual mental health services. Creating a safety plan may also assist the individual in ways to connect and regulate during moments of crisis.
5. **Follow up** - continued contact reiterates connection and acts as a buffer for later risks or crisis situations.

- Summarized from #BeThe1To

Suicide Safety Plan

- You can make a Safety Plan online at: <https://mysafetyplan.org> or use a template provided by the Suicide Prevention Lifeline.
- This outlines the following information:
 - Warning signs that a crisis may be developing
 - Internal coping strategies that are effective
 - People and social settings that provide distraction
 - People who can be asked for help
 - Professionals or agencies that can be contacted during a crisis
 - Ways to make the environment safe
 - A reminder of something that is important and worth living for



Suicide Crisis Resources

- Call **911** in the event of an emergency.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
 - Call 1-800-273-TALK (273-8255)
 - Text HOME to 741741
- Call **211** for resources or mobile crisis unit
- **BeThe1To** is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's campaign which has resources and support. <https://www.bethe1to.com>
- **Lifeline Chat** is a web chat service that connects individuals with counselors for emotional support. <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>
- **Social media reporting:** If you are worried about someone on social media, you can contact safety teams, who will reach out to connect the user with the help they need.
- **The Jed Foundation online** is a non-profit with resources, helplines, handouts and videos. <https://jedfoundation.org>
- **The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)** is a federally supported resource center which has resources, programs, trainings and information about legislation. <https://www.sprc.org>

Scan for Resources



www.centerforchildcounseling.org

Telephone: 561-244-9499
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