

# SUICIDE AWARENESS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Learning that a loved one is feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts can be frightening and overwhelming. The topic of suicide may be difficult to bring up with your loved one. This document will help support you and your family.

Recognizing the warning signs is an important first step in suicide prevention. Increasing our knowledge can help us feel more comfortable starting the conversation, providing opportunities for our loved one to share their concerns, and to help them get support.

**If you become aware that someone is suicidal, take action and get help immediately. (Resources on pg 2)**

## General Information

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among individuals aged 10-24 (NIMH, 2017)
- 17.7% of high school students reported seriously considering suicide (CDC, 2017)
- Suicide can happen to any person, in any family, at any time!
- **Suicide can be prevented and recovery is possible**
- You are not alone, help and support is available (reach out to your support system, mental health professional, resources listed on pg 2)
- Youth contemplating suicide frequently give warning signs about their distress
- **Tips to reduce risk:** ◆Teach and model healthy habits for mental health (i.e. self care, taking breaks as needed) ◆Check-in regularly beyond day to day tasks of chore and homework completion ◆Help them learn from mistakes and how to overcome challenge with flexibility and resiliency ◆Encourage problem solving skills and conflict resolution skills ◆Boost self-esteem with specific praise (i.e. “You showed kindness when you shared with your sister”) ◆Develop a sense of purpose (i.e. encourage hobbies, clubs, sports, involvement in places of worship) ◆Get help from a therapist.

## Signs to Look For:

**The following *F.A.C.T.S.* (warning signs) may mean that your youth is at risk.**

**Feelings:** Expressing hopelessness about the future or having no reason to live, talking about being a burden to others, stating they are trapped or feel worthless

**Actions:** Displaying severe/overwhelming pain or distress, looking for a way to kill themselves like searching online or buying/collecting lethal means, giving away personal items

**Changes:** Withdrawing or isolating from friends/family, changes in social activities, mood swings (anger, hostility) sleeping/eating more or less, sudden improvement in mood after a period of being down

**Threats:** Talking or writing about wanting to die or death (“I wish I were dead,” “Life doesn’t seem worth it”), making plans for suicide

**Situations:** Experiencing stressful situations including those that involve loss, break-ups, change, personal humiliation, getting into trouble (home, school, law)

**Additional warnings signs & risk factors:**

Lack of support support or sense of isolation

Easy access to lethal means (for example: guns, medication)

Increase in drug and/or alcohol use

Taking dangerous risks/increases in risky behaviors

Neglecting personal appearance

History of trauma

Previous attempts or family history of suicide

Exposure to others who have died by suicide (media or real life)

Frequent complaints about physical symptoms (stomachaches, headaches, fatigue).

**Rev 5.2020**

# What Should I Do if I Believe My Child is in Immediate Danger?

If you recognize signs of suicide in your child or you have a sense your child is thinking about suicide, it is important to take immediate steps to get support for you and your loved one.

## **Emergency Information/After Hours Services:**

If you need IMMEDIATE help, call 911.  
Access and Crisis Line 888-724-7240

## Here is What You Can Do:

One of the most helpful things you can do, if you are concerned your child is thinking about suicide, is to compassionately listen. Here are some suggestions to start the conversation.

**NOTICE:** *“Is everything okay? I’ve noticed that you have been…”*

- State the specific behavior or language that is concerning to you (i.e. sleeping more, avoiding friends, not playing with your soccer team). It will show that you are paying attention.

**CARE:** *“I’m concerned. This isn’t typical for you. You are important to me.”*

- Let the person know that you care and validate the experiences or feelings shared with you. *“Tell me more. I’d like to understand what it’s been like for you.”*
- Avoid overreacting or underreacting. Overreaction can close off future conversations. Underreacting may make us feel better, however any thoughts or talk of suicide should always be taken seriously.
- When your child starts to open up, be careful not to jump in with solutions “you should” or “why didn’t you?”

**ASK:** *“Sometimes when people feel lonely or down, they think about wanting to kill themselves. Are you thinking about ending your life?”*

- Ask directly about suicide. Asking about suicidal feelings doesn’t encourage people to think about suicide, or put an idea into their head.
- Normalize uncomfortable feelings, *“We all go through scary or tough times. What is scary about this time for you?” “I’m here for you. How can I help?”*
- Ask about the problem your loved one is facing (break-up, feeling isolated, feeling worthless). This can make it easier to bring it up in the future *“I wanted to ask you again about your break-up. How are you feeling now?”*

**HELP:** *“Let’s get some help.”*

- Let them know you are there *“I am going to keep supporting you and I will make sure you get the help you need to feel like yourself again.”*
- Call the Access and Crisis Line at 888-724-7240 or a mental health provider

**CONSIDER:**

- Timing is everything. It’s time to have the conversation. Select a moment when you will be able to get your child’s attention and they will be able to listen and share (maybe a car ride). Let them know you are ready to listen, when they are ready to talk.
- Ensure all lethal means are out of reach and locked away (medications, sharp objects, firearms, etc)

## Resources for Parents/Caregivers and Youth

### **Community Hotlines:**

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
(800) 273-TALK (8255) (24 hours)  
Trevor Lifeline- (866) 488-7386 (24 hours)  
Teen Line- (800) 852-8336 (6pm-10pm, daily)  
Access and Crisis Line- (888) 724-7240 (24 hours)

### **Text and Chat Resources:**

Crisis Text Line– text “HELLO” to 741741 (24 hours, daily)  
Teen Line– text “TEEN” to 839863

### **Online Resources:**

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>  
<https://teenlineonline.org/>  
<https://afsp.org/about-suicide/>  
<https://educatorsandselfinjury.com/>  
<https://namisandiego.org/>

### **Smartphone Apps:**

MY3  
Calm Harm  
VirtualHopeBox  
MindShift



Above information gathered from: American Counseling Association: Suicide Prevention TIP Sheet, The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. **Rev 5.2020**