

A Quick Guide to Having the Conversation:

Talking with Your Child About Suicide, Hopelessness, & Emotional Pain

Sometimes parents notice small changes but feel unsure how to bring it up. The goal of this conversation is not to have perfect answers. It is simply to create a safe space where your child feels seen and heard.

Even a short, caring conversation can help a child feel less alone.

Before You Begin

If you are worried about your child, it is normal to feel afraid, unsure, or overwhelmed. Take a moment to breathe. Your goal is not to solve everything in one conversation. Your goal is simply to create a safe space where your child feels heard and supported.

Many parents worry they might say the wrong thing. What matters most is showing up with care and willingness to listen.

Ways to Open the Conversation

You don't need a dramatic moment to begin. Simple observations can create a natural opening.

You might try saying:

- "I've noticed you seem like you've been carrying a lot lately. Do you want to talk about it?"
- "You don't seem like yourself recently, and I just wanted to check in."
- "I care about you and wanted to see how you've been doing."
- "You don't have to handle everything alone."

The goal is to communicate concern, not pressure.

When It Is Time to Ask Directly

Many adults worry that bringing up suicide might put the idea in someone's head. Research shows the opposite is true. Asking directly can actually help someone feel understood and supported.

If your concern becomes stronger, it is okay to ask clearly and calmly.

For example:

"Sometimes when people feel overwhelmed for a long time, they start thinking about hurting themselves. Have you had thoughts like that?"

Direct questions reduce shame and open the door for honesty.

What Matters Most

- Stay calm
 - Listen more than you speak
 - Avoid interrupting or correcting their feelings
 - Focus on understanding rather than fixing
 - Remind them they are not alone
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If They Don't Want to Talk

It's common for children or teens to shut down at first. This doesn't mean the conversation failed.

Avoid forcing them to open up immediately. Instead, focus on keeping the relationship safe.

You might say:

- "You don't have to talk right now if you're not ready."
- "Just know I'm here whenever you want to talk."
- "You matter to me, and I care about what you're going through."

Sometimes the first conversation simply lets them know they are not alone.

If Your Child Says They Want to Die

Hearing this can be frightening. The most helpful response is calm presence.

Focus on helping them feel safe enough to keep sharing.

Helpful responses include:

- Stay as calm as possible
- Thank them for trusting you
- Listen carefully without interrupting
- Take their words seriously
- Ask gentle questions if needed
- Stay with them if you are concerned about their safety
- Seek professional help as soon as possible

You might say:

“I’m really glad you told me. I know that wasn’t easy.”

or

“I care about you so much, and we’re going to get through this together.”

Responses That Can Shut Down the Conversation

Sometimes well-meaning statements unintentionally dismiss someone’s pain.

Try to avoid phrases like:

- “You’re overreacting.”
- “It’s not that bad.”
- “You have so much to be thankful for.”
- “Other people have it worse.”
- “You’ll grow out of it.”

Even encouraging words can feel invalidating when someone is deeply hurting.

What Helps Instead

Listening with compassion is often more powerful than offering solutions.

You might respond with:

- “Thank you for telling me.”
- “That sounds really heavy.”
- “I’m really glad you shared this with me.”
- “You don’t have to go through this alone.”
- “We will figure out the next steps together.”

Feeling understood can reduce the isolation that often fuels suicidal thoughts.

If They Ask You Not to Tell Anyone

Children sometimes fear getting in trouble or disappointing their parents.

You can acknowledge their concern while still prioritizing their safety.

For example:

“I’m really glad you trusted me with this. You’re not in trouble. But when someone is hurting this much, it’s important to get extra support. We’ll figure out the next steps together.”

Whenever possible, involve them in the process so they feel included rather than controlled.

Signs the Conversation Is Helping

Your child may:

- begin sharing small pieces of how they feel
- show relief after talking
- return later to continue the conversation
- express emotions they had been holding inside

Even small moments of openness are meaningful progress.

A Step Many Parents Forget

After a difficult conversation, many parents assume the crisis is over once the talk ends. In reality, follow-up is one of the most important parts of supporting a struggling child.

In the days and weeks after the conversation:

- Check in regularly
- Ask how they are feeling that day
- Continue listening without judgment
- Help connect them with professional support
- Keep reminding them they matter

Healing rarely happens in one conversation. What matters most is continuing to show up.

If Immediate Help Is Needed

If your child is in immediate danger or talking about harming themselves:

Call or text **988**
Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
Available 24 hours a day.

If you believe someone is in immediate danger, call **911**.

You do not have to handle this situation alone.

Final Encouragement

If you are reading this because you are worried about your child, your concern already matters more than you realize.

You do not need perfect words or professional training.

Your willingness to notice, ask, listen, and stay present can help a child feel seen in a moment when they might otherwise feel invisible.

Sometimes hope begins with one caring adult who is willing to start the conversation.

***The most powerful protection a struggling child can have
is one adult who notices, listens, and refuses to look away.***