

# **How to Talk to Your Child About Suicide, Hopelessness, and Emotional Pain:**

## **A Practical Guide for Parents and Caring Adults**

A companion resource to  
*You Don't Have to Die to Make the Pain Stop*

By Katina Lee

### **Permission to Share This Guide**

*This guide was created to help parents, teachers, pastors, and caring adults support children and teens who may be struggling with hopelessness or suicidal thoughts.*

*Churches, schools, counseling ministries, and families are welcome to share this guide freely for non-commercial use. It may be printed, distributed, or shared digitally as long as the content remains unchanged and credit is given to Katina Lee.*

*If this resource is helpful to you or your community, additional materials and support resources are available at [KatinaLee.com](http://KatinaLee.com).*

---

---

## **Introduction**

Talking about suicide can feel frightening. Many parents and leaders worry they might say the wrong thing, make the situation worse, or introduce ideas that weren't already there.

But the truth is this: silence is far more dangerous than an imperfect conversation.

Children, teens, and even adults often carry deep emotional pain without knowing how to express it. Many fear they will be misunderstood, dismissed, or judged if they speak honestly about how they feel.

This guide is designed to help caring adults start conversations that create safety, honesty, and hope.

You do not need to have perfect words.

What matters most is your willingness to listen, stay present, and remind someone they are not alone.

---

## **Why These Conversations Matter**

In recent years, emotional distress among young people has increased dramatically. Children and teens are facing pressures that many adults did not experience growing up.

Social media, academic pressure, isolation, bullying, and anxiety about the future are affecting young minds in powerful ways.

Even in Christian homes and communities, many young people quietly struggle with feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, or being a burden to others.

Some begin to wonder if life is worth continuing.

When these thoughts remain hidden, the pain grows heavier.

But when someone feels safe enough to talk, hope can begin to return.

Conversations save lives.

---

## Common Myths About Suicide

Many caring adults hesitate to talk about suicide because they fear they might make things worse. Unfortunately, several myths prevent people from starting important conversations.

**Myth:** Talking about suicide will put the idea in someone's head.

**Truth:** Research consistently shows that asking about suicidal thoughts does not increase risk. It actually helps people feel understood and supported.

**Myth:** People who talk about suicide are just seeking attention.

**Truth:** Any mention of suicide should always be taken seriously. Often it is a sign of deep emotional pain and a request for help.

**Myth:** Strong faith means someone should not struggle with suicidal thoughts.

**Truth:** Even people with deep faith can experience depression, despair, and emotional exhaustion. Struggling does not mean someone lacks faith.

**Myth:** If someone suddenly seems calm, they must be doing better.

**Truth:** Sometimes people appear calmer after deciding to hide their pain. Sudden emotional shifts should still be taken seriously.

---

## Warning Signs That Someone May Be Struggling

Not everyone who is struggling will show obvious signs, but certain changes in behavior can indicate emotional distress or suicidal thoughts.

Verbal warning signs may include:

- Talking about feeling hopeless or trapped
- Saying things like "I wish I could disappear"
- Saying "Everyone would be better off without me"
- Talking frequently about death or wanting to escape

Emotional warning signs may include:

- Persistent sadness or hopelessness
- Sudden emotional withdrawal
- Increased irritability or anger
- Loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed

Behavioral warning signs may include:

- Withdrawal from friends or family
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Giving away belongings
- Risk-taking behavior or self-harm
- Major personality changes

If several of these signs appear together, it may be time to start a conversation.

## **Bullying, Shame, and Social Pain**

For children and teens, social pain can feel overwhelming. Bullying, humiliation, rejection, or embarrassment may seem small to adults but can feel devastating to a young person.

Some children hide these experiences because they feel ashamed or fear making the situation worse.

Warning signs may include avoiding school, withdrawing from friends, sudden sadness, or unexplained physical complaints.

Taking these experiences seriously helps children feel believed and supported.

---

## **How to Start the Conversation**

Many adults hesitate to bring up suicide because they fear planting the idea.

Research consistently shows that asking about suicidal thoughts does not increase risk. Instead, it helps people feel seen and understood.

You can begin with simple observations.

- “I’ve noticed you seem really overwhelmed lately. Can we talk about what’s going on?”
- “I might be wrong, but you don’t seem like yourself lately.”
- “I care about you, and I’ve been worried.”

If your concern grows stronger, it is okay to ask directly:

“Sometimes when people feel this overwhelmed, they start thinking about hurting themselves. Have you had thoughts like that?”

Asking directly opens the door for honesty.

---

## **When They Don’t Want to Talk**

Sometimes a child may respond by shutting down or insisting nothing is wrong.

Try not to force the conversation. Pressure can cause someone to withdraw further.

Instead, create an environment where they know the door is always open.

You might say:

- “I care about you and I’m here whenever you’re ready to talk.”
- “I don’t have to understand everything right now. I just want you to know you matter.”

Sometimes the first conversation only plants a seed of safety. A child may return later when they feel ready.

---

## If Your Child Says They Want to Die

Hearing this can feel terrifying. What matters most is helping the child feel safe enough to keep talking.

- Stay calm.
  - Thank them for telling you.
    - “I’m really glad you told me. That must have been hard to share.”
  - Listen more than you speak.
  - Ask direct questions if needed.
  - Take the situation seriously even if they say they were joking.
  - Do not leave them alone if risk feels immediate.
  - Seek professional support as soon as possible.
  - Reassure them you are glad they told you and that they are not in trouble.
- 

## Things That Can Shut the Conversation Down

Statements meant to encourage can sometimes dismiss a person’s pain.

Avoid phrases such as:

- “Don’t be silly.”
- “You have so much to be thankful for.”
- “It’s not that big of a deal.”
- “You’ll get over it.”
- “You’re being dramatic.”

These responses can make someone feel misunderstood or ashamed.

---

## What Helps Instead

Listening with compassion is often the most powerful response.

You might say:

- “I’m really glad you told me.”
  - “That sounds really heavy.”
  - “You don’t have to go through this alone.”
  - “We will figure this out together.”
-

## **When They Say “Please Don’t Tell Anyone”**

Sometimes children fear punishment or judgment.

You might respond:

“I’m really glad you told me. You’re not in trouble. But if you’re hurting this much, I want to make sure you get the support you deserve.”

Whenever possible, involve them in the next steps.

---

## **Five Important Things Parents Should Know**

1. Most people who struggle with suicidal thoughts do not truly want to die. They want relief from emotional pain.
  2. Talking openly reduces isolation and shame.
  3. Listening without judgment is powerful.
  4. Professional help can be an important part of healing.
  5. Your presence and care can make a life-saving difference.
- 

## **Protective Factors That Help Children Stay Safe**

Protective factors help strengthen resilience.

These include:

- strong relationships with caring adults
  - faith and spiritual connection
  - healthy friendships
  - feeling heard and valued
  - access to counseling
  - meaningful activities and purpose
  - open conversations about emotions
-

## When to Seek Professional Help

Consider professional support if your child shows:

- persistent sadness or hopelessness
- self-harm behavior
- talk of suicide
- major personality changes
- withdrawal from daily life

Seeking help is a sign of care, not failure.

---

## You Do Not Have to Handle This Alone

If someone expresses suicidal thoughts, involve additional support.

This may include counselors, doctors, pastors, or school professionals.

If someone may be in immediate danger:

- stay with them
- remove access to dangerous items if possible
- contact support immediately

You can call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 or visit [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org).

**Available 24 hours a day in the United States.**

---

## Supporting a Child After the Conversation

Healing usually happens through ongoing support.

- Check in regularly.
- Encourage open communication.
- Reduce isolation.
- Encourage counseling support if needed.
- Remind them often that their life matters.

Small acts of care and consistency can have a powerful impact.

---

## Helping a Child Rebuild Hope

Hope grows through connection, safety, and purpose.

Encourage healthy routines, movement, creative outlets, supportive friendships, and spiritual practices such as prayer or journaling.

Even small steps toward stability can help rebuild hope.

---

## A Prayer for Parents and Caring Adults

God, give me wisdom to see what my child may be struggling to say.  
Help me listen with patience instead of fear and compassion instead of judgment.  
Guide us toward the help we need and remind my child that their life matters deeply.  
Amen.

---

## Prayer From the Author

God, I lift up the person reading these words right now.

You know the worry they carry, the questions they are holding, and the love they have for the child or young person on their heart. When fear rises and they feel unsure what to do, remind them that they do not have to walk this path alone.

Give them courage to start the conversations that feel difficult. Give them patience to listen with compassion and understanding. Help them notice the moments when their presence, their words, or their quiet support can bring comfort and hope.

Protect the child they are caring for. Surround them both with wisdom, guidance, and people who can help carry the weight when it feels heavy.

Let this home, this relationship, and these conversations become a place where honesty is safe and hope can grow again.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

## Final Encouragement

If you are reading this guide because you are worried about someone you love, that concern already matters more than you realize.

Many parents and caring adults worry that they will say the wrong thing or make a mistake in such an important moment. The truth is that love, attention, and presence are far more powerful than perfect words.

You do not need to have every answer.

You do not need to understand everything immediately.

What matters most is that the child or young person in your life knows there is someone who cares enough to notice, to ask questions, and to stay present even when the conversation is difficult.

For someone who feels overwhelmed, ashamed, or alone, a safe conversation can be the first step back toward hope.

Sometimes the most powerful words are the simplest ones:

- “I’m here.”
- “You matter to me.”
- “We will get through this together.”

Healing rarely happens in a single conversation. It grows through many small moments of listening, checking in, and reminding someone that their life has value.

If you are walking alongside someone who is struggling, remember this: you are not alone in that responsibility. Counselors, doctors, pastors, trauma-informed life coaches, teachers, and other caring adults can help carry that burden with you.

And even when the path forward feels uncertain, hope is still possible.

Hope often begins with one person who notices pain and chooses not to look away.

Your willingness to care, to listen, and to stay present may be the very thing that helps someone keep going one more day.

And sometimes, one more day is where healing begins.

*Sometimes the conversation you are afraid to start is the very one that can help save a life.  
Hope often begins with one brave moment of honesty and one person willing to listen.*

*Your willingness to notice pain and stay present may be the reason someone chooses to keep going.*

*God often brings hope through ordinary people who care enough to listen.*

*One caring conversation can interrupt despair, restore hope, and remind someone their life is still worth living.*