

You Should Talk to Your Kids About Suicide

Here's Why.

The most important thing parents can do to prevent suicide is to talk to kids about it. An honest conversation lets teens know they can come to you with issues if they need to.

Of course, suicide isn't the easiest subject to broach. Here are a few tips:

Bring it up naturally.

Leverage TV shows and media coverage of the topic to start a conversation — something like, “Hey, I read an article about this. What do you think?”

Don't worry about “putting ideas in their head.”

A conversation won't make a kid depressed or suicidal. In fact, discussing suicide with teens can mitigate the effects of a suicide in a community, since “copycat” suicides are often fueled by misconception.

Counter the stigma.

Anything a child interprets as stigma or judgment could cause them to shut down and not want to talk about it again. If a kid expresses thoughts of suicide, stay calm. Kids will be hypersensitive about your reaction, and many interpret a fearful reaction as anger, which could enhance their secrecy.

Don't try to fix it.

Instead, hear teens out, be supportive and seek professional help.

Listen, listen, listen.

If a teen's behavior or outlook seems to change, trust your instincts. Seek professional help, and if you think there's an imminent danger, get emergency help right away.



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Depression and suicide

Depression involves feelings of hopelessness, anger and frustration that can last a long time and get in the way of daily life. It's also far and away the greatest risk factor for suicide. The good news: It's treatable with help.

For parents, the process starts with knowing what to look for:

Signs of depression

- Prolonged anger, frustration or tearfulness
- Withdrawal from activities of previously enjoyed
- Loss of relationships or lack of interest in them
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping excessively
- Change in appetite: not eating or eating too much
- Moving or speaking slowly (or too quickly if expressing signs of mania)
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering information
- Changes in academic performance
- Increased thoughts or references to death or suicide, including self-harm behaviors

If your child shows signs of depression, bring it up with your primary care provider, who can refer you to resources.

To learn more about depression, suicide and how the Pediatric Mental Health Institute can help your child, visit childrenscolorado.org/mentalhealth or call 720-777-6200.

