



If talking about suicide makes you uncomfortable, you're not alone.

Talking with children directly about suicidal thoughts may be difficult, but talking with your children helps them know that they're not alone and they can come to you about any problem. Multiple studies show asking about suicide is not harmful and can help identify important warning signs. Giving a child a safe space to talk about their struggles and difficult feelings can save their life.

Where can you start?

Talk to your child often. Don't wait for a crisis. Build a habit of chatting with your child on a regular basis about how things are going in their life. We have **conversation starters** to help you get started. These open-ended questions may allow your child to candidly explain their thoughts and feelings. Talking openly shows that it's okay to feel and share a variety of emotions.



Ask directly about thoughts of suicide. Your child may not be having these thoughts, but such conversations can model the importance and benefit of talking about serious emotional concerns with trusted adults. Many children have heard of suicide and may have questions or confusion about it. These talks can be their source of factual and up-to-date information.



Look for mood changes or behavior warning signs. If your child suddenly stops enjoying something they've always loved, begins to isolate themselves, or has significant changes in their mood, personality, eating or sleeping, talk with them about what they are experiencing.



Common warnings signs of suicide

The following signs may indicate a child could use help from a mental health professional:

- Having recurrent thoughts of death or suicide
 - Expressing a specific plan for committing suicide
 - Saying statements like “I’d be better off dead,” “I’m worthless,” or “Nobody will miss me.”
 - Hopelessness, helplessness, discouragement, or despair
 - Feeling like a burden to others
 - Isolation and a lack of social support
 - Previous suicide attempts or self-harming behavior
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What should I do if my child has thoughts of suicide or other warning signs?

Be a source of support and safety. Some children and teens worry that their strong feelings should be hidden. Listening to them (even if you do nothing else) is the best way to increase their comfort in expressing upsetting thoughts and feelings. Let them know that you take them seriously and that you are there to help manage intense emotions.





Get support from a mental health professional to help your child. Thoughts of suicide are often related to illnesses such as depression and anxiety. These can improve with mental health treatment. Just like any other medical condition, treatment is needed to manage symptoms of emotional disorders, including suicidal behavior. Interventions might include talk therapy, medication, or a combination of both. Although response to treatment and symptom improvement will vary, accessing help early can often help reduce the risk of suicide by giving children tools to cope with emotional distress.



[Click here](#) to download a poster that will remind you of important information about suicide prevention.

Reviewing this poster together can encourage discussions about what your child may have heard or misunderstood. You may want to share it with your child’s teacher, coach or others.

Together, we can end the stigma around having mental health conversations.

Know the Facts About Suicide Prevention  


- Millions of people who live with depression never attempt suicide.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the U.S. for children ages 10-14 according to the CDC.
- Let your children know you take them seriously and you are there to help them manage intense emotions - even those that lead them to believe that life is not worth living.

Asking About Suicide Does NOT Increase Risk of Suicide
When someone has suicidal thoughts, being asked about it is often a relief. Actually saying the words, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" opens the door for your child to talk about their emotional struggles. As difficult as it may be to talk about suicide, it is important for your child's safety.

There Are Things You Can Do
Most people who attempt suicide do not want to die; they want the pain to stop. Suicide is preventable through professional treatment. Just like any other medical condition, treatment helps to manage the symptoms of depression. There are many types of treatment and sometimes a combination of services is most helpful.

It Isn't Always Planned
Teens, particularly males, are more likely to attempt suicide on impulse and less likely to plan in advance. The parts of the teen brain responsible for managing intense emotions and planning are last to develop.

If you or your child need immediate help due to having suicidal thoughts, go to your local emergency room immediately, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988 or reach the Crisis Text Line by texting "START" to 741-741.

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The Movement for Children's Mental Health

When suicide warning signs do occur, take safety precautions such as restricting access to firearms, medications, sharp objects and ropes/cords, and increase supervision of your child.

If you're concerned with your child's mental health, call Wolfson Children's 24/7 Kids & Teens Helpline at 904.202.7900 or text LIFE to 741741. You may also call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/) at 988. If there is an immediate safety concern, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Don't forget to share how you're using *On Our Sleeves* resources. Hit the **reply button** to tell us your *On Our Sleeves* story.

Sincerely,
Wolfson Children's Hospital

The mission of *On Our Sleeves* is to provide every community in America access to free, evidence-informed educational resources necessary for breaking stigmas about child mental health and educating families and advocates. **For more information, visit [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org).**

To access educational resources and revisit the mission of *On Our Sleeves*®, visit [wolfsonchildrens.com/onoursleeves](https://www.wolfsonchildrens.com/onoursleeves).

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