

## What Parents Should Know about Youth Suicide

- Suicide is not an easy topic to discuss but being able to talk openly about it is beneficial and preventative. Discussing it with children may be even more difficult, but it is something they need to know about and understand is not taboo.
- And more importantly, they need to know that they can come to you (or a trusted adult) should they ever experience depression, sadness, or suicidal thoughts.
- Thoughts about suicide are not uncommon in children and should not be ignored or dismissed. With empathy and care, and the right support your child can become resilient and thrive.

### Tips to Facilitate a Conversation

#### Know the Warning Signs

- **Changes in mood:** Feelings of hopelessness, worry, anxiety, anger, or worthlessness
- **Changes in behavior:** Withdrawal from normal activities, changes in sleep patterns or eating habits, change in friend group or use of alcohol or other drugs
- **Threatening suicide and/self-harm:** Talking about or wishing for death; posting online about wanting to die or kill themselves; researching ways to die; giving away belongings; cutting, or obtaining a weapon
- **Situational triggers:** Including death of a loved one, stress, a breakup, getting in trouble, or being overly concerned with grades at school, milestone events and holidays.

#### Know the Risk Factors

- Suicide can happen in any family. It is a complex culmination of many factors that sometimes can result in an impulsive act.
- The risk is more imminent when you consider other contributing issues a child may be dealing with (i.e., sexuality, bullying, gender identity, drug use, struggling with trauma, social and academic pressures). Youth who are overachievers also can also be at risk.
- There may not be obvious signs or symptoms, and caregivers are not always immediately aware of things such as a change of friends or breakups. Regular check-in conversations are a good practice and helps make the conversation easier when things are not going well.

#### Have a Plan

- **Plan:** Knowing what you want to say can make the transition to an open discussion much easier. Anticipate some resistance and how you might respond.
- **Pick a Time to Talk:** See <https://www.samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you>
- Timing may affect a person's willingness to open up. Here are some potential opportunities to start the discussion:
  - during a car ride.
  - when you hear or see something about suicide on TV.
  - when a suicide occurs in your community.

#### Be Honest and Direct

- It is okay to admit that suicide can be difficult to discuss. Talking about your feelings on the subject will help your child open up as well. If your teen still has a hard time speaking about it, feel free to ask them direct questions, such as:
  - “Have any of your friends dealt with suicide?”
  - “Have you ever seen someone post about these feelings online?”
  - “Do you know anyone who has ever made a suicide attempt?”
  - “Do you ever feel overwhelmed by your emotions?”

### **Be Supportive**

- Let your child know that you are always there for love and support. Let them know that they can come to you anytime, regardless of what they’re going through. Inform your child that there are a number of other resources they can turn to as well, including:
  - school officials, teachers, or guidance counselors,
  - close relatives,
  - Doctors, nurses, and other clinicians
  - 988-phone, text, and chat (available 24/7)
- Have your child program text and phone support number into their phones and post them at home on the refrigerator, for example.
- Make sure they know they will not be in trouble if they seek for help.

### **Be an Active Listener**

- Try to listen without judgment even if you’re worried. If you overreact, your child may not come back to you in a time of need. If you underreact, your child may not think that you care. Respond meaningfully, thoughtfully, and truthfully.

### **IF you suspect YOUR child is having suicidal thoughts:**

- **Call 988 and encourage your child to also call or text 988; Provide your child 24/7 access to 988.**
- **Call the Crisis Center; 240)777-4000 or walk-in (1301 Piccard Drive, Rockville) or with a mental health professional with suicide specific training.**
- **Go online to [BtheOne.Org](https://www.betheone.org) and encourage your child to do the same**
- Ask how they are feeling and then listen (really listen without providing feedback).
- Have conversations in a non-confrontational way. Consider talking during a walk or on a car ride when you aren’t positioned face to face.
- Don’t restrict mobile phone/internet access but monitor it.
- Don’t act shocked or angry.

### **Don’t say:**

- “I understand”
- “When I was your age...”
- “It’s no big deal”

### **Do say:**

- “I am here to listen”
- “You must feel very bad”
- “What have you tried already?”
- “What do you need from me?”
- “How can we work together to help you feel safe?”

### **Help your Child Become More Resilient by Building These Skills:**

#### **Coping Skills**

- Model positive coping skills for your kids
- Point out healthy and unhealthy coping on TV and movies and/or teach new skills like yoga, exercise, meditation, and using coloring books to relax

#### **Problem Solving Skills**

- Talk about mistakes and failure as a learning experience
- Discuss when you have had setbacks and how you dealt with them
- Discuss problems together and model how to break them down into manageable parts

**Parents:** Dial 988 on your mobile phone or landline. 988 can provide guidance and can also talk to your child with you.

The pandemic has been a vulnerable time for youth. Youth who lost a caregiver to COVID-19 may be especially at risk.

**For more resources to support your child please visit: [BtheOne.org](https://www.btheone.org)**

#### **FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS**

The ASQ is a validated tool for suicide assessment for youth as young as 8. DHHS has funding to train approximately 150 clinicians in Montgomery County on the ASQ. Please use the link to sign up (open to ALL County clinicians, both DHHS and Community providers).

<https://www.lifelineworkshops.com/md-training-info>

988 can also support mental health providers

Videos:

What’s Happening MoCo interview with Rachel Larkin, EveryMind/the local 988 Lifeline Center

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gKogfmkiZ8>

Validation Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dab6adGBL2I>