

HOW TO TALK TO: ABOUT SUICIDE YOUR KIDS

Let's talk

It can be terrifying to think your child might want to take their own life. Comfort can be found in the knowledge that it is largely preventable. Knowing the warning signs, talking to your child and linking them with support, can provide them with what they need to get through this.

Talking to your child about suicide

Young people may not always seek help, so it helps if parents look out for these warning signs.

Looking out for the warning signs can enable you to help your child. Keep in mind, every young person is unique and may display all, some, or none of these behaviours.

While warning signs can alert you to your child's struggles, consider approaching your child and having an open and honest conversation about the way they feel.

Experts in youth psychology believe it is best to directly ask your child if they are feeling suicidal. "Are you feeling so low you're thinking about suicide?" may seem hard to say but can be the first step towards the help they need.

You may dread mentioning the word 'suicide' to your child, fearing that if you say it, they will be more likely to act it out. However, the research does not support this.

If you still feel unsure, it may be easier for you to start by describing what you have observed, for example, "I've noticed you've not been yourself lately, is everything okay? How can I help?"

Let them know you are concerned and that you care, but try not to overwhelm them. The most valuable thing is to just listen and show them you are there for them.

It is important not to dismiss their feelings. Instead, simply acknowledge how they feel to avoid appearing judgemental.

If talking about this with your child is difficult for you, you can admit this. Sharing this discomfort may bring you and your child closer, as it is probably just as difficult for them to share their feelings with you.

Whether your child wants to talk about how they are feeling or not, you can help them by letting them know support is available.

There are also support services for yourself, as supporting your child may take its toll, and your mental health is just as important.

Common warning signs

- Becoming socially withdrawn (e.g. staying home for long periods of time or avoiding contact with family and friends);
- Behaving recklessly (e.g. driving recklessly) and taking unnecessary or uncharacteristic risks
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having nothing to live for
- Researching suicide methods
- Self-harming
- Abusing drugs and alcohol or using more than usual
- Becoming disconnected from family and friends
- Making direct suicide threats (e.g. "I want to die")
- Making indirect suicide threats (e.g. "I don't want to be here anymore")
- Displaying feelings of low self-worth
- Suddenly quitting important activities (e.g. extracurricular activities)
- Mood swings and irritability
- Writing suicide notes
- Putting affairs in order (young adults)

Seeking help

If you think your child might attempt suicide, it's important to act immediately. Call your GP, mental health crisis service or take them to your local hospital emergency department. Lifeline (13 11 44) and the Suicide Call Back Service (1300 659 467) are also available 24/7, 365 days a year. In an emergency, call triple zero (000).

Longer term options include headspace and Youth Insearch. Participation in Youth Insearch usually occurs over 9-12 months.

For more information head to www.youthinsearch.org.au or call us at 02 9659 6122.

