

# Suicide Prevention

## A Resource for Parents



Know the Signs. Find the Words. Reach Out.

**KNOW**  
**THE SIGNS**

[suicideispreventable.org](http://suicideispreventable.org)



Funded by counties through the Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63).

Pain isn't always obvious. Young people may seem happy when they're with their friends or engaging in school activities, but they may be hurting on the inside. Their pain may manifest itself as anger or irritability and they may pull away from their parents or lose interest in activities they were once interested in.



## How do you know when it's time to worry?

Ask yourself these questions. If you answer yes to one or more of the questions, have a conversation with your child, especially if the behavior is new, has increased, or seems related to a painful event, loss or change.

## Ask Yourself These Questions:

1. Has your youth lost interest in activities such as school, sports, hobbies, or spending time with their friends?
2. Have you noticed dramatic mood changes?
3. Does your youth seem unusually tired or exhausted? Sleeping too much or not enough?
4. Have you noticed unusual neglect of their personal appearance?
5. Does your youth seem to feel sad, worthless, or hopeless?
6. Does your youth frequently complain about headaches, stomachaches, or fatigue?
7. Have you noticed a change in appetite? Weight loss or gain?
8. Is your youth angry, agitated, or irritable in a way that seems out of character or context?
9. Have you noticed any indications that your youth is engaging in reckless or risky behavior?
10. Has your youth increased their use of drugs or alcohol?
11. Has your youth been giving away belongings that have value to them?

### Critical Warning Signs

If any of these critical warning signs are present, call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-8255 (TALK)** right away:

- Talking or writing about death or suicide
- Seeking methods for a suicide attempt, including searching online
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

## What You Can Do:

It's natural for parents to think a behavior change is normal, "just a phase," and will pass, but if you sense something is wrong, don't delay in getting help! **Find the words to have this difficult conversation.**

**Express your concern.** Mention specific things you have noticed and, most importantly, ask directly if they are thinking of harming themselves or thinking of suicide. Talking about suicide does not increase suicidal behavior. By talking openly and directly, you are sending the message that you care and want to help.

**Find the Words: "Are you thinking about suicide?"**

### What if they say "no"?

Continue to talk to your child and let them know you are there for them. Listen without lecturing or judgment. Be vigilant about the behaviors you are noticing and continue to check in with your child on a regular basis.

Encourage them to reach out to resources such as Teen Line, where they can talk to other youth about things that might be troubling them.

#### Teen Line

Call 310.855.4673 (6 p.m. to 10 p.m. daily)  
or text TEEN to 839863 (6 p.m. to 9 p.m. daily)

#### Crisis Text Line (24/7)

Text HOME to 741741

#### The Trevor Project for LGBTQ Teens (24/7)

Call 1.866.488.7386 or text START to 678678

### What if they say "yes"?

If your teen answers "yes," take it seriously. Remain calm. Thank them for their honesty. Encourage them to talk about the reasons they feel this way and listen. Say, "I'm sorry you are in this pain. Let's see what we can do to figure this out. I want to be helpful. Let's get help and learn more together."

**Consider the Next Steps.** A youth who is having thoughts about suicide, especially if they have a plan, should be evaluated by a mental health professional with training in suicide prevention. Next steps include calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a local crisis center, a mental health professional, or your family doctor as soon as possible. Your child's school can also provide a variety of supports and help keep your child safe, so you are encouraged to engage the school.

**Plan for Safety.** If you are concerned about your youth, especially if they are showing warning signs of suicide, make safety a priority. Remove weapons from the home and securely store medications. Make sure your child's mental health professional completes a safety plan and ask them to share it with you (and to be part of the safety plan), which usually includes coping strategies and people and places to call when they are in emotional pain or in a crisis.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**  
1.800.273.TALK (8255)

**Healing Takes Time.** If your youth is undergoing mental health treatment, or treatment after a suicide attempt, remind them that recovery takes time and they may not feel better right away. Urge them to take it a little easier and not expect to return to all their usual responsibilities right away. It can help to create a network of trusted friends and family as supports for your youth.

## Know the Signs



Phases of irritability, volatile displays of anger and tears, rebelling against rules and even experimenting with drugs and alcohol can be part of the youth experience, but it is important to stay vigilant for warning signs that your child is more than moody.

## Pain Isn't Always Obvious

## Raising Resilient Teens

Whether or not you have specific concerns about suicide risk, there are things you can do as a parent to build protective factors that can help youth cope with stressful events and emotional pain.



**Foster Positive Connections.** Encourage your child to have and maintain connections with friends and loved ones, and to participate in activities that they enjoy. If they refuse to socialize, don't force them. Spend extra time with them; even watching a movie together signals that you are there for them. It's also great for a child to have additional adult mentors besides their parents. Talk to your child about who their reliable adults are, and who else can they speak to?

**Promote Healthy Emotional Skills.** As much as we would like to protect our child from them, stressful situations and problems are part of life. Helping your youth cope with emotions such as stress, anger, and sadness can build their resiliency when problems occur.

**Encourage Exercise.** Physical exercise produces changes in the body that can help reduce stress and depression. Activities such as yoga and mindfulness can be especially helpful for anxious and distracted youth.

For mental health resources in many languages visit [EMMResourceCenter.org](http://EMMResourceCenter.org)

# Reach Out

You are not alone and your youth is not alone. There are resources that can help 24/7. When you call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** you will be connected to a trained counselor who can help sort through your concerns and how to have a conversation with your youth. Crisis resources are also available to help your child in the way that works best for them, including texting and chat services through the **Lifeline** and **Crisis Text Line**. You can also contact your school to ask about counseling or talk to your child's physician.



National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

**1.800.273.TALK (8255)**

En español numero 2

To learn the warning signs visit:

**[SuicidelsPreventable.org](http://SuicidelsPreventable.org)**

The Directing Change Program and Film Contest is a youth suicide prevention and mental health program that encourages young people to learn about critical health topics by creating short films that are used to change conversations in schools and communities.



**Directing Change**

*Program & Film Contest*

[www.DirectingChangeCA.org](http://www.DirectingChangeCA.org)