

# SUICIDE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The transition from childhood to adulthood can be tremendously stressful. Family, school, and social pressures are often overwhelming for young people who lack the life experience to put these challenges in context. When combined with mental health problems such as depression, these struggles can put young people at risk for suicide.

## HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS SUICIDAL?

There is no way to tell if someone is suicidal, but there are some common warning signs that can indicate that your child might be at risk. Young people who are suicidal (bold items indicate a special risk):

- **May talk about or threaten suicide**
- **Seem preoccupied with death, dying and suicide (for example in a diary or drawings)**
- **May have previously attempted suicide**
- **Might hoard pills or other things to commit suicide (for example, weapons), or describe methods for committing suicide**
- **Try to give away meaningful belongings**
- Seem to lose interest in friends, school, sports or hobbies
- Show signs of depression or appear hopeless
- May have recently lost a friend, family member or parent, especially to suicide
- Be conflicted or ashamed about their sexual orientation
- Use alcohol or drugs heavily
- Show changes in their typical behaviour, including: hygiene, eating, sleeping, and moods

**Remember: Talking about suicide or suicide attempts should always be taken seriously.**

## TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT SUICIDE

Talking to your child about suicide can be difficult, but will help your child feel less alone and make it easier for them to accept help. Here are some tips:

**Start gently.** Mention the changes you've noticed in their behaviour, such as "I've noticed you're spending a lot of time alone lately; is something bothering you?"

**Be direct.** Ask your child if they are considering suicide ("Are you thinking about hurting or killing yourself?"). If the answer is yes, find out if they have a plan ("How are you planning to do it?"). The more detailed the plan, the higher the risk.

**Remind them you care.** People who feel suicidal are often worried that they are a burden, so it's important to communicate to them that you love and want to help them through this.



**Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people after motor vehicle accidents.**

**Tell them help is available** and that you have hope for them. Communicate to your child that things can get better, and that you will support them in finding help and working toward a happier future -- however long it takes. You can make an appointment with your family doctor to talk about options that are available in your community. You can also pass along the **Kids Help Phone** number: **1-800-668-6868** so they can talk to a counselor.

### DON'T...

**Judge.** Let your child do the talking, and try to avoid interrupting or expressing disappointment.

**Talk too much.** Don't try to fill all of the silences in the conversation. The pauses might result in your child opening up more.

**Minimize** your child's suffering by saying things like "Life isn't fair" or "It'll pass".

## IF YOUR CHILD HAS A PLAN TO COMMIT SUICIDE

**Do not leave the child alone.** Make an appointment with your family doctor as soon as possible for an assessment. If a doctor is unavailable, take your child to the Emergency room at your local hospital.

## GETTING HELP FOR YOURSELF

Knowing that your child is suicidal can be incredibly difficult. You might feel judged or blamed for what your child is going through, or that it is your fault. It's not. Avoid the temptation to criticize or blame yourself. Support is crucial during this time; create a network of people you can talk to about your feelings, such as friends, family members, church personnel, counselors, or anyone else who can listen and assist. **You don't have to go through this alone.**

For more parent, teen and kid tipsheets visit [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)



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