

How can you prevent suicide?

1) Know and look out for the warning signs :

- Talking about or making plans for suicide
- Expressing hopelessness about the future
- Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
- Worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior
 - Withdrawal from or changes in social connections/situations
 - Changes in sleeping or eating (increased or decreased)
 - Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
 - Recent increased agitation or irritability

2) If you recognize the warning signs, TALK

- **T**ell your child you care about them. LISTEN. Resist the urge to minimize, judge, or try to fix. Turn off the scripts in your head, and be curious.
- **A**sk directly about suicide. It is okay and helpful to ask teens about suicide. *"It sounds like you are going through a heck of a lot. I know other kids sometimes think about suicide when they're struggling like this. Have you had thoughts of suicide?"*
- **L**ink your child to help. Use the resources below. Your child also has a counselor at school you can talk with, and there are mental health resources in the community. **Maintain visual contact if the child is in suicidal crisis.**
Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK(8255)
Mobile Crisis: Orleans Parish 504-826-2675; Jefferson Parish 504-832-5123
- **K**now your limits. It's okay to not know what to say. *"I don't really know what to say, but I'm so glad you told me. I can see you're in a lot of pain. Let's call the Lifeline or talk to a counselor more about it."*



Statistics and Information about Suicide

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for **teens** in America. It is the 10th leading cause of death in the US.
- **Louisiana** high school students reported the **highest rate of suicide attempts** in the United States in 2017.
- The suicide rate in African American males ages 5-11 has doubled since 1990.
- In girls ages 10-14, the suicide rate has tripled over the last 15 years.
- Over 70% of young people who die by suicide died on their 1st attempt.

These facts are important to know so that we can look out for warning signs, take them seriously in our teens, and respond appropriately. Suicide is a complex topic with difficult and heavy emotions.

Myth – Suicide in children and adolescents is not a problem

Truth – Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among 10-29 year olds. Every day, about 12 youth die by suicide. For every death, there are around 25 attempts.

Myth – Asking about suicide may put the idea in someone's head

Truth – Talking about suicide in a caring, nonjudgmental, and empathetic way shows that you take your child and his or her emotional pain seriously.

Myth – Only mental health professionals can identify kids at risk for suicide

Truth – School staff, parents, caregivers, and peers are usually the first to see warning signs and are on the front lines to respond.

Frequently Asked Questions from the Lifelines Parent Workshop

Q: Who considers suicide?

A: People of all ages, races, faiths, and cultures die by suicide, as do individuals from all walks of life and all income levels. Suicidal youth come from all kinds of families, rich and poor, happy and sad, two-parent and single-parent. Suicidal behavior knows no boundaries.

Q: Can a teen really be suicidal? They haven't lived long enough to know what real problems are!

A: In part, that is exactly the problem. We live in an information-packed and high stress society. The expectations placed on teens in our society can be very difficult to handle, as they have not yet developed the skills needed to deal with these stresses. A loss that seems minor to an adult can feel life-threatening to teens if they cannot find a way to cope with the feelings or find a solution. Also, they feel the need to solve the problem as fast as they can in a culture obsessed with "now" (e-mail, voice mail, cell phones, pagers, etc.). For teens, each day is as big as it gets.

Q: Why do people choose to die by suicide?

A: Suicidal behavior is one of the most complicated human behaviors. This question cannot be answered briefly. There is no research that shows that a certain set of risk factors can accurately predict the likelihood of imminent danger of suicide for any one person. It is fair to say that many suicidal people are experiencing varying degrees of outside stresses, internal conflict, and neurobiological dysfunction, and these factors contribute to their state of mind. Depression, anxiety, conduct disorders, bullying, and substance abuse all contribute to the possibility of suicide, but they do not cause suicide. The reasons behind a suicide often remain a mystery.

Q: Won't people think I am a bad parent if my teen is suicidal?

A: Some people may be quick to judge and not understand that given a certain set of circumstances any of us could feel suicidal. It is more likely that people will think you are a loving and caring parent if you are helping to keep your teen alive. Mental health professionals, in particular, deal with suicidal individuals every day. They understand how difficult life can be for a teen and that parents cannot protect their children from all the stress in the world. What you can do is listen to your teen and take action when he or she cannot. Take care of your teen.

Q: Every time I ask, my teen tells me that I won't understand. How can I help her to talk?

A: Acknowledge that you might not understand, but that you care very much and you will try to understand. Also keep in mind that this phrase tends to be used when teens can't explain how they feel. Another option is to tell her you understand she doesn't want to talk to you, but would she agree to talk about it with someone else, like a counselor? If she agrees, make sure to follow up on it; you can even make the initial call yourself if she wants you to.

Q: My teenager listens to horrible music. I'm worried that the violent lyrics will make him kill himself.

A: While you may not like your teen's choice in music, it is unlikely to make him kill himself if that was not already an issue. In fact, for most teens, music, even violent music, may actually allow them to vent some of their anger and frustration and help them to feel better. However, there are situations where a teenager who is already feeling depressed or feeling alienated may choose a certain type of music that can make those feelings stronger. Discuss your concerns with your teen and make a deal that if he feels like hurting or killing himself that he will talk to you.

Q: How can I help my child not to feel suicidal?

A: This begins by talking about suicide before it becomes an issue and the teen is in crisis. We need to acknowledge that suicide is an option that teens consider and open the channels of communication so that teens have somewhere to turn where they know they will be understood. One of the major reasons why teens don't turn to adults is that they feel they will not be understood. The Web site of the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide (www.sptsnj.org) can help to educate you about suicide and what you can do.

****It is important to know that the primary method of teen suicide death is firearms.
Thus, restricting access to lethal means is an important way to prevent suicide.***

Starting the Conversation

1. Pick a good time. You want your child's full attention, so choose a time when there are minimal distractions and a reasonable degree of privacy.
2. Be conversational. Remember that your goal is to have a conversation with your child, not deliver a lecture.
3. Be honest. If this is a hard subject for you to talk about, acknowledge it. ("You know, I never thought I'd be talking with you about suicide. It's a topic I've never been really comfortable with . . .") By acknowledging your discomfort, you give your child permission to acknowledge his or her discomfort, too.
4. Be direct. Ask open-ended questions to clarify your child's responses. ("Tell me how you feel talking about suicide." "What do you think about suicide?" "What have you learned about suicide in school?")
5. Listen to what your child has to say. You've brought up the topic. You're interested in his or her responses, so simply listen to your child's answers. Don't interrupt or interject your opinion unless asked.
6. If you hear something that worries you, ask for more information. ("Tell me more.")
7. Open the door to revisit the conversation. Suicide isn't a one-time discussion topic. Once you've made it okay to talk about, it should be easier to bring up again. If you've heard something that concerns you, make sure to ask about it again.

It is important to understand that suicide is a crisis in communication. When you sense that your teen is troubled, what will probably help the most is to have already established helpful patterns of communication.

Here are ways to establish and maintain communication between you and your teen:

1. Create occasions for communication.
2. When you talk with your teen:
 - Really listen.
 - Try to understand his or her viewpoint first, before trying to provide an alternate viewpoint.
 - Accept your teen's feelings and concerns rather than evaluate. (Avoid statements such as "You shouldn't get upset over that!" and "If you had made a decision earlier, this wouldn't have happened!")
 - Don't minimize. Avoid saying things like "Everyone feels that way" and "Don't let little things like that get to you."
 - Recall that your teen sees his or her experience as unique. Acknowledge this and then let him or her know that others may have also struggled with these concerns.
 - Don't compare your teen with siblings, other kids, or your childhood.
 - Don't overreact. (Avoid statements such as "How could you think something like that?")
 - Pause; take a deep breath and listen.
 - Have definite standards and limits, but follow the rule of minimum conformity. That is, decide on the absolute minimum requirements for behavior, talk, dress, and so forth, and let the rest go. You can't enforce these anyway, and the more requirements you have, the less influence you have.
3. Be aware of the pressures and expectations you place on your child. Clearly, kids must learn to stick it out and develop discipline, but each achieves in his or her own way and at different paces. It is difficult to walk the line between preparing kids for life's pressures and adding too much pressure of your own in regard to school, sports, achievement, appearance, manners, and so forth.
4. Be aware of demands kids place on themselves. This may be a very important source of stress for teens.
5. Follow this simple rule from Dr. Hiam Ginott, author of *Between Parent and Child*: "Acknowledgment always precedes advice or directives." (For example, "I know that college was very important to you and I can see this is very upsetting, but let's look at some other alternatives." or "I see that Tom meant a lot to you. This is hard, but I'm wondering if you're not being a bit hard on yourself.")