

Recognize Warning Signs of Suicide In Children, Tweens, and Teens



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Four out of five teens who attempt suicide give clear warning signs.

Warning signs include:

- Talking about suicide
- Feeling hopeless, helpless, or worthless
- A deepening depression
- Preoccupation with death
- Taking unnecessary risks or exhibiting self-destructive behavior
- Acting out of character
- A loss of interest in the things one cares about
- Visiting or calling people one cares about
- Giving away prized possessions

Anyone can experience suicidal thoughts, but these risk factors increase the chances:

- Perfectionist personalities
- Gay, lesbian, and Trans youth
- Learning-disabled youth
- Loners
- Low self-esteem
- Depression
- Abused, molested, or neglected youth
- Genetic predisposition
- Family situations that include violence, substance abuse, or divorce

RESOURCES TO TURN TO FOR HELP IF YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR CHILD

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **1 (800) 273-8255**

Jason Foundation | Trevor Project | American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

How to Talk About Suicide: A Guide for Parents

Suicide is now the second leading cause of death for children 10 to 18, so it's important to be able to discuss with your child what it is and how they're feeling about it. Even if kids don't personally experience suicidal ideation, they may have friends who will.

We've compiled some helpful tips from leading organizations¹ to assist you with these hard conversations.

If a young child asks about suicide:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents do not talk about tragedies until kids are 8 if they're not directly affected.
- Keep it simple without going into intense details.
- Say things like *"This person died and it's really sad. They were sick."*
- Give short, true answers.

Tweens may begin understanding the concept of suicide, so be sure to listen them.

- Be direct. Start the conversation with questions like *"What have you heard about suicide? What do you think about it?"*
- Talking about death can be frightening, so be extra patient.
- Explain mental illness as you would physical illness, without blame or judgment.
- Say *"died by suicide"* instead of *"committed suicide."* The verb *"commit"* can imply a moral failing.

Teens are more familiar with suicide than kids and tweens.

- Don't overreact, as that may scare the child away from any future discussion on the subject. Underreacting, on the other hand, may be dangerous. Trust your instincts.
- Make sure the conversation is two-sided and not a lecture.
- Kids can struggle with how to support their friends who are depressed. Let them know they can always tell an adult if they think a friend is in danger.
- Reiterate that there's no shame in getting help – for anyone.

1. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology, Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, UPenn Medical School