



Protecting Your Child from Suicide

School Psychology Program
McKay School of Education
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Melissa Allen Heath
801-422-1235
melissa_heath@byu.edu

Parents
Helping
Children



Parents can help prevent suicide by watching for warning signs

Watch for the following changes in your child's behavior and activities:

- Making comments such as, "I wish I were dead," or "I wish I hadn't been born."
- Withdrawing from activities, avoiding family and friends.
- Acting differently, changes in eating and sleeping, doing risky things that cause injury to self or others, and abusing drugs or alcohol.
- Giving away personal things and saying good-bye to people as if they won't see them again.
- For no apparent reason, quickly changing from very sad to very happy.
- Feeling hopeless after a loved one's death, breakup with a girlfriend/boyfriend, disagreement with a best friend, problems at school, being bullied, teen pregnancy, or following a big disappointment.

Reassure them that you will do everything possible to keep them safe.

Parents can help by talking about suicide

This is a sensitive topic. Most parents worry that talking about suicide will increase the likelihood of their child making that choice. However, most children who are suicidal have already thought about suicide. Talking does not make it more likely to happen.

If you notice changes in your child's behavior and activities, ask questions. "Lately, you do not seem like yourself. What's going on?" "You are facing challenges, and I'm worried about you and how you are feeling."



Parents can help by directly asking about suicide

Parents can help by directly asking about suicide. These questions are difficult to ask, so it may help to practice saying these questions aloud before talking with your child. "Does it seem like things will never get better?" "Are you thinking about suicide?" "Are you suicidal now?" If your child has thought about suicide, it is important to ask for more information.

"Have you thought about how you would hurt or kill yourself?" "Do you have access to _____?" "Where would you get _____?" (fill in the blank with whatever method they mentioned, i.e., pills, gun, etc.). "Have you thought about when you would kill yourself?"

The more detailed the plan, the more serious the problem, and the more urgent the need for professional help. Ask for help. Your school's mental health professionals can help you. Spiritual and other community leaders can also provide support. You are not alone.

Tips for talking with your child

- Eliminate distractions—such as television, phone calls, or conversations with others.
- Keep your voice and facial expressions calm.
- Ask questions and listen to your child. Get on your child’s level so you can talk face-to-face. Do not control the conversation. Let your child talk. Do not interrupt, yell, threaten, or criticize. If you and your child become angry, take a break, calm down, and try again.
- Focus on offering support. Do not become angry because of your child’s anger and despair.
- Focus on the present and future, not the past.
- If your child does not want to talk with you, reassure them that you care. Suggest to your child that they speak with another caring adult, such as a counselor, spiritual leader, or other professional.



What to do when your child shows the warning signs of suicide:

- Don’t leave your child alone.
- Explain, “I care about you, and I will get someone who will understand you and help you.” Do not make promises to keep this a secret. Do not criticize your child for feeling suicidal. Reassure them that you will do everything possible to keep them safe.
- Get help, either by calling 911 or taking your child to the nearest hospital emergency room.
- Remove dangerous items (particularly guns and medications) or lock them in a safe place.
- Reassure them, “You are not alone.” “Suicide is not an option.” “I will get the help you need.”

