Northeast and Caribbean (HHS Region 2)
MHTTC Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Suicide Warning Signs in Children and Teens

Suicide is a serious and real concern among children and teens. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10-241. Suicide attempts are often related to other mental health conditions, but not always. Particularly among younger children, suicide attempts can be impulsive2. Warning signs of suicide or suicidal statements should always be taken seriously and evaluated by a mental health professional. Suicidal feelings are treatable with appropriate intervention and support.

Warning Signs of Suicide3

- Talking/joking/writing/artwork about death, dying, or suicide
- Withdrawing from/saying goodbye to friends and family
- Feeling hopeless, having no reason to live
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Engaging in reckless behavior
- Talking positively about/romanticizing death
- Giving away possessions
- Seeking out pills, weapons, or other ways to kill themselves
- Making statements like:
  "I'd be better off dead"
  "I wish I could disappear forever"
  "I can't go on"
  "There's no way out"
- Posting about or following accounts related to death on social media

What can caregivers do?

Ask your child if they are depressed or thinking about suicide. This will not put the thought into their head, rather it will give them an opportunity to talk about their concerns1,4.

- *Are you feeling sad or depressed?*
- *Are you thinking (have you ever thought) about hurting or killing yourself?*
- *Do you wish you were dead?*
- *Do you think that you or your family would be better off if you were dead?*

Helplines & Hotlines

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

SAMHSA National Helpline
1-800-662-HELP (4357)
samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline

NAMI Helpline
1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
nami.org/help

SAFE PLACE
Text SAFE to 44357
nationalsafeplace.org

The Trevor Project
1-866-488-7386
Text START to 678678
thetrevorproject.org

Hopeline
1-800-442-HOPE (4673)
Text HOPELINE to 741741
centerforsuicideawareness.org/hopeline

TeenLine
1-800-852-8336
Text TEEN to 839863
teenlineonline.org

The JED Foundation
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Text START to 741741
jedfoundation.org

1Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (May 2021). Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. www.cdc.gov/injury/wisgars
2American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (June 2018). Suicide in Children and Teens. www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Faces_For_Families/FFF-Guide-Teen-Suicide-010.aspx
3. Smith, M., Robinson, L., Segal, J., & Reid, S. (2021). Parent's Guide to Teen Depression. www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/parents-guide-to-teen-depression.htm#
4Horowitz, L. M., Bridge, J. A., Teach, S. J., Ballard, E., Klima, J. Rosenstein, D.L., ... & Pao, M. (2012). Asl Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ): a brief instrument for the pediatric emergency department. Archives of Peiatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 166(12), 1170-1176.

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