



## Let's Talk about Suicide

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Hearing the words, “your child is suicidal”, could be the most terrifying moment for a parent and caregiver. It can leave a parent and caregiver feeling confused, helpless, sometimes hopeless, and asking what to do. While it can feel intimidating, talking and asking about suicide, to your child or teen can be one step on a path to prevent it (Boston Children’s Hospital, n.d).

After a year of COVID-19, children of all ages continue to experience disruptions to life that make it hard for them to fully live. While some are ecstatic about being back to school, others are nearly immobilized by it, and some continue to be fully in distance learning. Not only has school been impacted by COVID but children of all ages continue to be worried about the health of their family and friends, are unable to see loved ones, and unable to participate in activities that they used to use to cope.

*In fact, research indicates that COVID-19 may increase mental health symptoms and possibly increase the risk factors for suicide due to the stress, worry, isolation, grief, and fear related to COVID-19 (Mayo Clinic, 2020).*

It’s heavy. Kids and teens can be deeply helped by the adults in their lives. For caretakers, having tools to talk about suicide and knowing how to spot the signs that your child needs support can make all the difference.

## Setting the table to talk

**Let’s start by clearing the air: asking someone if they are suicidal will not cause them to commit suicide.**

It can be hard to find the words or “right way” to talk about or ask your child about suicide; yet it is a proven tool for prevention.

So, what’s a good way to approach it with your child or teen? Every child is different and you know your child best. Most will respond when you are upfront, compassionate and clear with your questions. Start the conversation by asking: “I’m worried about you. Have you been having thoughts about wanting to die or killing yourself?” (Boston Children’s Hospital, n.d). If your child doesn’t respond, keep asking and talking about suicide it will not cause them to commit suicide but instead can prevent it.

For more support to talk with someone who may be in emotional crisis or thinking about suicide, visit [Suicide Awareness Voices of Education \(SAVE\) online](#).

## Why should we have this conversation?

“The second leading cause of death for young people ages 10-20” in the state of Minnesota is Suicide (Minnesota Department of Health, 2019).

There are multiple factors that contribute to an “increase of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, such as childhood trauma and adversity, serious mental illness, physical illness, alcohol or other



abuse, a painful loss, exposure to violence, social isolation, and easy access to lethal means” (Minnesota Department of Health, 2019) along with experiencing oppression, historical trauma, and culture genocide.

It is important to know though that having any or multiple of these risk factors does not automatically mean that a child has suicidal thoughts and behaviors. **It is also important to know that suicide is preventable, treatment is available, and there is hope.**

## Watching for warning signs

There are multiple warning signs for suicide, though the best way to know if someone is suicidal is to ask.

According to Boston Children’s Hospital, warning signs include:

- preoccupation with death
- intense sadness and/or hopelessness
- lack of interest in activities that used to provide the person with pleasure
- social withdrawal
- substance use
- irregular sleep patterns
- giving away possessions
- risky behaviors
- exhaustion
- increased irritability
- changes in appetite
- inability to think clearly/concentration problems, and
- changes in school patterns e.g. drop in grades or lack of attendance

## Discover the hope in talking about suicide

What we know is that suicidality is treatable and positive outcomes are possible – even if it may feel impossible.

- Help is here. We are a community ready to support each other in healing – and there’s never been a more ideal time to start – individually, as a family and communally.
- Find connection to support the healing process: the more connected with others and supported a child feels the less likely they are to commit suicide.
- Your greatest tools in the caregiver toolkit is to be compassionate, supportive, and to check in with your child if you are concerned about them having suicidal thoughts.
- Create a safety plan with your child using the Safety Plan Template from the Suicide Prevention Lifeline, with a clinician, or with a community agency such as COPE.
- We are here for you at [Washburn Center for Children](#). If not our team of licensed, compassionate therapists, connect with another mental health provider or community organization suited to your needs as we recognize that culture is healing and wellness does not begin or stop with just mental health treatment.



- If you or a loved one is at risk of suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or Text MN to 741741.
- If you have a teen or child who is immediate danger or imminent risk, call 9-1-1 and ask for a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) officer.

## Resources

### Crisis Numbers:

- National Suicide Hotline 1 800 366 8288,
- Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio- [1-888-628-9454](tel:1-888-628-9454)
- Cutting & Self Abuse 1 800 366 8288,
- Crisis Text Line 741-741 text 'Start',
- Trevor Project (LGBTIQ+ specific) 1-866- 488-7386

### Downloadable Apps:

- Combined Mind
- Calm Harm
- Clear Fear
- My 3

### Where can I learn more online?

- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)
- [#BeThe1To](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Suicide prevention resources](#)
- <https://www.naminh.org/resources-2/bipoc/>
- <https://thementalhealthcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BIPOC-Mental-Health-Resources.pdf>

### Citations

- *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020," 2020, August.*
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<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/covid-19-suicide-risk/art-20490350>
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- <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/fastfact.html>
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- *America's Health Rankings. (2019). Teen Suicide in Minnesota in 2018. Retrieved from* <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/Suicide/state/MN>.

