

Suicide Warning Signs and How to Respond

If you or someone you know is experiencing thoughts of suicide, call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988. In a medical emergency, call 911 or go to your local emergency department.

What to Look For

Youth often show warning signs before a suicide attempt. If you see these signs, reach out to the person and get help quickly. Some common warning signs include:

- Talking about or posting on social media about wanting to die
- Intentionally hurting or injuring themselves
- Withdrawing from others or not doing things they usually enjoy
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness or being a burden
- Researching ways to die
- Big or unexpected changes in mood or behavior
- Working out details of ending their life
- Reaching out to say “Goodbye” to friends and loved ones
- Giving away things that mean a lot to them
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Taking risks that are out of character for them

How to Respond

Having thoughts of suicide does not mean a person will attempt or die by suicide. Many people experience thoughts of suicide and overcome them with the right care and support. If you see a warning sign, here are some steps to respond and save a life.

Remain calm: It is OK to feel uncomfortable. Managing your emotions allows youth the space to talk openly.

Be direct about concerns: Asking specific questions helps you clearly understand what is going on and shows you are paying attention. Directly asking about suicide IS SAFE and demonstrates it is OK to talk and find help.

Just listen: You do not need to have all of the answers or try to fix everything right then. Simply listening to a young person can reduce stress and help improve their emotions.

Show them you care: Tell them you understand they are having a hard time, thank them for sharing, and tell them you care. You don't have to agree with everything they say, but being there and supporting them can make a big difference.

Find help together: Warning signs are like alarm bells that tell you help is needed — never keep them a secret. Talk openly about options for seeking professional support together and stay with them until you get connected.



To learn more about youth suicide prevention,
visit [NationwideChildrens.org/SuicidePrevention](https://www.NationwideChildrens.org/SuicidePrevention)



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S®
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.

Your Child Has Thought About Ending Their Life – What's Next?

If you learn your child has been thinking of suicide, you may feel shocked, numb, afraid or confused. You may think to yourself, “How can I help my child?” and “How do I keep my child safe?”

Here are some things to remember during this stressful time:

- **You are not alone.**
 - o About 17 percent of high school students report having seriously considered suicide in the past year. Twelve percent of children age 6 to 12 have thoughts about suicide.
- **Thinking about suicide does not mean that you or your child has done anything wrong.**
 - o Thoughts of suicide are often related to illnesses such as depression and anxiety. These can improve with mental health treatment.
- **Check in regularly with your child and ask directly about suicidal thoughts. Listening to your child (even if you do nothing else) is the best way to increase their comfort in expressing upsetting thoughts and feelings.**
 - o Discuss changes that you have noticed and why it concerns you.
 - o Ask your child directly, “Have you been thinking about killing yourself?”
 - o Do not try to “solve” your child’s issues. Show compassion and support.
 - o Let them know that you will be there for them. Give them time to manage intensely painful emotions.
- **Try to stay calm. Getting support from a mental health professional can help your child. It can give you a sense of hope.**
- **Work with mental health professionals to develop a safety plan. Some important pieces of a safety plan:**
 - o Your child should have a list of trusted adults to contact for when they are in crisis.
 - o Keep crisis hotline and text line numbers in easy to find places (e.g., phone, refrigerator).
 - o Prompt your child to practice coping skills.

(over)



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S®
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.

- o Lock up or remove items in your home that could prove deadly, especially if your child has considered them as a way to end their life. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines, alcohol, cleaning supplies, sharp objects, belts, cords, ropes, and especially, guns and bullets.
- o In a crisis, constant, direct supervision of your child may be needed to keep them safe.
- o Consider using phone apps and other technology to make safety plans easy to access. Safety plans should be shared with trusted adults and updated if risk factors change.
- **You are in charge of who receives or shares your child’s medical information.**
 - o Think about letting a small group of supportive adults across different settings share information by signing releases of information.
 - o This group of supportive adults may include teachers, school counselors, mental health therapists, doctors and family members.
- **If you have depression or anxiety yourself, be aware that your child’s mental health concerns may raise your level of distress. If your child thinks about suicide often, it is common to become frustrated and feel worn out. You may find it harder to be supportive and patient.**
 - o It can be helpful for parents to get counseling for themselves to manage difficult emotions and to be in a position to provide effective care.
 - o You do not have to go through this alone.
 - o All thoughts of suicide, statements about death or dying, or behaviors taken to injure oneself or to end one’s life should be taken seriously.
- **Here are some additional helpful resources:**
 - o The Center for Suicide Prevention and Research website includes tips and blogs that support caregivers: **NationwideChildrens.org/Suicide-Research**
 - o Franklin County Crisis Hotline for youth (under 18): (614) 722-1800
 - o Crisis text support: Text “4HOPE” to 741-741
 - o Helpful suicide prevention and safety planning apps: MY3, Mood Tools
 - o Text or call the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988



Safe Storage Saves Lives

Safe storage of potentially harmful items is everyone's responsibility. It is hard to predict when someone might experience an emotional crisis, so keeping your home safe at all times is a smart decision. Suicidal thoughts can come on quickly in response to highly stressful situations, and in these moments, the brain does not think as clearly. By making sure that potentially harmful items are secured, you can get ahead and protect yourselves and your friends before a crisis can even start. **Don't do this alone.** Team up with your parent or caregiver and talk about safe storage.

Firearms

Always store firearms unloaded in a safe or with a gun lock with ammo stored separately.



Everyday Items

Tell a caregiver about anything that could cause serious harm to yourself or a friend and secure it.



Medication

Keep only the medicine you need, store medicine in a secure place and dispose of old medicine.



Communicate

Talk openly with a trusted adult about how you feel. It is important and sometimes feels uncomfortable, which is normal!



Help is available 24/7

If you or a friend are experiencing suicidal thoughts call the **988** Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or text **"4HOPE"** to the Crisis Text Line at **741-741**.

In an emergency, call **911** or go to your local emergency room.



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S®
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.