



Student Health & Safety Handbook for Families

Rockbridge County Public School
2893 Collierstown Road
Lexington, Virginia 24450
Phone: 540.463.7386 Fax: 540.463.7823

Created: 3/26/2026
Last Updated: 4/2/2026



Rockbridge County Public Schools Student Health & Safety Handbook for Families

Table of Contents

Supporting Student Safety.....	1
Connecting with Your Child Daily.....	2
Validating Your Child's Emotions.....	3
Tools & Strategies for Keeping Your Child Safe.....	6
Limiting Access to Medications & Substances.....	8
Limiting Access to Knives & Sharp Objects.....	11
Limiting Access to Ligatures.....	12
Limiting Access to Firearms.....	13
Recognizing & Responding to Signs of Self-Harm.....	15
Recognizing & Responding to Signs of Violence.....	16
Recognizing & Responding to Suicide Risk.....	18
Rockbridge County Crisis Community Resources.....	20
Community Resources.....	21
Additional Resources.....	24

Rockbridge County Public Schools does not endorse any of these services or providers listed in this document. Any exclusion of a service provider is an oversight. This document is intended as general guidance. Always consult with a licensed mental health professional for advice tailored to your child's specific needs.



Supporting Student Safety

The following guides and resources are designed to help families recognize warning signs, respond to mental health challenges, and create safer home environments for children and adolescents. The materials align with the parental notification requirements set forth in § 22.1-79.4 and § 22.1-272.1 of the *Code of Virginia*, which require threat assessment teams and suicide risk assessment teams to provide parents or guardians with information that assists them in recognizing and responding to behaviors that may indicate a student poses a risk to themselves or others. In accordance with these provisions, the resources are intended to be shared with caregivers either at the time of initial notification or as soon as practicable thereafter. Additionally, the materials support compliance with statutory requirements to inform parents of the legal responsibilities related to children's access to firearms under § 18.2-56.2.

Remember:

Monitoring your child doesn't mean hovering; it means staying engaged, staying present, and showing love through action. Your role as a caregiver is critical, and you don't have to do it alone. Your home should be a safe space for your child to grow and explore. Limiting access to harmful substances is a simple but powerful way to protect their health, development, and future.

If you are ever unsure what to do, contact your school counselor, pediatrician or a mental health provider, or the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline for immediate guidance.



The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a free, confidential resource available 24/7 for anyone experiencing a mental health crisis, emotional distress, thoughts of suicide, or substance use concerns. As a parent, you or your child can call, text, or chat 988 at any time to connect with a trained crisis counselor who will listen, offer support without judgment, and help you find local resources if needed. The service is not just for emergencies, it's also there if you're worried about your child or someone else and need guidance on how to help. Counselors are specially trained to support people of all ages, and fewer than 2% of calls require emergency services, so you can feel comfortable reaching out for help whenever you need it.

Additional resources can be found on the Virginia Department of Education's [Supporting Student Safety: Parent and Caregiver Resources for Suicide and Violence Prevention webpage](#).



Connecting with Your Child Daily

Meaningful Questions to Connect with Your Child Daily

If you've ever asked your child "How was your day?" and received only a brief or uninterested reply, you're not alone. The following questions are designed to spark deeper conversations and provide greater insight into your child's emotional and social experiences. Invite your child to pick a question to ask you first, then use that same question to spark a conversation with them. Alternatively, write each question on a strip of paper and place them in a jar. Each day, during a time you both agree on (such as dinner, bedtime, or while driving home) take turns drawing a question to discuss together.

1. What was the best part of your day today? 2. Did anything surprise you today? 3. Who did you spend the most time with today? 4. Was there something that made you laugh or smile? 5. Did you learn something new or interesting? 6. What was the hardest or most challenging part of your day? 7. Is there something you wish had gone differently today? 8. Did you help someone, or did someone help you today? 9. What's one thing you're proud of from today? 10. Did anything make you feel worried or upset? 11. What's one thing you want to remember about today? 12. What's something you're looking forward to tomorrow? 13. What's something kind you noticed someone do today? 14. Was there a moment today when you felt frustrated or angry?	15. Did you try something new or step outside your comfort zone? 16. If you could describe your day as a color/weather, what would it be? 17. What is one way you coped with stress today? 18. If you could change one thing about today, what would it be? 19. Did you have any interesting conversations today? 20. Is there anything you want to talk about or share with me? 21. If you could describe your day in one word, what would it be? 22. What did you do that was kind today? 23. What do you wish your teachers knew about your day today? 24. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all, 10 being very) how stressful was your day?
--	---



Validating Your Child's Emotions

Phrases for Validating Your Child's Emotions

Validating a child's emotions helps them feel seen, heard, and supported, which builds emotional intelligence, trust, and resilience. Here are several helpful phrases, organized by intention:

To Acknowledge Their Feelings

Young Children	Adolescents
"I see that you're really upset right now."	"It sounds like you've been dealing with a lot."
"It's okay to feel that way."	"That really does seem like a tough situation."
"That sounds really frustrating."	"I can tell this matters to you."
"You're feeling sad, and that's completely okay."	"You have every right to feel the way you do."
"I hear you, that was a big deal."	"That makes total sense. I get why that would bother you."

To Show Empathy

Young Children	Adolescents
"I would feel that way too if I were in your shoes."	"I'd probably feel the same way if I were in your shoes."
"That makes sense why you'd feel [angry/sad/scared/etc.]."	"That's completely valid. Anyone would be upset about that."
"It's normal to feel like that sometimes."	"It's okay to feel overwhelmed sometimes."
"I get why that hurt your feelings."	"I hear you. That would be hard for anyone."



Validating Your Child's Emotions

To Let Them Know They're Not Alone

Young Children	Adolescents
"You're not alone. I'm here with you." "We'll figure this out together." "I'm so glad you told me how you're feeling." "Take your time. I'll be here when you're ready."	"You don't have to go through this by yourself." "I'm here to talk or just listen. Whatever you need." "Thanks for sharing. That takes courage."

To Help Them Name Emotions

Young Children	Adolescents
"It sounds like you might be feeling [nervous/jealous/disappointed]. Does that sound right?" "Do you think what you're feeling is more like anger or sadness?" "It's hard to tell sometimes, but I think your body is trying to tell you something."	"Do you think what you're feeling is more like stress or pressure?" "It seems like you're frustrated, is that how it feels to you?" "Sometimes when things pile up, it's hard to tell what we're really feeling, want to talk it through?"



Validating Your Child's Emotions

To Offer Support Without Judgment

Young Children	Adolescents
"I'm proud of you for sharing that with me." "You're allowed to feel however you feel, there's no wrong feeling." "You don't have to fix it all right now. I'm here." "I love you, even when you're upset or having a hard time." "It's okay to be [angry/sad/scared/etc.]. I feel that way too sometimes."	"There's no pressure to figure it all out right now." "It's okay to not be okay, you don't have to have it all together." "You're allowed to feel whatever you're feeling. No judgment." "You're not being dramatic, what you're feeling is real."



Tools & Strategies for Keeping Your Child Safe



What do I do if it is an emergency?

If you are unable to guarantee your child's immediate safety or the safety of others, or if you do not feel capable of safely transporting your child to an emergency facility, call 911 right away.

When a child is experiencing thoughts of harming themselves or others, it can be one of the most frightening and overwhelming times for parents and caregivers. During these critical moments, parents and caregivers provide essential supervision and monitoring of their child, which are powerful opportunities for connection, prevention, and understanding.

This guide outlines general action steps you can consider to help keep your child safe while maintaining trust and open communication.

Please note that not all these steps may be necessary depending on your child's age, symptoms, and other factors that make each situation unique.

Step 1: Provide Constant, Compassionate Supervision

- Stay physically present with your child as much as possible, especially during the early stages of concern.
- Keep bedroom doors unlocked or open. If doors have a lock, make sure you can unlock them easily.
- Limit time alone and possibly consider a temporary sleeping arrangement in a shared space.
- Inform other trusted adults, especially those who may share in supervision of your child throughout their day (e.g., family members, school staff, daycare or after school care staff, athletic coaches) so they can offer support.
- If your child is in immediate danger, do not leave them alone. Call emergency services or a crisis line for guidance.

Step 2: Set Clear Expectations About Privacy and Safety

- Let your child know that when safety is a concern, privacy may be limited but explain it's out of care, not punishment.
- Emphasize that your goal is to keep them safe, not to control or shame them.

Step 3: Check Social Media and Online Activity

- Review your child's social media accounts (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.) for concerning content, conversations, or posts.
- Monitor your child's cellphones and school devices. Specifically consider text messages, photos, social media accounts, chat messages (i.e., Google chat, Google Docs) spaces where students can gain access to peers and others can gain access to them.
- Look for themes of hopelessness, isolation, aggression, bullying, or threats, whether your child is expressing or receiving them.
- Consider using parental monitoring tools or apps with your child's awareness ([How to use parental controls to keep your kid safer online](#)).
- Encourage your child to talk about what they see or share online and how it makes them feel.



Tools & Strategies for Keeping Your Child Safe

Step 4: Review Internet Search History

- Check your child's internet history for searches related to self-harm, suicide, weapons, violence, or other high-risk topics.
- If you find concerning content, respond calmly. Ask questions, show concern, and avoid judgment.
- Use it as a starting point for conversation: "I noticed you searched for [topic]. Can we talk about what's been going on?"

Step 5: Secure the Environment

- Remove or lock up all potentially dangerous items: medications (both prescription and over-the-counter medications), sharp objects, firearms, alcohol, etc.
- If you own firearms, ensure they are stored unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition—with no access by your child.
- Store household cleaners, ropes, or other harmful items out of reach.

Step 6: Maintain Open and Ongoing Communication

- Ask your child directly how they are feeling. Use calm, non-judgmental language.
- Check in daily: "On a scale of 1-10, how stressful was your day?" or "Anything on your mind you want to talk about?"
- Validate their emotions, even if they seem irrational to you: "That sounds really hard. I'm so glad you shared that with me."

Step 7: Collaborate with Mental Health Professionals

- Keep in close contact with school counselors, therapists, counselors, or doctors working with your child.
- Share what you observe at home since they may not see the same behaviors at school or in clinical settings.
- Ask about safety plans, coping strategies, and signs of progress or worsening symptoms.

Step 8: Keep a Written Safety Plan

- Develop a safety plan with your child and their school counselor, outlining:
 - Warning signs
 - Coping strategies
 - Multiple people they can talk to, in multiple settings (school, home, etc.)
 - Actions you will take if things escalate beyond your control or become unsafe.
- Keep the plan somewhere visible and easy to reference. Consider sharing it with another family member who may be able to support you and your child.

Step 9: Practice Self-Care and Get Support for Yourself

- Caring for a child in crisis is emotionally demanding. You deserve support, too.
- Talk to a counselor, support group, or trusted friend about your own feelings and stress.
- Taking care of yourself models healthy coping and helps you stay grounded.
- Consider "tagging in" someone you trust who could share in the caretaking and supervision of your child should you become overwhelmed.



Limiting Access to Medications and Substances

Unintentional overdoses and intentional misuse of medications, alcohol, substances, or illicit substances are serious risks for children and teens. Easy or unrestricted access increases the risk of accidental overdose, misuse, and intentional self-harm.

Safe storage protects kids from accidental ingestion, substance misuse, and self-harm. This guide outlines action steps you can consider to help keep your child safe while maintaining trust and open communication.

What steps can I take to protect my child from accessing medications and substances?

- Store all medications, cannabis products, and alcohol in a locked cabinet or container.
- Avoid keeping medications or edibles in purses, backpacks, or nightstands.
- Visit the [Lock and Talk website](#) and scroll to the bottom of the page for the interactive map to find your local Community Services Board (input your zip code) to access free medication lock boxes or free firearm locks.
- Keep only the amount of medication needed for a short period (such as a week or a month) and store the rest securely or ask your pharmacist about safe storage options. Avoid stockpiling medications.
- Keep substances out of sight and out of reach, even items you use regularly. Regularly review your medicine cabinet and properly dispose of any expired, unused, or unneeded medications.
- Lock up or remove alcohol, cleaning agents, pesticides, and other toxic substances from accessible areas.
- Talk with other caregivers, babysitters, or relatives about safe storage expectations in their homes.
- Child-resistant does not mean child-proof. Always combine packaging with safe storage.
- Talk to your child about the dangers of medications and substances, and explain why you are taking these precautions.
- Encourage open conversations about mental health and let them know you are there to support them.

Suicide attempts are often impulsive, and a moment of crisis can escalate very quickly.



Making sure your child cannot access lethal means at the wrong time is critical.



Limiting Access to Medications and Substances

What are some key points to consider regarding access to substances?

- Even common, everyday medications and substances can be dangerous in large amounts or when misused.
- Opioids and barbiturates are especially lethal in overdose situations, but antidepressants, antihistamines, and even OTC pain relievers can also be deadly.
- Most youth suicide attempts by poisoning involve medications that are easily found at home.
- If you are concerned about your child's safety, it is important to lock up or remove these items from your home and supervise their use.
- Blister packs make it harder to access large quantities of pills quickly, which can slow down impulsive actions.

Limiting access to lethal means does not replace professional help.



If your child is struggling, seek support from mental health professionals immediately. Your vigilance and care can make a critical difference in your child's safety and recovery.

What medications and potentially harmful substances may be in my home?

Type of Substance	Common Types
Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medications These are frequently used in self-poisoning suicide attempts, especially among adolescents, because they are easily accessible and often found in most households.	• Acetaminophen (Tylenol) • Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) • Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) • Diphenhydramine (Benadryl and other antihistamines)



Limiting Access to Medications and Substances

Type of Substance	Common Types
Prescription Medications These drugs can be lethal in overdose and are associated with increased risk of suicide attempts and deaths.	· Antidepressants (such as fluoxetine/Prozac, paroxetine/Paxil) · Anti-anxiety medications (benzodiazepines like temazepam, triazolam, flurazepam) · Sleep medications (Z-drugs like zolpidem/Ambien, eszopiclone/Lunesta, zaleplon/Sonata, and trazodone) · Antiepileptic drugs (gabapentin, topiramate, oxcarbazepine, etc.) · Opioid painkillers (such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine) · Barbiturates · Antidiabetic medications
Other Potentially Harmful Substances	· Alcohol (can increase the risk and lethality of overdose when combined with medications) · Household chemicals (cleaners, pesticides, antifreeze) · Illicit substances (marijuana, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine)

What do I do if I believe my child has consumed a harmful substance?

Call 911 or Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 immediately if you suspect a child has consumed a harmful substance. Keep the item or packaging nearby for reference. Don't wait for symptoms to appear as quick action saves lives.



Limiting Access to Knives & Sharp Objects

Children and teens experiencing mental health struggles, especially those with thoughts of self-harm or suicide, are at an increased risk of using sharp objects to hurt themselves. Removing or restricting access to these items at home is a vital step in keeping them safe.

Knives and other sharp objects can be used in acts of self-harm, particularly among children and teens experiencing emotional distress. Safe storage of sharp objects is a key component of suicide prevention and youth safety.

What are some common sharp objects to secure or remove?

- Kitchen knives (all sizes)
- Scissors and box cutters
- Razor blades and shaving razors
- Pencil sharpeners (blades)
- Utility knives, pocket knives, craft blades
- Broken glass or mirrors
- Nail clippers and files
- Safety pins, needles, and tacks

Nonsuicidal self-injury is distinct from suicide attempts, but there is a strong association.



About 65% of youth who self-injure will also experience suicidal thoughts at some point, though not all will attempt suicide.

What steps can I take to protect my child from accessing knives and sharp objects during an emotional crisis?

- **Remove or lock up sharp objects.** Store all knives, scissors, and razors in a locked drawer, cabinet, or lockbox. Remove unnecessary sharp objects from bedrooms, bathrooms, and other accessible areas.
- **Supervise use of sharp items.** Only allow access to sharp objects when directly supervised by a trusted adult. Consider alternatives for daily needs (e.g., use electric razors, pre-cut food, or safety scissors).
- **Regularly check for hidden items.** Periodically check your child's room, backpack, and common areas for sharp objects that may have been hidden or brought in from outside.
- **Communicate openly.** Talk with your child about your concerns and the steps you are taking to keep them safe. Encourage them to share their feelings and let them know you are there to support them.
- **Inform all caregivers.** Ensure that all family members, school staff, and other adults responsible for supervising your child are aware of these safety measures.

Suicide attempts are often impulsive, and a moment of crisis can escalate very quickly.



Making sure your child cannot access lethal means at the wrong time is critical.



Limiting Access to Ligatures

Ligatures are items that can be used to tie or secure around the neck or body and may be used in attempts of self-harm or suicide.

While these items are everyday objects, they can pose serious risk in moments of crisis or emotional distress. Limiting access to ligatures is a critical part of safety planning for children and teens at risk of self-harm. Many suicide attempts occur during short-term emotional crises and removing or securing ligature risks can reduce the chance of impulsive actions.

When should I take extra precautions regarding access to ligatures?

- If your child is expressing suicidal thoughts or has a history of self-harm.
- After a recent mental health crisis or hospitalization.
- During periods of increased stress, loss, or significant life changes.



What are common household ligatures?

- Belts
- Ties
- Shoelaces
- Cords
- Ropes
- Scarves
- Drawstrings (from hoodies or sweatpants)
- Dog leashes
- Plastic bags

What steps can I take to protect my child from accessing ligatures during an emotional crisis?

- Remove hooks or fixtures that could be used for hanging (especially in bedrooms and bathrooms).
- Store potential ligatures in a locked closet or drawer.
- Remove or shorten cords on blinds or use breakaway cords or cordless blinds when possible.
- Replace drawstrings in clothing with elastic or remove them entirely.
- Talk with other caregivers, babysitters, or relatives about storage expectations in their homes.





Limiting Access to Firearms

When a child is experiencing thoughts of harming themselves or others, it can be one of the most frightening and overwhelming times for a parent. During these critical moments, supervision and monitoring are not just protective, they're powerful tools for understanding, connection, and prevention. This guide outlines action steps you can consider to help keep your child safe while maintaining trust and open communication.

Did you know?

- **Firearms are the leading method of death by suicide** among youth in Virginia. They are also involved in many tragic incidents of violence.
- **Most youth suicide attempts are impulsive.** Easy access to a firearm during a crisis can turn a temporary feeling into a permanent tragedy.
- **Firearms are extremely lethal.** Nine out of ten suicide attempts with a gun result in death.
- **Safe storage saves lives.** Storing guns unloaded, locked, and separated from ammunition greatly reduces the risk of both suicide and accidental shootings.



How can I store firearms safely?

Safe storage is a simple, powerful step every parent can take to protect their children and others.

- Always keep guns locked and unloaded.
- Use a gun safe, lockbox, or trigger lock. Never store firearms in easily accessible places, like drawers or closets.
- Store ammunition separately and locked.
- Keep keys or combinations hidden and out of reach of children and teens.

What steps can I take to protect my child from firearm-related risks?

- Talk to all household members about firearm safety and expectations. Ensure guests or relatives who visit also follow safe storage practices.
- Ask about firearms in other homes. Before your child visits a friend or relative, ask if there are firearms in the home and how they're stored.
- If your child is experiencing mental health challenges, remove access to firearms immediately. Consider removing firearms from the home temporarily or storing them off-site.
- Visit the [Lock and Talk website](#) and scroll to the bottom of the page for the interactive map to find your local Community Services Board (input your zip code) to access free firearm locks or medication lock boxes.



Limiting Access to Firearms

In Virginia, what legal requirements exist relating to the safe storage of firearms in the presence of minors?

Suicide attempts are often impulsive, and a moment of crisis can escalate very quickly.



Making sure your child cannot access lethal means at the wrong time is critical.

According to [Virginia Code § 18.2-56.2](#), the legal requirements for parents regarding safe storage of firearms are as follows:

- It is unlawful to leave a loaded, unsecured firearm in a manner that endangers the life or limb of any child under the age of 14. Violating this law is a Class 1 misdemeanor.
- It is unlawful to knowingly allow a child under the age of 12 to use a firearm unless the child is under the supervision of an adult. For this law, “adult” means a parent, guardian, person standing in loco parentis, or a person 21 years or older with the parent or guardian's permission. Violating this provision is also a Class 1 misdemeanor.



Recognizing & Responding to Signs of Self-Harm

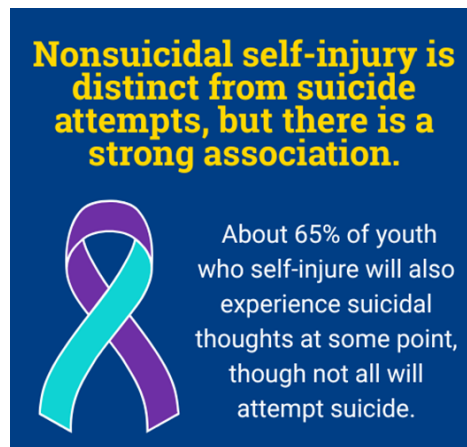
This information outlines general action steps you can consider to help keep your child safe while maintaining trust and open communication. Please note that not all these steps may be necessary depending on your child's age, symptoms, and other factors that make each situation unique.

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when someone intentionally hurts themselves as a way to cope with emotional pain, stress, or overwhelming feelings. It can include cutting, scratching, burning, or other actions that cause physical harm.

How can I recognize signs of self-harm?

- Unexplained cuts, bruises, or burn
- Wearing long sleeves or pants even in warm weather
- Frequent “accidents” or vague explanations for injuries
- Sharp objects hidden in personal spaces
- Changes in mood, such as sadness, withdrawal, irritability, or hopelessness
- Statements like: “I just want the pain to stop,” or “You wouldn’t understand.”



As a caregiver, how can I respond?

- Stay calm and nonjudgmental: respond with empathy, not anger or panic. Acknowledge their pain without shame.
 - Validate their emotions, even if they seem irrational to you: “That sounds really hard. I’m so glad you shared that with me.”
- Ask open, caring questions:
 - Try: “Can you tell me what’s been going on?”
 - Avoid: “Why would you do that to yourself?”
- Focus on support, not punishment: self-harm is often a coping mechanism, not attention-seeking or rebellion. If your child fears punishment this may result in an increased effort to hide self-harming behaviors.
- Encourage healthy coping strategies such as journaling, art, physical activity, music, or talking to someone they trust.
- Seek professional help: talk to a school counselor, therapist, pediatrician, local community services board, or contact a crisis resource center. Ask about safety plans, coping strategies, and signs of progress or worsening symptoms.



Recognizing & Responding to Signs of Violence

When a child is experiencing thoughts of harming themselves or others, it can be one of the most frightening and overwhelming times for a parent or caregiver. During these critical moments, parents and caregivers provide essential supervision and monitoring of their child, which are powerful opportunities for connection, prevention, and understanding. This guide outlines general action steps you can consider to help keep your child and others safe while maintaining trust and open communication.

Please note that not all of these steps may be necessary depending on your child's age, symptoms, and other factors that make each situation unique.

What are warning signs I can look for if I am concerned about my student harming others?

If you are concerned that your child may be on a pathway to violence, there are several warning signs and behaviors that indicate it's important to reach out for additional help:

- **Talking, writing, or posting about violence or death**, especially targeting specific people, groups, or places (such as schools or public spaces).
- **Frequent intense anger**, irritability, or daily temper loss.
- **Aggressive behavior toward others**, including fighting, bullying, or making threats.
- **Cruelty to animals** or destruction of property.
- **Withdrawal from friends, family, or activities** that were previously enjoyed.
- **Carrying, talking about, or showing an extreme fascination with weapons.**
- **Making threats or plans to harm others** or expressing a desire for revenge.
- **Risk-taking behaviors**, such as substance use, reckless driving, or unsafe sexual activity.
- **Sudden changes** in mood, school performance, or social relationships.
- **Blaming others** for their actions or refusing to take responsibility.
- **Preoccupation with violent themes in games, media, or play.**
- **History of discipline problems or conflicts with authority.**

If several of these signs are present, especially if they are new, escalating, or combined, it is crucial for parents to seek help from a qualified mental health professional immediately. Early intervention can help address underlying issues and reduce the risk of violence.



Recognizing & Responding to Signs of Violence

As a caregiver, how can I respond?

- Stay in control: respond to escalating situations with a calm, firm tone (avoid yelling).
- Ask open, nonjudgemental, caring questions, such as: “Can you tell me what’s been going on?”
- Validate their emotions, even if they seem irrational to you: try stating, “That sounds really hard. I’m so glad you shared that with me.” Let them know it's okay to feel angry, but there are better ways to express those feelings. Avoid dismissing, minimizing, or trying to immediately fix things.
- Set clear and consistent boundaries: explain what behaviors are not acceptable and why.
- Focus on support, not punishment: let them know they are not alone, and that you will help them.
- Remove means of harm: firearms, secure medications, sharp objects, or anything that could be used for self-harm or harm to others.
- Encourage healthy coping strategies: journaling, art, physical activity, music, or talking to someone they trust.
- Monitor media exposure: limit access to violent or age-inappropriate media content. Review your child’s social media accounts (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.) and internet search history for concerning content, conversations, or posts.
- Model healthy conflict resolution: show your child how to handle frustration and solve problems.
- Seek professional help: talk to a counselor, therapist, pediatrician, or contact crisis resources. Ask about safety plans, coping strategies, and signs of progress or worsening symptoms.

Limiting access to lethal means does not replace professional help.



If your child is struggling, seek support from mental health professionals immediately. Your vigilance and care can make a critical difference in your child’s safety and recovery.



Recognizing & Responding to Suicide Risk

When a child is experiencing thoughts of suicide, it can be one of the most frightening and overwhelming times for a parent or caregiver. During these critical moments, parents and caregivers provide essential supervision and monitoring of their child which are powerful opportunities for connection, prevention, and understanding.

This guide outlines general action steps you can consider to help keep your child safe while maintaining trust and open communication.

Please note that not all of these steps may be necessary depending on your child's age, symptoms, and other factors that make each situation unique.

What are warning signs I can look for if I am concerned about suicide risk?

- Talking about death or saying things like, “I wish I wasn’t here” or “You’d be better off without me.”
- Drawing or writing about death or dying.
- Sudden withdrawal from family, friends, or favorite activities.
- Aggressive behavior or intense mood swings.
- Increased sadness, hopelessness, or tearfulness.
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Giving away prized possessions or saying goodbye.

Remember:

Monitoring your child doesn’t mean hovering, it means staying engaged, staying present, and showing love through action. Your role as a caregiver is critical and you don’t have to do it alone. If you are ever unsure what to do, contact your school counselor, pediatrician, a mental health provider, or the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline for immediate guidance.



The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a free, confidential resource available 24/7 for anyone experiencing a mental health crisis, emotional distress, thoughts of suicide, or substance use concerns. As a parent, you or your child can call, text, or chat 988 at any time to connect with a trained crisis counselor who will listen, offer support without judgment, and help you find local resources if needed. The service is not just for emergencies it’s also there if you’re worried about your child or someone else and need guidance on how to help. Counselors are specially trained to support people of all ages, and fewer than 2% of calls require emergency services, so you can feel comfortable reaching out for help whenever you need it.



Recognizing & Responding to Suicide Risk

As a caregiver, how can I respond?

- Stay calm and nonjudgmental: take what your child says seriously. Respond with empathy, not anger or panic. Acknowledge their pain without shame.
- Validate their emotions, even if they seem irrational to you: “That sounds really hard. I’m so glad you shared that with me.”
- Avoid dismissing, minimizing, or trying to immediately fix things.
- Ask directly: Use age-appropriate language. For example, “Have you been feeling really sad or thinking about not wanting to be here?” or “I’ve noticed you’ve seemed really down lately. Are you thinking about hurting yourself?”
- Ask open, caring questions:
 - Try: “Can you tell me what’s been going on?”
 - Avoid: “Why would you want to kill yourself?”
- Focus on support, not punishment: let them know they are not alone, and that you will help them get through this.
- Remove or restrict access to means of harm: firearms, medications, harmful substances, sharp objects, ligatures, or anything that could be used for self-harm or a suicide attempt.
- Provide constant, compassionate supervision:
 - Stay physically present with your child as much as possible, especially during the early stages of concern.
 - Keep bedroom doors unlocked or open. If doors have a lock, make sure you can unlock them easily.
 - Limit time alone and possibly consider temporary shared spaces for sleeping arrangements.
 - Inform other trusted adults (e.g., family members, school staff) so they can also offer supervision and support.
 - If your child is in immediate danger, do not leave them alone. Call emergency services (911) or a crisis line for guidance (988).
 - Let your child know that when safety is a concern, privacy may be limited but explain it’s out of care, not punishment. Emphasize that your goal is to keep them safe, not to control or shame them.
 - Review your child’s social media accounts (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.) and internet search history for concerning content, conversations, or posts.
- Encourage healthy coping strategies.
- Seek professional help: talk to a counselor, therapist, pediatrician, or contact crisis resources. Ask about safety plans, coping strategies, and signs of progress or worsening symptoms.
- Develop an easy-to-reference safety plan with your child and their school counselor, outlining:
 - Warning signs and triggering or stressful events
 - Coping strategies (including people they can talk to)
 - Actions you will take if things escalate



Rockbridge County Crisis Community Resources

This is not an exhaustive list. Please contact your child's school counselor or administration for additional information if needed.

Crisis Mental Health Information

[Rockbridge Area CSB](#) 540.463.3141 241 Greenhouse Road, Lexington VA 24450
Crisis Hotline: 1.855.222.2046

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.8255(TALK)
SAMHSA National Helpline: 1.800.622.4357(HELP)

Suspected Abuse/Neglect Reporting and Prevention Services

Rockbridge County - Department of Social Services
Phone: 540.463.7143 Fax: 540.464.9110

[Virginia Hotlines:](#)

- Virginia Child Protective Services Hotline: 800-552-7096
- Virginia Adult Protective Services Hotline: 800 832-3858
- Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault: 800 838-8238

General Information on how to talk to your children from National Association of School Psychologists website: <https://www.nasponline.org/>



Community Resources

Medical Services

Carilion Rockbridge Community Hospital	540.458.3300
Rockbridge Area Health Center	540.464.8700
Rockbridge Area Hospice	540.463.1848
Velocity Care-Lexington	540.462.3950
Poison Control	800.222.1222
Lexington/Rockbridge Health Department	540.463.3185
Buena Vista Health Department	540.261.2149

Mental Health Services

Rockbridge Area Health Center	540.464.8700
Rockbridge Area Community Services Board	
Daytime	540.463.3141
Crisis	855.222.2046
Suicide Hotline	988 (call/text)
Suicide Text Line	741741
Veteran Crisis Hotline	800.273.8255 (ext. 1)
Adult REACH Crisis Hotline	855.917.8278
Child REACH Crisis Hotline	888.908.0486
Children's Mobile Crisis Unit Hotline	800.970.5897

Social Services

Rockbridge Area DSS	
Administrative	540.463.7143
Child Reporting	800.552.7096
Adult Reporting	888.832.3858

Domestic Violence Shelters

Project Horizon Crisis Line	540.463.2594
---	--------------

Counselor and Psychologists-Local

Molly Adams	540.416.2115
Janet Boller	857.204.8572
Chad Kelland	540.319.0053
Karmen Massie	540.254.7868
Glen Sullivan	540.463.2080
James Worth	540.463.4000
Bello Counseling	540.227.0385
Compass Behavioral Group	540.462.2914
Lexington Psychological Services	540.463.2080
Mountain Creek Counseling	540.742.7260
Well + Being Counseling	540.212.4111

*Please note that inclusion on this list doesn't mean endorsement
and exclusion reflects oversight.*



Community Resources

Counselor and Psychologists-Shenandoah Valley

Augusta Psychological Associates	540.949.4202
Augusta Behavioral Health	540.213.2525
Joseph Cianciolo & Elizabeth Cianciolo	540.886.3063
Paul Harmon	540.942.5847
Shenandoah Counseling Associates	540.886.5200
Shenandoah Psychological Services	540.251.7728
Arrow Project	540.255.0972
Sarah Spence	540.202.1979
Shenandoah Art Therapy	540.255.1458
Shenandoah Creative Counseling	540.471.9022
Shenandoah Psychiatric Medicine	540.949.0955
Wonderley Counseling Services	540.471.0569
Clarvida	540.248.5510

Counselor and Psychologists-Roanoke Valley

Appalachian Counseling Center	540.774.4211
Carilion Pediatric Behavioral Medicine	540.769.0976
Carilion Clinic Child Psychiatry	540.981.8181
Lewis Gale Behavioral Health	540.772.2801
Mosaic Mental Wellness & Health	540.566.4034
National Counseling Group	540.776.0716
Roanoke Valley Counseling Center	540.354.0911
Casa Latina	540.579.2776
Intercept Health Services	540.523.8099
Clarvida	540.344.9501

Law Enforcement

Non-Emergency Numbers

Buena Vista	540.261.6171
Lexington	540.463.9177
Rockbridge	540.463.7328
State Police	800.542.5959

Administrative Numbers

Buena Vista Police	540.261.6174
Lexington Police	540.462.3705
Rockbridge Sheriff's Office	540.463.7329

Legal Services

Court Services	540.463.5401
Blue Ridge Legal Aid	540.463.7334
VA Poverty Law Center	800.868.8752

*Please note that inclusion on this list doesn't mean endorsement
and exclusion reflects oversight.*



Community Resources

Medication Drop Boxes

CVS Lexington

506 E. Nelson St, Lexington, VA 24450

Carilion Rockbridge Community Hospital

1 Health Circle, Lexington, VA 24450

Buena Vista Police Department

306 Park Avenue, Buena Vista, VA 24416

Rockbridge County Sheriff's Office

258 Greenhouse Road, Lexington, VA 24450

Lexington Prescription Center

800 S. Main Street, Lexington, VA 24450

Family Assistance

United Way Rockbridge

540.463.4482

Fuel Assistance Program

540.463.9718

[Rockbridge Area Relief Association](#)

540.463.6943

Total Action for Progress

540.777.4673(HOPE)

Nearby Homeless Shelters

YWCA Domestic Violence Prevention Program-Lynchburg

434.847.7751

Salvation Army Center of Hope-Lynchburg

434-845.5939

Hand-Up Lodge-Lynchburg

434.846.2778

Liberty Godparent Home-Lynchburg

434.845.3466

Valley Mission Inc.-Staunton

540.343.7227

Rescue Mission-Roanoke

540.343.7227

The Haven Day Shelter-Charlottesville

434.207.2328

Salvation Army Emergency Shelter-Charlottesville

434.295.4058

PACEM-Charlottesville

434.973.1234

WARM-Waynesboro

540.324.8166

Residential Placements and Treatment

[Hallmark Youthcare](#)-Richmond

804.784.2200

[Liberty Point Behavioral Healthcare](#)-Staunton

540.213.0450

[Newport Academy](#)-McLean

703.665.1914

*Please note that inclusion on this list doesn't mean endorsement
and exclusion reflects oversight.*



Additional Resources

Additional Self-Harm Prevention Resources

- [Help for Cutting and Other Self-Injury](#) (Child Mind Institute): this article is written for caregivers on how to support children who are intentionally hurting themselves, often by cutting or scratching their skin, as a way to manage difficult emotions.
- [Self-Injury and Recovery, Information for Parents](#) (Cornell Research Program): This resource offers a comprehensive guide for parents navigating the challenges of supporting a child who engages in self-injury. This resource provides insights into recognizing signs of self-injury, understanding the emotional responses parents may experience, and effective communication strategies to foster a supportive environment for healing.
- [Self-Harm Guide for Parents](#) (Young Minds): This comprehensive guide for parents navigating the complexities of self-harm in young people. The resource covers key topics such as recognizing signs of self-harm, understanding underlying causes, and providing strategies to support your child, including how to engage in open conversations and seek professional help when needed.

Additional Suicide Prevention Resources

- [What to do if You're Worried About Suicide](#) (Child Mind Institute): This article offers parents and caregivers essential guidance on supporting a child who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts. It emphasizes the importance of open, empathetic communication, seeking professional help, and taking immediate action if there's a risk of harm, including contacting emergency services.
- [Suicide Prevention: 12 Things Parents Can Do](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics): This guide for parents on preventing youth suicide emphasizes the importance of recognizing warning signs, fostering open communication, and creating a supportive environment, while also providing resources for immediate help and professional support.
- [Helping Your Loved One Who is Suicidal](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration): This guide is designed to help families who have a loved one who is suicidal or has made a suicide attempt. It provides information on understanding suicide, warning signs, and action steps to take. Additionally, it provides guidance on how to prevent future attempts and keep your loved one safe.
- [A Journey Toward Health and Hope: Your Handbook for Recovery After a Suicide Attempt](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration): This resource guides people through the first steps toward recovery and a hopeful future after a suicide attempt. It includes personal stories from survivors, and strategies for recovery, such as re-establishing connections and finding a counselor.
- [Suicide is Different](#): Providing support for suicide caregivers, Suicide Is Different, offers a variety of resources and tools to help you assist loved ones who may be struggling with suicide.



Additional Resources

Additional Violence Prevention Resources

- [Warning signs of youth violence](#) (American Psychological Association): This comprehensive resource helps parents recognize early warning signs of youth violence, including sudden behavioral changes, withdrawal, or expressions of hopelessness. By understanding these indicators, parents can take proactive steps to support their child's mental health and seek appropriate interventions.
- [Understanding Violent Behavior in Children and Adolescents](#) (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry): This guide offers parents essential information on identifying and addressing violent behaviors in youth. It outlines risk factors such as exposure to violence, substance use, and family stressors, and emphasizes the importance of early intervention through professional evaluation and treatment to help children manage anger and develop healthier coping mechanisms.
- [The Risk of Violent and Homicidal Behavior in Children](#) (The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress): This resource provides information on risk factors contributing to violent and homicidal behavior in children. It provides guidance for parents on recognizing early warning signs and understanding the underlying causes of such behaviors, aiming to promote early intervention and support for affected children.

Additional Safety Resources for Parents and Caregivers

- [Threat Assessment Video for Parents](#) (Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services): This video provides an overview of the threat assessment process used in Virginia K-12 public schools. It explains that threat assessment is a structured, evidence-based process designed to identify and intervene with individuals who may pose a risk of violence to themselves or others.
- [OK2SpeakOut Parent Resources](#) (Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services): Offers a variety of information and tools to help parents talk with their teens, recognize warning signs, and support their child's mental health. It includes public service announcements and emphasizes the importance of being prepared to listen and engage in open conversations, while reminding users to seek immediate help in emergencies.

Additional Access to Lethal Means Resources

- [Lock and Talk Virginia](#): Information for families on how to identify the signs of a mental health crisis in their loved ones, and what resources are available to help; including a map of local community service boards.
- [Understanding Gun Safety](#) (Project ChildSafe): Project ChildSafe offers free educational resources to demonstrate the importance of firearm safety and to encourage the promotion and the practice of responsible firearm ownership.
- [Center for Gun Violence Solutions](#) (Johns Hopkins): The Center for Gun Violence Solutions at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health addresses gun violence as a public health emergency *and* utilizes objective, non-partisan research to develop solutions that inform, fuel, and propel advocacy to measurably lower gun violence.



Additional Resources

Additional Access to Lethal Means Resources (continued)

- [Understanding Youth Mental Health and Preventing Unauthorized Access to Firearms:](#) The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) developed this guide to address firearm safety, suicide prevention, and safeguarding mental health. This resource is for parents to learn more about mental health, how to recognize if their children need help and what to do if the warning signs for suicide or other concerning behaviors are there.

Need Immediate Help?

- If this is an emergency, call 911.
- [Virginia Suicide Prevention Lifeline:](#) call or text 988 (Free and confidential crisis counseling and support from trained professionals)



Community & School Resources

Contact your child's school counselor,
pediatrician, or local mental health
provider to discuss safety planning
and mental health supports for your child.

**Rockbridge County Public School
2893 Collierstown Road
Lexington, Virginia 24450
Phone: 540.463.7386 Fax: 540.463.7823**