

## ADOLESCENCE

# 8 ways to discuss suicide with TEENS

Discussing suicide with teens and children is difficult,  
but it is something they need to learn about



**S**uicide and self-harm is not an easy subject to discuss. But being able to talk openly about it is beneficial. Discussing it with teens and children may be even more difficult, but it is something they need to learn about.

More important, they need to know that they can rely on their parents for sympathy, advice and counsel should they ever experience depression, sadness, or suicidal impulses.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people in America. The situation isn't better in India, i.e., Bharat. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, one student commits suicide every hour. It's hard imagining suicide impacting your family or circle of friends, but it's quite likely to happen. Don't rule it out. That's why a frank and open discussion about suicide prevention may save the life of a loved one.

## Starting a conversation

Before discussing suicide and prevention with a teen, it is important that you have an understanding of the subject yourself. Discussing the warning signs is a major prevention step.

These signs include:

- ▶ Changes in mood. Children experiencing hopelessness, worry, anxiety, anger, worthlessness
- ▶ Changes in behaviour. Withdrawal from normal activities, changes in sleeping, eating habits, abrupt change of friends circle
- ▶ Threatening or attempting self-harm. Talking about or wishing for death, researching ways to die, giving away precious possessions, purchasing dangerous weapons
- ▶ Situational triggers. Death of a loved one, stress, humiliation, a break up, or getting into hot soup trigger



suicidal thoughts

**Risk factors**

To properly counsel a suicidal teenager, you must first understand the weight of the matter and the risk. Understand that suicide can happen in any family and can be just as likely as other teenage problems such as underage drinking.

In fact, the risk is more real when you consider other stressful issues teens may be facing (sexuality, bullying, gender identity, drug abuse, etc).

**Make a plan**

It is often helpful to plan out the discussion before initiating it with your teen. Knowing what you want to say can make the transition to an open discussion much easier. However, you don't have to stick to a rigid outline; your teen will help to guide the conversation.

**Choose a time to talk**

Getting teenagers to converse can be an arduous task. That is why timing may affect their willingness to open up. Here are some potential opportunities to start the discussion:

- ▶ during a car ride;
- ▶ when you hear or see something about suicide on TV;
- ▶ when a suicide occurs in your community.

**Honesty & direction**

It is okay to admit that suicide can be difficult to discuss. Talking about your feelings on the subject will help your child open up as well. If your teen still has a hard time

speaking about it, feel free to ask them direct questions, such as:

- ▶ "Have any of your friends dealt with suicide?"
- ▶ "Do you know anyone who has ever made a suicide attempt?"
- ▶ "Do you ever have any feelings of anxiety?"

**Be supportive**

Let your child know that you are always there for love and support. Let her know that she can come to you for support anytime, regardless of what she is going through. Inform your teen that there are a number of other resources they can turn to as well, including:

- ▶ school officials, teachers, or guidance counselors,
- ▶ close relatives

**Active listening**

Be sure to listen to your teen and respond appropriately. If you over-react, she may not come back to you in time of need. If you under-react, your teen may think you don't care. Respond meaningfully, thoughtfully, and helpfully.

**Take further action if necessary**

If your teen expresses or shows any signs of self-harm, be sure to consult a certified counselor or mental health professional. Moreover, you should check in with your teen over time to ensure that she remains on the path to a happy, healthy life.

(Steve Johnson, Excerpted and adapted from <https://centerforparentingeducation.org/>)

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