

A Guide for Parents for Suicide Prevention and Support

When do the normal ups and downs of children and teens become something to worry about? It's important to learn about the factors that can put a teen at risk for suicide. The more you know, the better you'll be prepared for understanding what can put your child at risk.

1. Don't let your child's depression or anxiety snowball.

Your child may just be having a bad day, but maybe it's something more if this mood has been going on for a couple of weeks. Many times they're too embarrassed to reveal their unhappiness to others, including Mom and Dad. Boys in particular may try to hide their emotions. Start with *"You seem sad. Would you like to talk about it? Maybe I can help."*

2. Listen—even when your child is not talking.

Not all, but most kids who are thinking about suicide tip off their troubled state of mind through troubled behaviors and actions. There are usually three or more issues or factors going on all at once in a child's life at the time when he or she is thinking about taking his or her life.

These include but are not limited to:

- Major loss (i.e., break up or death)
- Substance use
- Peer or social pressure
- Access to weapons
- Public humiliation
- Severe chronic pain
- Chronic medical condition
- Impulsiveness/aggressiveness
- Family history of suicide

If your instinct tells you that a child might be a danger to himself, heed your instincts and don't allow him to be left alone. In this situation, it is better to overreact than to underreact.

3. Never shrug off threats of suicide as typical child or adolescent melodrama.

Any written or verbal statement of *"I want to die"* or *"I don't care anymore"* should be treated seriously. Often, children who attempt suicide had been telling their parents repeatedly that they intended to kill themselves. **Any of these other red flags warrants your immediate attention and action by seeking professional help right away:**

- *"Nothing matters."*
- *"I wonder how many people would come to my funeral?"*
- *"Sometimes I wish I could just go to sleep and never wake up."*
- *"Everyone would be better off without me."*
- *"You won't have to worry about me much longer."*

When a child states comments like the ones above or admits to feeling suicidal, try not to react with shock. Above all, don't tell him or her, *"You don't mean that!"* Be willing to listen nonjudgmentally to what he or she is really saying, which is: *"I need your love and attention because I'm in tremendous pain, and I can't seem to stop it on my own."* In a calm voice, you might say, *"I see. You must really, really be hurting inside."*

4. Seek professional help right away.

If your child's behavior has you concerned, don't wait to contact your pediatrician. Contact a local mental health provider who works with children to have your child or youth evaluated as soon as possible so that your son or daughter can start therapy or counseling if he or she is not in danger of self-harm. However, call your local mental health crisis support team or go to your local emergency room if you think your child is actively suicidal and in danger of self-harm.

5. Share your feelings.

Let your child know he or she is not alone and that everyone feels sad or depressed or anxious now and then, including moms and dads. Without minimizing his anguish, be reassuring that these bad times won't last forever. Things truly will get better and you will help get your child through counseling and other treatment to help make things better for him or her.

6. Encourage your child not isolate himself or herself from family and friends.

It's usually better to be around other people than to be alone, but don't push if he/she says no.

7. Recommend exercise.

Physical activity as simple as walking or as vigorous as pumping iron can put the brakes on mild to moderate depression. Experts recommend working out for thirty to forty minutes a day, two to five times per week. Exercise distracts people from their problems and makes them feel better about themselves and working out causes the brain to release endorphins believed to improve mood and decrease physical pain.

8. Remind your child who is undergoing treatment not to expect immediate results.

Talk therapy and/or medication usually take time to improve mood. Your child shouldn't become discouraged if he or she doesn't feel better right away. Until therapy begins to take effect, this is probably not the time to assume responsibilities that could prove overwhelming. Suggest that he or she divide large tasks into smaller, more manageable ones whenever possible and participate in favorite, low-stress activities. The goal is to rebuild confidence and self-esteem.

9. If you keep guns at home, store them safely or move all firearms elsewhere until the crisis has passed. Prescription medications should be locked away as well.

If you suspect your child might be suicidal, it is extremely important to keep all firearms, alcohol, and medications under lock and key. Change safe or lock codes or passwords, even if you think your child does not know where they are or the codes to get in. Many

attempted or completed suicides happen with things children have access to in their own home.

10. Make sure you are taking care of yourself.

Caring for a loved one who is struggling with medical or mental health concerns can take a toll on the caregiver. Make sure you are setting a good example for your child as well. Make healthy living a priority: make sure you are getting enough sleep and eating healthy if possible, find a support system through friends or family, and reach out for professional help when needed.

Resources: If you are experiencing a severe life threatening crisis, please call 911 immediately.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255)

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

KLARAS: Children/Adolescent Mental Health (254) 752-7889

Klaras Center for Families is dedicated to providing comprehensive services to the children, adolescents, young adults and families in the most trauma-sensitive, culturally sensitive, safe healing environment.

STARRY Waco (254)-399-6552

STARRY Counseling services are available at no cost to families with children up to 17 years old (or youth older than the age of 17 who are still enrolled in high school in Texas). Counseling services include individual, group, and family counseling as well as parenting classes.

The Family Health Center (254) 313-4500

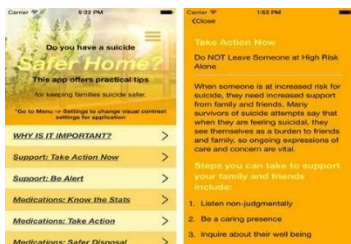
The Family Health Center provides a wide range of medical and mental health services. Their clinicians are Licensed Professional Counselors, Masters Level Social Workers, and Licensed Clinical Social Workers who are full of experience to help you and your family. They accept most insurance plans including CHIP and Medicaid.

*If you have insurance you can always call your insurance provider to find providers in the area that accept your insurance.

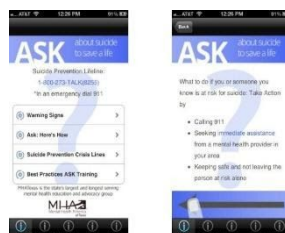
The Jason Foundation Parent Resource Program

<http://jasonfoundation.com/get-involved/parent/parent-resource-program/>

Suicide Safer Home APP for Parents



ASK APP for Students



A Friend Asks APP



Midway ISD Online Community Resource Guide:

<https://www.midwayisd.org/cms/lib/TX01000662/Centricity/Domain/33/MISD%20resource%20guide.pdf>

"In order to assist families that may need counseling support or services beyond that provided by Midway ISD, we offer the following list of resources that may be of interest and benefit to parents. The District is providing links to these resources as a convenience; the inclusion of any linked resource does not imply any affiliation, recommendation, or endorsement of the resource, nor a guarantee of the quality of information contained on the linked site. The District makes no representation or warranties, express or implied, as to the accuracy of any of the material located on other sites. Please note that the linked sites are not under the control of the Midway ISD, and Midway ISD is not responsible for the content of any linked site or any link contained in a linked site, or any changes or updates to such sites."

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics (2019). *Ten Things Parents Can Do To Prevent Suicide*.

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Ten-Things-Parents-Can-Do-to-Prevent-Suicide.aspx>