



Suicide Awareness and Prevention

In a crisis situation, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or text the Crisis Text Line by texting 'TALK' to 741741 to speak or text with a trained counselor who can provide guidance on the most appropriate next steps and resources. Calling 911 is best for situations when self-harm is occurring or is about to occur. Additional resources and links are listed at the end of this document as well.

Note: Information gathered from the American Psychological Association, the American Society for Suicide Prevention, Youth.gov, and the SQUARE (Suicide, Questions, Answers, and Resources) Program.

Facts

Developmentally, the years between childhood and adulthood represent a critical period of transition and significant cognitive, mental, emotional, and social change. While adolescence is a time of tremendous growth and potential, navigating new milestones in preparation for adult roles involving education, employment, relationships, and living circumstances can be difficult. These transitions can lead to various mental health challenges that can be associated with increased risk for suicide.

According to the youth.gov website, suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth age 15-24. Approximately one out of every 15 high school students reports attempting suicide each year. One out of every 53 high school students reports having made a suicide attempt that was serious enough to be treated by a doctor or a nurse.³ For each suicide death among young people, there may be as many as 100 to 200 suicide attempts.

As parents, you can play a role in building up your child's mental health simply by becoming aware of the risk factors and warning signs that can lead to suicide, making yourself available to their your child, knowing how to practice having a caring conversation, and being aware that help is always available.

Risk Factors and Warning Signs

When children hit puberty, there are changes in their body and brain that can and do lead to behavioral changes. But there is a normal range which can manifest as moodiness, irritability, and pushing you away. This is a natural part of adolescent development. What should be concerning is if you notice indications of hopelessness or worthlessness, a withdrawal from friends and activities, or suicidal thinking or behavior. These are not typical manifestations for teenage angst.

You know your child. You know their usual patterns, their common reactions to frustration and challenges, and what their good days and bad days look like. Trust your instincts if their behavior goes beyond these usual patterns of behavior. It could be just the tip of the iceberg of possible changes in their physical or mental health. It's worth engaging them in conversation to get a fuller understanding of what they are experiencing so you can provide support, and get a better sense of how severe it is.

If your teen or tween's sleep, energy, appetite, motivation, substance use, and frustration aren't bouncing back to normal after a few days, have them see their pediatrician or a mental health practitioner.

Below are specific risk factors and warning signs which have been identified.

Examples of Risk Factors

Several factors increase the risk of suicidal thoughts or behaviors, including:

- Mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety and other mood disorders
- Alcohol and substance use

- Impulsive behaviors
- History of trauma or abuse
- Family history of suicide
- Previous suicide attempt(s)

Examples of Warning Signs

Not everyone exhibits the same signs that they're thinking about suicide, but these warning signs are cause for concern:

- Physical changes in appearance or hygiene
- Increase in alcohol or drug use
- Sudden drop in grades
- Social withdrawal
- Talking about suicide or preoccupation with death
- Risky or reckless behaviors
- Self-harm behaviors such as cutting
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having nothing to live for
- Researching suicide methods and/or acquiring weapons

Talking about Suicide

Check in with your child regularly, beyond just day-to-day tasks such as homework. Don't be afraid to have a conversation with your child about mental health and suicide. If your child is talking about any level of distress, do not hesitate to ask them whether they're feeling changes in their mood or level of stress, or having suicidal thoughts. Asking your child directly about suicide will not increase their risk, or plant the idea. It will create an opportunity to offer support, and let them know you care enough to have the conversation.

If your child isn't ready to talk, leave the invitation open for later by saying, "Whenever you want to talk, I'm here to listen and support you." You could add "I won't judge, and I'll never stop supporting you, no matter what challenges you face." The likelihood is that your child will open up when you least expect it, sitting side-by-side rather than face-to-face, in the car or engaged in some other activity together. When your teen starts to open up, be careful not to fall into the trap of jumping in with a solution or by saying, "You should..." or "Why didn't you..."

Listen intently and without judgment. Ask open-ended questions, i.e. those that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Resist the urge to offer quick fixes or solutions to their challenges, which tends to shut down further dialog. Validate and support their feelings.

Follow their cues, and say things like, "Tell me more about that. I'd love to understand more about what that's like for you. When he said that/did that to you, how did that make you feel?"

If your child has a history of depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, self-harm or substance use, you should monitor them more closely, and consider involving a professional, either at key times, or for the longer term for more chronic conditions.

Steps to Facilitate Communication

- Express your concern. It's a myth that if you mention suicide, you might plant the idea. By honestly and openly expressing your concerns, you'll send an important message that you care and understand.
- Really listen. Parents can be tempted to shut down an upsetting conversation by saying, "I don't want to hear those things," or "I had a hard time as a teen, but I got over it." Instead, say, "Tell me more about how you're feeling." Then listen.
- Maintain connection. You might want to safeguard a child or teen by keeping him home in a protective cocoon, but isolation can increase the risk of suicidal behaviors. Help a struggling child maintain connections with friends and loved ones. As a parent, spend extra time with your child. Even watching TV or playing video games together sends a signal that you're there.
- Be compassionate. Express your love for the child or teen. Tell her you hear her pain, that it can get better, that you will make sure she gets help and will support her every step of the way.
- Trust your judgment. If a young person denies that he is having suicidal thoughts, but you doubt his honesty, trust your intuition. Take further steps to ensure his or her safety.
- Prioritize safety. Remove potentially harmful items (medications, knives, weapons, etc.) from the house, make sure the child or teen is not left alone, and consult a mental health professional right away.

Resources

Talk with your child about how to seek help. If you fear they may be at risk, get professional help right away. Let them know you'll be there for them no matter what, that your love is unconditional, and that you'll help them get the support they need to get through this challenging time.

While there are a wide variety of professional help options available, Immanuel Schools has compiled a list of Christian based counseling resources that may be helpful.

Immanuel Schools On-Campus Support

Grant Thiessen, a local community pastor that partners with Immanuel, is available to counsel students on-campus and is open to meeting with family members as well. Appointments can be scheduled through calling the district office.

Local Options

Fresno Pacific University - Fresno (559-453-8050)

Link Care- Fresno

<http://www.linkcare.org/>

The Well Counseling Center - Fresno

wellcounselingcenter.org

Resilience Counseling Group - Fresno

<https://www.resiliencecounselinggroup.com/>

Trinity Ministries - Visalia

<https://www.tmicounseling.com/>

Search for Christian Counselors by Area

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/>

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