

How do I talk to my child about suicide?

As a parent, you know your child best. There may be a time when you sense something different and worrisome about your child's behavior or someone tells you that your child has mentioned ending their life. Take these concerns seriously and have a conversation with your child. Disregard anyone saying you are overreacting, or your child just wants attention. Having the conversation may be scary, but it is important. Take a deep breath and collect your thoughts

Ask your child directly: Are you thinking about suicide?

- Ask a direct question - don't beat around the bush.
 - It may be scary, but it is important to appear calm when you talk to your child. Asking calmly and directly can show your child that you aren't afraid to have this conversation. You can say: "Are you thinking about suicide?" or "Have you ever thought about ending your life?" Rest assured that when asking directly, you will not put the idea of suicide into your child's head.
- Keep your tone conversational rather than confrontational.
 - While this is a serious conversation you don't want your child to feel like they are in trouble or that you are angry with them. Listen without judgement. Let them know you are concerned and care by saying something like, "Thank you for talking to me and telling me how you have been feeling." Validate their feelings and let them know that they are not alone.
- Avoid trying to "fix" the problem.
 - While it may be an instinct to go right to problem-solving mode, know that one conversation isn't going to "fix things." Do more listening than talking and really try to hear what they are saying as you offer consistent support. Some examples of phrases to use are: "I am here for you," and "We're going to get through this together."

Utilize crisis resources

Reach out for help - Call 988, the new number for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. You can call or text that number 24/7. You will be connected to trained crisis counselors who can provide support and resources for free. They will help you figure out the next step to help your child. Remember that you are not and do not have to be a mental help professional in this situation.

There are more resources out there for you

Other national crisis resources (also available for free, 24/7) are Crisis Text Line (Text PA to 741741) and The TrevorLifeline for LGBTQ+ youth (text START to 678678 or call 1-866-488-7386)

Non crisis resource for ongoing follow-up support:

This situation can be overwhelming for parents but we're here to help you. Reach out to a PA Parent and Family Alliance, Family Support Partner (FSP) at 888-273-2361 or scan the QR code for more information.

