



Youth Suicide Prevention - Surviving the Teens® Tips for Parents

1. Determine your child's coping techniques. Your child will use various coping techniques to decrease stress; some can be harmful and contribute to depression. Acknowledge how your child copes with stress without reacting.

2. Identify your child's stress factors. Make a list of what you see as stress factors and how they affect your child's behavior, self-image, and mental health. Then talk to your child about what is stressful to him or her. Explore positive ways of reducing stress and responding to stressful or crisis situations.

3. Know the risk factors. Depression is the major risk factor for suicide; substance abuse is the second major risk factor. Early signs of depression can include: change in sleeping or eating patterns, a gain or loss of weight, irritability, lashing out at others, fatigue, withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, anxiety, extra sensitivity to criticism, being pessimistic, having low self-esteem or feeling worthless. Talk to your child's doctor if you observe several of these signs or changes, or if you have concerns about substance abuse, physical/sexual abuse or teasing and bullying.

4. Recognize the warning signs. Any sudden change of behavior or appearance could be a warning sign. Even a positive change may be a sign. For instance, suddenly appearing calm or happy after a period of being angry, upset or depressed could mean that the child has thought of "a way out" of the situation. Other signs could include: a drop in grades, feeling no one cares or not belonging/fitting in, isolation, feelings of helplessness and/or hopelessness, taking unnecessary risks, increasing use of drugs and/or alcohol, and any direct or indirect statements. Take all signs seriously.

5. Restrict methods of suicide. Remove things from the home that can harm your child, such as guns, pills, or poisons. Having guns in the home greatly increases the risk of suicide. It is also important to safely dispose of old prescription medications that are no longer being used and to monitor over-the-counter medications, which can also be dangerous.

6. Keep the lines of communication open. Actively listen to your child by encouraging him to express feelings without judging or reacting to his comments and by imagining how he is feeling. Share your concerns and tell him how much you care for him. Do not be afraid to ask your child if he has had thoughts of dying or not wanting to live anymore. This will not give your child the idea of suicide, but will give him permission to talk about it. See "Steps to LAST®" at www.cincinnatichildrens.org/steps-to-last.

7. Get help. It's important for children to know that it's okay to ask for help. Make a list of people your child can call when in a crisis and have it displayed in a prominent place. This could include the names and numbers of family members, friends, the school counselor/nurse, a coach, a pastor/rabbi, and a crisis line. Crisis numbers can be called 24-hours a day for help, such as 1-800-273-TALK. If your child is actively suicidal, immediately take him/her to the Emergency Room. You can also call Cincinnati Children's Psychiatric Intake Response Center at 636-4124 for a referral. For more information about the in-school program, visit www.cincinnatichildrens.org/surviving-teens or contact Cathy Strunk, MSN, RN, Surviving the Teens® Program Director/Educator, at cathy.strunk@cchmc.org.