

# Back to School Mental Health: Tips for Talking to Youth About Suicide

Numerous research studies indicate children and youth have been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Forced into remote learning and physically isolated from their peers and activities, many have suffered declines in social, emotional, physical and academic health. And the impact continues to linger.

A [recent survey of parents](#) indicated that a third of children in the United States show some signs of mental health distress, including changes in behavior, eating habits, and activity levels.

Research shows transitions of any kind are stressful and impact mental health and major life transitions are environmental risk factors for suicide. As kids readjust to in-person learning and new routines this fall, it's essential for parents, teachers, and caregivers to understand suicide warning signs and be confident about starting a conversation. These steps can support our young people and save lives.

## Four Ways to Start a Conversation

- Read up on the facts, practice your approach, and plan for a time when you won't be rushed to start the conversation with your loved one.
- Communicate in a straightforward manner. **It's OK to ask**, "Are you now or have you thought about ending your life?" Regardless of your feelings, focus on listening openly, expressing concern, and reassure them you are there to help.
- Ask if they have access to any lethal means and safely help remove their access to them
- Keep in mind children and teenagers may not be aware or able to express what they are feeling. Keep the lines of communication open and check-in more than once.

## Where to Get Help

Resources for those in crisis include:

- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-8255**
- The California Peer-Run Warm Line at **1-855-845-7415**
- Online resources are also available at **[suicideispreventable.org](https://suicideispreventable.org)**
- The Trevor Project Lifeline for LGBTQ youth at **1-866-488-7386**

## Encourage Healthy Ways to Cope



### Social Support:

One of the most crucial protective factors against stress is having stable and supportive relationships with even just one other person. Encourage your loved one to engage with their social network in a safe manner.



### Take care of their physical health:

Ensure children get enough sleep, eat healthy foods, and stay active and hydrated. Research has shown this has dramatic effects on people's mental as well as physical wellbeing.



### Building Mindfulness and Gratitude:

Research has found that taking time to practice mindfulness, such as breathing techniques, journaling, or meditation, can help children to recognize and process emotions, build resilience, and buffer the effects of stress. Work with your loved one to find a supportive outlet.



### Seek Help:

Don't hesitate to reach out to friends, family members, school or professional counselors who can provide resources and help strengthen coping strategies.