Youth Suicide Prevention Toolkit for Parents

MYTH
A youth threatening suicide is not serious about it.

FACT
Youth who talk about suicide are serious risks. It’s better to overestimate the risk of suicide and intervene than to ignore or minimize behaviors.

MYTH
Suicide cannot be prevented because a suicidal youth will find a way to do it.

FACT
The keys to prevention are recognizing the warning signs and knowing what to do. Most suicidal youth do not want to die, they just want their pain to end.

MYTH
Talking about suicide will cause youth to attempt.

FACT
Talking about suicide reduces the risk. Be direct in a caring, non-confrontational way. Open talk and concern are a source of relief and key for prevention.

Developed by Oakland County Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force
Why do I need to watch for suicide?

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death for those ages 15 to 24 in the U.S.
- For each suicide death, family and close friends are at higher risk for suicide themselves.
- If you are concerned, don’t wait to talk to your child.
- Knowing the risk factors and warning signs helps you help your child with concerns about himself or another student.
- Asking directly about suicide tells your child it’s ok to talk about it with you.
- Take all suicidal thoughts, threats and behaviors seriously.
- Most suicidal people want to end severe emotional pain.
- Emotional pain makes it hard to think clearly, consider options or remember reasons for living.

Risk factors

Prior suicide attempt
- This is the strongest predictor of future attempts.

Substance use
- Using alcohol and other drugs can be an attempt to self-medicate to ease the pain associated with depression, traumatic events or other issues.
- 96% of drug-related suicide attempts involved prescription drugs.

Mental illness
- 1 in 5 teens will have depression at some point.
- Many teens with depression are undiagnosed.
- Childhood depression often continues into adulthood, especially if left untreated.

Interpersonal conflict
- **Bullying:** In-person or cyberbullying
- **Trauma:** Examples include injury, assault, legal trouble, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.
- **Relationship breakups:** Impulsivity combined with a potential inability to think through consequences before acting can increase the risk for suicide following a breakup.
- **Sexting:** Tell your children to never take images they don’t want classmates, family or future employers to see. Forwarding a sexual picture of a minor is a crime.
- **Recent loss:** Examples include moving, changing schools, divorce, or death of a loved one.
- **Questioning sexual orientation**

Many teens say their parents are not discussing the dangers of prescription drug abuse with them.
Warning signs

Call 911 if:
• A suicide attempt has been made
• A weapon is present
• The person is out of control

Take immediate action and call 800-231-1127 (Common Ground) if someone:
• Makes a serious threat to kill himself or herself such as:
  — “I wish I were dead.”
  — “If … doesn’t happen, I’ll kill myself.”
  — “What’s the point of living?”
• Looks for a way to carry out a suicide plan
• Talks about death or suicide in text messages, on social media sites or in poems/music
• Gives away possessions

Call 800-231-1127 if someone exhibits uncharacteristic behavior:
• Hopelessness
• Rage, anger or seeking revenge
• Reckless or risky behavior
• Expressions of feeling trapped, like there’s no way out
• Alcohol or drug use
• Withdrawal from family or friends
• Anxiety, agitation or sleep irregularity
• Dramatic mood changes
• Discussions of no reason for living or no sense of purpose
• Depression

Common Ground
800-231-1127
commongroundhelps.org
Prevention

What you can do right now:

- Know suicide risk factors and warning signs.
- Share this booklet with your child.
- Have a conversation about what your child should do if he is concerned about himself or a friend.
- Promote skills in problem-solving and conflict resolution.
- Maintain a supportive and involved relationship with your child.
- Encourage participation in sports, activities at school/place of worship or volunteering.
- Help your teen develop strong communication skills.
- Get medical care for depression and substance use.
- Don’t leave a depressed or suicidal teen home alone.
- Most suicides occur in the early afternoon/evening in the teen’s home.

Remove these items or secure in your home:

Prescription and over-the-counter medications

- Keep medications, including vitamins with iron, where your kids or their friends cannot access.
- Don’t keep lethal doses of medication on hand. A pharmacist can advise you on safe quantities.
- Safely discard unused medications. Visit oakgov.com/sheriff/Pages/community_services/operation_medicine_cabinet.aspx for drop-off locations.

Alcohol and drugs

- Talk to your kids about substance use as a major risk factor for suicide.
- If your teen has a pattern of substance use, seek mental health care. Substance use could be an attempt to self-medicate a mental illness.
- Substance use makes youth more likely to choose lethal means, such as guns. Remove firearms from your home.

Poisons

- Lock up potentially harmful common household products, including household cleaners, products containing alcohol (such as mouthwash, hand sanitizer, etc.), and cosmetics (such as nail polish remover, perfume, etc.).

Guns

- Remove firearms from your home. More than half of all suicide deaths result from a gunshot wound.
Talking to your kids

How to start a conversation after a relationship breakup:
- What did you notice about yourself in the relationship?
- What is positive? What would you like to change?
- Were there patterns or issues that brought you into this relationship or caused it to end?
- What are your priorities and preferences in life?
- Who are you on your own and how do you want to live your life?

How to start a conversation about suicide:
- “I have been feeling concerned about you lately.”
- “Lately, I’ve noticed some differences in you. How are you doing?”
- “What happened? It might help to talk about it.”

Questions you can ask:
- “When did you begin feeling like this?”
- “Did something happen that made you start feeling this way?”
- “How can I support you right now?”
- “Could you tell me more about that?”

What to say that can help:
- “You are not alone— I’m here for you.”
- “I may not understand exactly how you feel, but I love you and want to help.”
- “I think you feel there is no way out. Let’s talk about some options.”
Resources

Common Ground
Resource & Crisis Helpline 800-231-1127 (24-hour)
Text 248-809-5550
Crisis Chat commongroundhelps.org

Community Network Services
248-745-4900 • cnsmi.org

Easter Seals Michigan
800-75-SEALS • essmichigan.org

Oakland County Community Mental Health Authority
800-341-2003 • occmha.org

Oakland County Health Division Office of Substance Abuse Services
248-858-0001
oakgov.com/health/Pages/program_service/osas/sas_about.aspx

Oakland County Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force
oakgov.com/health/pages/initiatives/suicideprevention.aspx

Oakland Family Services
248-858-7766 • oaklandfamilyservices.org

Training and Treatment Innovations
248-969-9932 • ttiinc.org

Other useful websites:

Is your home suicide proof?
suicideproof.org

How prevalent are mental health issues?
halloffus.com

Inspiration for teens
loveislouder.com

Suicide prevention for LGBTQ youth
thetrevorproject.org