



# How do I know if my child is at risk for suicide?

Below is a list of potential warning signs to look for in your children or your children's friends. These are just potential warning signs and do not mean that your child is considering suicide, however on the back are some ways to help and support your child.

## **Verbal** Saying things such as:

- I want to kill myself
- I wish I was dead
- I don't want to be here anymore
- No one understands me
- I can't take it anymore
- Things will never get better
- I'm tired of being a burden to my friends and family
- No one would miss me if I were gone
- I can't do anything right

## **Physical Changes**

- Significant change in appetite or weight.
- Suddenly not caring about appearances or cleanliness.
- Unexplained cuts, scrapes or bruises.
- Appearing tired all the time, sleeping too much or too little.
- Health complaints such as headaches and body aches.

## **Acting Differently**

- Changes in mood: more withdrawn, anxious, sad, or a sudden mood lift after a down period.
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Suddenly taking more risks: not taking prescribed medication, ignoring physical limitations or using more drugs or alcohol.
- Loss of concentration.
- Withdrawing from friends and family.
- Losing interest in the things that used to be enjoyed.
- Not planning for the future.
- Hurting oneself on purpose.
- Thinking and talking about death a lot.
- Unexplained good-byes or unusual personal expressions that have a sense of closure such as giving away possessions.

## **Situations**

- Recently having lost a loved one, relationship or job.
- Having questions or worries about being gay, bisexual or transgender.
- Previous suicide attempts.
- Recent death of a loved one.
- Problems in an important relationship (girlfriend/boyfriend, best friend or parental).
- Problems at work or school, decline in academic function or college rejection.
- Social isolations or significant change in peer group.

## **If you are concerned, below are the recommended steps to keep you and your family safe:**

### **You are not in this alone, you have resources!**

- Talk with school staff, including the School Counselor, Principal, or Vice Principal or reach out to therapist, doctor, or other Health Care Professional to discuss options.
- San Diego Access and Crisis Line, 1-888-724-7240 Available 7 days a week/24 hours a day
- Emergencies: 911 and ask for the PERT team if possible.
- Non-emergencies: Call your Police Department or Local Sheriff's Office
- Emergency Screening Unit: (619) 421-6900
  - Address: 730 Medical Center Court Chula Vista, CA, 91911
  - The Emergency Screening Unit (ESU) provides emergency psychiatric evaluations, crisis intervention, crisis stabilization, brief outpatient counseling, case management and emergency medication management to children and adolescents under 18 years.

### **Ask: "Are you thinking about suicide?" in a caring, yet straightforward manner**

- Bringing up the subject of suicide and discussing it openly is one of the most helpful things you can do. There is no evidence that screening or talking to youth about suicide induces suicidal thinking or behavior.
- Be non-judgmental. Do offer words of encouragement. Do not make your child feel embarrassed or ashamed. Also do not promise to keep this to yourself.

### **After every question and listen**

- For their response. It is easy to say "no" to just end the conversation but if you are concerned, talk to them for a little bit more to be sure.
- To their reasons for wanting to end their life. This will help with context and concerns in their life, also known as warning signs for the future.
- For hope and their reasons to want to live! Most suicidal people do not want death; they want the pain to stop.

### **Ask: "What were/are your plans and thoughts exactly?"**

- Know the facts so you can keep your child safe.

### **Ask: "Do you have any items you were planning to use to hurt yourself?"**

- Disable their plan. Make sure you remove those items from your child's reach and possession.

### **Ask: "What did you do in response to these thoughts?"**

- These can be reasons or ways your child has already thought of to keep themselves safe.
- Help them find positive and safe outlets for their feelings (such as coping skills or chat lines.)

### **Do not leave the youth alone and contact your resources**

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*Adapted from NeedhamACTS website, [http://needhamacts.org/parents/at\\_risk.htm](http://needhamacts.org/parents/at_risk.htm) and LivingWorks' Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST).*

**San Diego Youth Services – HERE Now School Based Suicide Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Program**  
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