Teens and Suicide

What families should know

According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is a leading cause of death among youth in the United States. Teens can go from feeling OK to really sad/upset very quickly and you may not always know why. Things like school or friends, an argument or break-up, changes to their medicine, or using drugs/alcohol can all impact your teen's mood.

When your teen is very sad/upset, it's important to help them stay safe. Remember, teenagers' brains are still growing, and they don't always think about what could happen next. This handout will help you understand how you can help your teen stay safe if they are feeling extremely sad or upset.

SELF-HARM VS. SUICIDE

Self-harm and suicide are different things, but both are serious. Let's look at what sets them apart:

- **Self-harm** means hurting yourself on purpose, but it's **not always** about wanting to die.
- **Suicide** means someone wants to end their life.

HOW TO TALK OPENLY WITH YOUR TEEN

Talking openly means having an honest and clear conversation about a topic. This means you speak directly to the point and about your feelings – and your teen feels that they can talk directly as well. Tips on how to have an open conversation can include:

- Letting your child know that you're always there if they want to talk – about anything.
- Listening and taking their feelings seriously. What might seem small to you could feel big to them.
- It's OK to ask directly if they're thinking about suicide. It won't make things worse.
- Be honest about what safety steps you're taking and why.
- You can ask a therapist, pediatrician, or other healthcare provider to help with hard talks.

HOW TO PLAN FOR SAFETY

- Think about **what could hurt your child** in your home and l**ock these things away** so your child can't reach them. You can use a lockbox, or you can put a lock on a closet door.
    - Remember to keep the key or lock code safe so your child can't access the lockbox or closet.

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- It may be hard to keep your child away from all items they could possibly use to hurt themselves. So, when in doubt, have a trusted adult with your child as much as possible.

LOCK UP ALL MEDICINE

- Get rid of (or *dispose of*) old medicine.
  - Poison control can help you with this, if needed. You can reach them online at www.poison.org or call 800.222.1222 for help.
  - Scan the QR code to read about the FDA recommendations for safe medication disposal.
- Keep only a small amount of the medicine you need in your home.
- Lock up **all** medicine, even over-the-counter ones like Tylenol® and cold medicine.

FDA recommendations for safe medication disposal

LOCK UP ALL ALCOHOL

- Alcohol can make someone more likely to act without thinking.
- It's also dangerous if you drink it with medicine.
- Treat alcohol like other poisons and keep it out of reach.

A list of state laws that have to do with keeping your loved one who is at risk of self-harm/suicide safe in a home with guns.

STORE GUNS SAFELY

- Guns are very dangerous in a suicide crisis.
- Keep them **unloaded** and **locked up**.
- Lock up bullets in a **different place**.
- Just hiding guns (and not locking them up) is **not** enough. Teens can find them.
- If possible, it's even better to store any guns somewhere outside your home for now. You may be able to:
  - Give them to a trusted adult (if your state's laws let you).
  - Store them at a gun store or at a police station.
- Scan the QR codes to view information about gun safety, resources, and local laws.

More resources about gun safety for parents and caregivers

IF YOU NEED HELP

You are not alone. Help is available. If you feel that you or your child is in danger, you can either:

- Call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline)

Or

- Call **911**

Or

- Go to the **emergency room**

The information included in this document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to substitute in any way for medical education, training, treatment, advice, or diagnosis by a healthcare professional. Please contact your care team for medical advice.

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