

Preventing youth suicides

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In October of 2020, [a stark public health warning was released by a Connecticut public health clearinghouse](#): youth suicides were on the rise in Connecticut and we had to act fast. Even before this recent surge, suicide was the second leading cause of death in adolescents in the United States. Compounded by the coronavirus pandemic, remote

learning, social isolation, civil unrest and the economic impacts of the pandemic, our kids' lives had been totally uprooted and many of them are struggling. In October alone, four young teens in our state died by suicide—an extraordinary rise that required immediate action. All these issues will persist into the new year and children locally and nationally need our continued support more than ever as their lives continue to change in new and unexpected ways. Here are some ways we can help and support our kids as we continue to work through the pandemic and other challenges.

Open conversation is extremely important. It is okay to acknowledge that things are not okay. It is okay to talk about [suicide](#) and mental and emotional health with our kids. It does not make one more likely to die by suicide. Talking about suicide reduces stigma and allows individuals to seek help and consider other options. Talking with teens about suicide and [self-harm](#) is especially important if there are warning signs, including things like:

- Talking about wanting to die, be dead, or kill oneself
- Looking for a means to kill oneself (e.g medications, knives, firearms, belts)
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose in life
- Talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated, or reckless
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

It's also important to remember that depression and suicide were a major problem for American adults and adolescents well before the

coronavirus pandemic began and deaths by suicide are the second leading cause of death in the U.S. among adolescents and young adults. A quick shift to remote and virtual learning last March increased [social isolation](#) and created additional stressors and [risk factors](#) that have increased the rates of depression, anxiety and the risk of suicide and self-harm, but it's most important to remember: Effective treatments exist for depression and suicide is preventable.

Additionally, parents and guardians need to take care of themselves too. We are all feeling the effects of the pandemic and the many ongoing crises our country and the world is facing. These risks are not unique only to our kids. The world is experiencing a collective trauma. As adults we so often push through, put on a smile or act tough, but things are hard. It's more than ok to ask for help when you need it, reach out and talk to someone, or get in touch with a counselor or crisis line. There are many free options available and we've linked them at the bottom of this article. Use the resources that you need because life is better with you in it.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, the [National Suicide Prevention Hotline](#) is available to anyone in the United States, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for free, by phone at 800-273-8255 or [via chat online here](#).

More information: M. David Rudd et al. Warning Signs for Suicide: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications, *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* (2006). [DOI: 10.1521/suli.2006.36.3.255](https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.2006.36.3.255)

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