

Child suicides are rising during lockdown: Watch for the warning signs

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Among the many dangers the coronavirus pandemic has brought, parents really need to be on the lookout for one in particular: an increased risk of suicide among vulnerable teens.

"We've seen an upsurge in really bad suicide attempts," and the pandemic is likely behind that increase, said Dr. Taranjeet Jolly, an adult and pediatric psychiatrist at Penn State Health's Milton S. Hershey Medical Center.

Social isolation during the pandemic can push youngsters with underlying [mental health issues](#) "over the edge," Jolly said in a Penn State Health news release.

Other factors include family dysfunction and long amounts of forced time with others. Even children in so-called healthy families can feel overwhelmed. Anxiety about [pandemic](#) shutdown-related financial struggles, constant bad news and [health](#)-related worries can also transfer from [parents](#) to children.

Parents should watch for certain behavioral changes in their children, Jolly said. Have their sleep habits changed? Do they sleep more or less? Do they have trouble concentrating? Do they seem drowsy or lethargic? Do they spend more time alone in their room? Do they snap at or become angry at small things?

"Don't be afraid to reach out," Jolly said.

If parents are concerned about their children's mental health, they should consult a primary care provider, who can recommend what to do next, he advised.

Parents can help their children simply by being present in their lives. For example, make meals together as a family, play games, and share [outdoor activities](#) such as walks or runs, Jolly suggested.

"Anything you can do together as a family will help," he said.

Some gatherings with friends are fine, as long as everyone follows social distancing measures such as meeting in open spaces, wearing masks and staying 6 feet apart, according to Jolly.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among people aged 10 to 34 in the United States.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more on [children's mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

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