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KNOW! TO DISCUSS DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE

Every year, individuals and organizations come together to raise awareness for suicide prevention during September, which is National Suicide Prevention Month. This year, we have collaborated with Nationwide Children's Hospital to share their recommendations for talking to young people about depression and suicide. Everyone has a role in suicide prevention. You can make a difference just by starting a conversation.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO TALK ABOUT DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE

Suicide ranks as the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10-19 in the United States impacting families regardless of culture or economic status. National survey data indicates that 1 in 5 high school students have seriously considered suicide in the past year. Other research suggests that rates of preteen suicidal thoughts and behaviors have been increasing over time. These numbers remind us of the importance of talking openly with our kids about suicide and mental health before a crisis occurs. Even if it doesn't seem like your child is showing signs of depression, normalizing these conversations now can make it easier for them to open up should they need support later.

Healthy conversations about suicide and mental health do not increase the risk of a person experiencing thoughts of suicide or developing a mental health condition. In fact, many children report feeling relief knowing that they can freely talk about their experiences and find support.

While anyone can experience suicidal thoughts, there are certain risk factors that increase the chances a person may think of suicide. Having risk factors, doesn't mean a person will definitely have suicidal thoughts, just that there is a higher chance they may compared to someone without any risk factors.



GUEST COLUMNIST: JOHN ACKERMAN, PHD

John Ackerman, PhD, is a clinical psychologist in Behavioral Health and Suicide Prevention Coordinator for the Center for Suicide Prevention and Research at Nationwide Children's Hospital. He directs community, school, and hospital efforts to educate others about the risks and warning signs of pediatric suicide.



It is important to be aware of risk factors in your child's life so you can best support them. Some common risk factors are:

- History of mental health conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety) or prior suicide attempt
- Substance use (drugs or alcohol)
- Family history of suicide or mental health diagnosis
- History of trauma or abuse
- Bullying and/or cyberbullying
- Loss of a loved one
- Significant relationship problems or family conflict
- Access to lethal means such as firearms or medications
- Lack of access to mental health care or stigma regarding treatment

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

When having conversations about suicide and mental health, it is important to ask clear and direct questions with the goal of understanding your child's experiences. This communicates to your child that it is okay to open up and talk about these things. If questions come across as punitive or judgmental, children often will not share their true thoughts and will be less likely to seek help in the future. Consider the following tips when having these conversations with your child:

- Focus on asking open-ended questions: "How are you feeling lately? What's been on your mind?"
- Gently call attention to changes in behavior, mood, or social habits: "I've noticed you seem sad or upset. Do you want to talk about it?"
- Remind them that you're there to support them no matter what: "I'm always here for you. We'll get through this together."
- Do not be afraid to directly ask if they are thinking of suicide or self-harm: "Have you ever thought about ending your life?" If they indicate that they are in crisis, connect them with immediate resources like 988, the suicide prevention lifeline, or local crisis services.

There are some behaviors you can be on the lookout for that might indicate your child may be having a difficult time. They are called warning signs, and if you notice any of them, it is important that you check in quickly and seek support.

- Any major changes in behavior or mood
- Withdrawal from friends, family, or social activities
- Giving away personal belongings or saying goodbyes.
- Self-injury (e.g., cutting)
- Talking about feeling empty, alone, or like a burden
- Searching online for ways to harm themselves
- Talking about or posting on social media about suicide or wanting to die
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs

Regular check-ins can help normalize talking about emotions and mental health, so your child knows they can come to you.

If you ever feel worried about your child's safety, don't wait—reach out for professional support. Call or the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline for 24/7 support. If there is an immediate safety concern or medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Crisis Text Line: Text HOME or 4HOPE to 741 741

[Center for Suicide Prevention and Research Blog Posts](#)
([nationwidechildrens.org](https://www.nationwidechildrens.org))



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