

KNOW! HOW TO HELP KIDS SUPPORT A FRIEND IN CRISIS

Meet the Author



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John Ackerman, PhD, is a child clinical psychologist and Suicide Prevention Clinical Manager for the Center for Suicide Prevention and Research at Nationwide Children's Hospital. He works with schools and community organizations across Ohio to implement evidence-based suicide prevention strategies and supports training in suicide screening and risk assessment for behavioral health and healthcare professionals.

Dr. Ackerman's research focuses on risk factors for youth suicidal behavior, mood disorders, and suicide prevention. He has also studied the impact of media reporting on youth suicide and trained Ohio journalists on best practices for discussing suicide.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among young people¹, and children and teens may struggle for a long time before an adult learns they are hurting. Sometimes, a friend is the first person a young person tells when they are struggling. Suicide prevention means preparing young people for these moments before they happen. Talking openly with your child about suicide not only helps them know they can come to you when they are struggling but also prepares them to recognize when a friend may need help and know how to respond.

TEACH YOUR CHILD HOW TO HELP A FRIEND

Young people are often among the first to notice when a friend is struggling and may even be the first person that friend turns to for help, so it's important they know how to respond.

A child or teen may receive a text saying, "I can't do this anymore," hear a friend talk about wanting to die, notice concerning posts online, or see a friend suddenly withdrawing from everyone. Your child may feel frightened and unsure what to do.

Give them a simple plan. One useful approach is

ACT: Acknowledge, Care, Tell.²

A

ACKNOWLEDGE



Notice when something seems wrong and check in. If you're concerned about suicide or self-harm, you can ask directly.

TRY SAYING

"You don't seem like yourself lately. What's going on?"

"I've noticed you've been having a really hard time. Do you want to talk?"

"Are you thinking about suicide or hurting yourself?"

C

CARE



Listen without judging or trying to solve everything. Let your friend know you care and that they don't have to do this alone.

TRY SAYING

"I'm really glad you told me."

"That sounds really hard."

"I care about you."

"You don't have to deal with this alone."

ACT: Acknowledge, Care, Tell.² Cont**T TELL**

Tell a trusted adult. This is the most important part.

If a friend talks about suicide, self-harm, or seems to be in danger, children and teens should tell a parent, counselor, teacher, coach, or another trusted adult.

IF A FRIEND SAYS:

"Promise you won't tell anyone."

TRY SAYING:

"I care about you too much to keep this to myself. Let's find an adult who can help us."

Teach your child that **suicidal thoughts are not a secret to keep**. When possible, encourage your child to go with their friend to get help rather than simply telling an adult and walking away.

MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD KNOWS:
"YOU ARE A FRIEND, NOT A THERAPIST"³

Young people may feel responsible for keeping a struggling friend safe or worry that telling an adult will betray their trust. Help your child understand their role:

- "Your job is not to fix your friend's problems."
- "Your job is not to keep your friend safe all by yourself."
- "Your job is to care and connect your friend with an adult who can help."

Getting help is not betraying a friend; it is taking care of them. It is okay for your child to take a break, spend time with other friends, or ask an adult to take over.

Help your child identify two or three trusted adults they could turn to at home, at school, or in the community if they or a friend needed help.

GIVE YOUR CHILD A SIMPLE MESSAGE TO REMEMBER

Your child doesn't need to memorize a complicated plan. Teach them to **ACT: Acknowledge the concern, show you Care, and Tell a trusted adult.**

You never have to handle this alone - and neither does your friend.

Talking about suicide should not be a one-time conversation. Remind your child that difficult emotions are okay to talk about, that asking for help is a strength, and that trusted adults can step in when things become too much to handle alone.

If your child or someone they know is experiencing suicidal thoughts or an emotional crisis, **call or text 988** for free, confidential support. If there is immediate danger or a medical emergency, **call 911** or go to the nearest emergency department.

RESOURCES

1. Text or call the [Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#): 988
2. [Crisis Text Line](#): Text "HOME" to 741-741
3. [How to Help a Friend](#)
4. [Nationwide Children's Suicide Prevention Resources](#)

SOURCES

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus/data-finder.htm?year=2020-2021&table=Table%20LCODAge>
2. <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/about-us/collaboratory/mental-and-behavioral-health/sos>
3. <https://www.nami.org/kids-teens-and-young-adults/what-you-need-to-know-about-youth-suicide/>

Scan for additional Know!
Prevention Tips for Everyone:

