

# Suicide Warning Signs and How to Respond

## The Signs: What to Look for

The following warning signs indicate that a youth is severely depressed or at risk for suicide and should be responded to immediately:

- Talking to others or posting on social media about:
  - Suicide or wanting to die
  - Feeling hopeless, trapped or like they are “a burden” to others
- Looking for a way to kill themselves
  - Gathering medications, sharp objects, firearms
  - Searching online for ways to end their life
- Expressing unbearable emotional pain
- Visiting or calling people to say “goodbye”
- Giving away prized possessions
- Suddenly becoming calm or cheerful after a long period of depression

The following warning signs indicate that a youth may be struggling with depression, which requires further evaluation by a mental health professional:

- Feeling sad or irritable more often than not
- Sleeping or eating more or less than usual
- Showing little to no interest in pleasurable activities
- Withdrawing from others
- Participating in reckless behavior that is out of character
- Engaging in self-injurious behavior
- Having trouble concentrating or performing poorly in school
- Complaining frequently about physical symptoms (e.g., fatigue, stomachaches, headaches)
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs

*(over)*



## **The Response: How to Communicate Concern and Get Support**

When a youth shares thoughts of wanting to die by suicide or warning signs become obvious, use these strategies:

- Remain calm, take a deep breath and do not react emotionally. It's OK to feel uncomfortable.
- Be patient and speak in a relaxed, reassuring tone.
- Tell them you care and acknowledge that they are hurting.
- Be direct about your concerns:
  - State the specific changes you see in the person's mood and/or behavior.
  - Ask if they are thinking about suicide or have tried to kill themselves.
- **Get professional help.**
- **Never leave them alone if they are showing warning signs of suicide.**

Some ways of responding to a person who is having suicidal thoughts are ineffective. Please consider the following tips.

- Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong.
- Don't lecture on the value of life or question why someone could feel this way.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy or promise confidentiality; indicate that safety and getting help are top priority.
- Convey the message that suicide is preventable and treatment is effective.

**Even if a person is not suicidal, discussing your concerns is important. It lets a person know you care and are willing to have tough conversations.**

**If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255), or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting "START" to 741-741. Trained crisis counselors are standing by to help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**

**For more information about the Center for Suicide Prevention and Research at Nationwide Children's Hospital, visit [NationwideChildrens.org/Suicide-Prevention](https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/Suicide-Prevention).**

