



Teen Suicide Prevention Warning Signs to Watch Out For

If you're worried your teen is suicidal, reach out to the following 24/7 resources:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 988

For youth in crisis but not actively suicidal, you may call Idaho Youth Ranch Emergency Help Line: 208-322-2308



Suicide is all too common for teens. Unfortunately, the rates are only getting higher—especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. [Recent reports](#) show that suicide is now the second-leading cause of death for kids aged 10-14. Many factors may contribute to these rising rates, including increased social media use, pressures of the modern world, easy access to means (such as firearms or pills), and more.

As a parent, it can be terrifying when you think that your teen may be thinking of ending their own life. Many parents feel helpless and say they don't know what to do to help their child. It might feel like no matter what you say, you can't get through to them. Getting your child to open up to you at all might even be challenging.

It's important not to panic. With action, suicide prevention is possible. But to take the appropriate action, you need to be able to recognize the warning signs.

In this guide, we'll go through vital warning signs of teen suicide, plus action tips parents can use to intervene quickly.

Staying Calm and Non-Judgmental in Your Approach

You don't need to be a licensed mental health professional to learn how to recognize warning signs of suicide. The more you know about what teen suicidality looks like, the more likely



you are to be able to recognize when your teen is at risk. Here are some of the most common warning signs of suicide to watch out for in your teen. Keep in mind that not every teen will display every one of these warning signs. If you notice even one, it's important to take it seriously.

They talk about or threaten suicide

It may seem obvious, but it's important to highlight. Some suicidal teens will make comments about death or suicide. These may come off to you as just passing remarks or even jokes. Even if you think they might be joking, it is crucial to take every comment seriously.

Suicidal comments aren't always direct; sometimes, they sound more passive. For example, your teen may comment like, "No one would care if I died," or "I just don't want to wake up anymore." They may ask, "What do you think is the most painless way to die?"

They may also make direct or indirect threats. For example, when they're being given a consequence (like being grounded), they may shout, "I'm just going to kill myself!"

These comments could be harmless but could also be a sign of something deeper, so it's important to always take them seriously. Never brush your teen off when they speak in this way.

They've written a suicide note

Similarly, don't brush suicide notes off as "teenage drama." If you find a suicide note your teen has written (or if they share one with you), take this very seriously as a warning sign that your teen is contemplating suicide.

They display in habits or physical appearance

Your teen may suddenly start dressing differently or stop keeping up with personal hygiene and self-care (for example, they may stop showering or washing their hair).

They may also start behaving differently. For example, they may sleep a lot more (or less) or change their eating habits. Their grades might drop suddenly. Any significant change like



this is a warning sign that your teen is depressed and may be feeling suicidal.

Making final arrangements

One warning sign of suicide in adults is making final arrangements before death—they may update their will, ask friends if they would care for their pets in their absence, and so on. In teens, these “final arrangements” could look like giving prized possessions away. For example, your teen may gift a favorite piece of jewelry or a treasured stuffed animal from their childhood to their best friends.

They are having relationship problems

Having a recent breakup heightens the risk of suicide for teens. This doesn't mean that every teen who goes through a breakup is at risk for suicide. Still, if your teen seems to be coping poorly with the breakup—for example, sleeping all the time and withdrawing from you and your friends—this could put them at risk.

It's not only romantic relationships that can increase suicide risk. If your teen suddenly has conflict with their friends or seems to be withdrawing from them, this could also be a warning sign.

They abuse drugs and alcohol

Using drugs or alcohol also increases suicide risk for all ages. Pay special attention if your teen has suddenly increased their drug or alcohol use. Although experimenting with drugs and alcohol is a developmentally appropriate behavior for teens, suddenly starting or increasing use might be a sign of something deeper, like depression or suicide.

They feel trapped or hopeless

People often choose to end their lives because they feel trapped in a situation and hopeless about ever finding a solution. Pay close attention if your teen has commented about feeling trapped, hopeless, or helpless. This is especially important if you already know that they tend to think of suicide as a solution or “escape” (for example, if they have attempted or threatened suicide before).



They self-harm regularly

Self-harm behaviors, like cutting, aren't usually signs of suicidal ideation. Most teens self-harm as a way to cope with painful emotions—without having to resort to suicide.

However, self-harming regularly can sometimes lead to suicide attempts in some teens. And because self-harm and suicidal ideation share similar risk factors, your teen may be at a higher risk of also having suicidal thoughts if they self-harm.

They have access to means or ask about means

If your teen has access to the means to end their life, then this puts them at higher risk. For example, you may have a firearm in the home that they can access, have pills that they can overdose on, or have recently bought items like a rope.

Some teens may ask you about different means. For example, they may suddenly express interest in the security code for a firearm or ask questions like how long it takes to die by overdose. These questions are alarm bells that must be taken very seriously.

DBT is a comprehensive, evidence-based treatment approach designed specifically to tackle persistent suicidal and self-harming behaviors. It was originally developed by psychologist Marsha Linehan for adults with borderline personality disorder exhibiting chronic suicidality.

Teen suicide: What parents can do

Suicide is preventable, especially if you notice the warning signs, but you must act quickly. The sooner you can approach this subject with your teen, the better.

If you're worried that your child is facing a mental health emergency—or if you think they're planning on ending their life—then you should contact a mental health professional or call the national mental health crisis line at 988.

Follow these tips to approach the topic of suicide with your teen:

- ▶ Be direct. Don't be afraid to say the word "suicide." Some parents feel that if they bring up suicide with their teen, then this will "put the idea in their head." This is a myth; talking

about suicide directly doesn't increase your teen's risk of suicide and could save their life.

- Show empathy and understanding. Ask open questions, and be genuinely curious about how your teen feels. Make a genuine effort to see the world through your teen's eyes—and be able to accept that worldview as their truth (no matter how much you disagree with it).
- Never be judgmental of your teen's emotional experience. Don't brush them off when they talk to you. For example, don't say: "You're just a kid. You'll grow out of this." Instead, show empathy: "It sounds like you're in a lot of pain. That must be so hard."
- Ask your teen how you can support them. Don't assume that they don't need you anymore at their age.
- Don't wait for your teen to come to you. If you notice any warning signs or if you're in any way concerned about your child, approach the subject with them. You can say something like, "I've noticed you've been drawing a lot of pictures about suicide lately. Don't get me wrong—you're very talented! I just wanted to talk to you about it and ask how you feel. I love you, and I want to be there for you."
- Secure any means of suicide you have in the home. For example, remove firearms from your home if possible (and securely lock them away if not). Lock away medications that can be fatal when taken in large quantities, even over-the-counter medication. Consider other potentially lethal products such as cleaning supplies, antifreeze, knives, ropes, and plastic bags, among other things.
- Be compassionate with yourself. It can be easy to start feeling guilty or helpless when your teen is going through such a painful period. Teen suicide affects the whole family. Your teen should always come first but don't forget to take care of yourself.
- Get professional help as soon as possible. You can recognize when your teen needs help and provide emotional support—and this is a powerful contribution. But if your teen is feeling suicidal, then they will require professional mental health treatment.

At Idaho Youth Ranch, we provide individual, group, and family counseling to help teens who are going through mental health struggles like depression and anxiety. Our DBT program specifically helps teens who live with powerful, painful emotions (such as suicidal ideation) learn how to manage them in more healthy ways.

If you're worried your teen is suicidal, reach out to the following 24/7 resources:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 988

For youth in crisis but not actively suicidal, you may call Idaho Youth Ranch Emergency Help Line: 208-322-2308