

How to help your child when they are talking about suicide

We have found that 3 key areas can help a young person to stay in control of suicidal thoughts:

- Feeling more connected with others
- Gaining a sense of control over their lives - to overcome helplessness
- Having hope - seeing that things will get better

Evidence suggests that a strong parent/carer-child relationship is the single most important factor that helps any young person with stress. Therefore in order to help your child feel more connected we have found that providing a supportive relationship for them, strengthening your relationship and listening to him/her are important factors in helping them feel more positive about life.

Helping your child to see that life is worth living

1. Evidence shows that spending time with your child and responding to their needs can support a young person, for example, you could encourage and facilitate activities that they enjoy or give them space to talk.
2. When you listen to your child they feel heard and they feel that they are being taken seriously. Therefore when your child tells you how he/she is feeling, you may thank your child or teen for sharing with you. "I didn't know you were feeling so bad... Thanks for telling me."
3. Showing empathy to your child/teen. This can be difficult as it means accepting how bad your child or teen is feeling but we have found it to be a helpful approach to take. For example you could say, "Yes, I can see that would be very difficult."

It is understandable to want try to find solutions for your child and to attempt to stop them from feeling the way they are feeling but try **not** to say:

- a. "You shouldn't be feeling this way"
- b. "It's not that bad"
- c. "You should count yourself lucky"
- d. "How can you be feeling so bad when we've given you so much? What do you expect from us?"

Feedback that we have received from young people highlights that this type of comment can make them feel guilty and ashamed, so they might not open up any more. Children and young people can feel they are being blamed even when this isn't the intention. Therefore this can make them feel worse and may confirm to them that they are a burden for you, which could increase the risk of suicide.

4. Avoid giving advice or being critical. It is understandable as parents/carers to feel you have more life experience than your children and therefore have

good advice to give, but in offering advice or criticism we have found that children and youth tend to feel you are not hearing them and they can feel that you really don't understand what he/she is going through. Try to show your child they are 'heard', understood and accepted.

5. Evidence places importance on giving hope to a young person who is having suicidal thoughts, therefore you might say: "This is going to get better." If things were better in the past, you could say, "I will be with you and we'll work on this and get through it as we did before." It can be helpful to encourage your child to remember how he/she has overcome other challenges and remind him/her how he/she used his/her strengths to get through that difficult time.
6. We have found that it can be helpful to assure your child or teen that he/she is not alone, for example, you might say: "We're in this one together; we're going to help you get over this."
7. When we offer support to a young person it helps them to feel that you are there for them, but everyone's needs are different and therefore it can be beneficial to ask your child how he/she wants to be supported and what would be helpful for them specifically rather than assuming what they need. You might ask: "How can I support you? How can I help you with this?" In our experience young people will ask for advice if they want it and therefore try not to give them advice unless they ask you for it.
8. Supporting someone you love when they feel so hopeless can be incredibly difficult and scary and therefore we would encourage you to find support for yourself in helping your child/teen through these challenging and tough times. Think about what support you can draw on and think about how you also take care of yourself whilst taking care of them.

If your child is expressing that he/she cannot stop thinking about suicide and has imminent plans to hurt him/herself, seek professional help right away:

- Don't leave your child alone: make sure that there is someone with your child, whether it is you or a close friend or family member.
- Call for professional help in a crisis:
 1. Bromley Wellbeing Service for Children and Young People, 020 3770 8848 (Mon – Sat, 9am – 5pm)
 2. Urgent Advice Line (out of hours) 0800 330 8580
 3. If there is physical risk then go to A & E
- Get support for yourself during this time of crisis. If you have contacted professional help, then consider calling a close family member or friend to support you as you get help for your child.

If you feel that you require urgent support or if it is an emergency or out of hours:

- * **if you have harmed yourself**
- * **if you have harmed someone else**
- * **if you are worried that someone else is at risk of harm**
- * **if you are worried that you might harm yourself**
- * **if you are worried that you might harm someone else**

You can go to:

Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Hospital, Bromley BR6 8ND - [01689 863000](tel:01689863000).

Queen Mary Hospital, Frogna Ave, Sidcup, DA14 6LT - [020 8302 2678](tel:02083022678)

University Hospital Lewisham, Lewisham High St, London SE13 6LH - [0208 333 3000](tel:02083333000).

or pick up the phone and dial [999](tel:999) and ask for help

If you are finding your feelings very difficult to manage but you do not think there is an urgent risk, you might find it helpful to speak to someone about how you are feeling.

You can contact your GP on the telephone number for your surgery during surgery opening hours. There are also a number of helplines that offer support to people managing difficult feelings. Some of these are listed below.

Shout UK (24/7 Crisis Messenger - Young Minds) - Text: SHOUT to 85258

Child Line [0800 1111](tel:08001111) (free to call from UK landlines and mobiles)

Samaritans 116 123 (free to call from UK landlines and mobiles 24 hours, 7 days a week)

Saneline [0300 304 7000](tel:03003047000) (6pm – 11pm, every day of the year)

HOPElink UK [0800 068 4141](tel:08000684141) www.papyrus-uk.org Young suicide prevention society

Oxleas Urgent Mental Health Advice Line [0800 330 8590](tel:08003308590)

GP surgery closed?

If you need to see a GP overnight between the hours of 6.30pm and 8.00am on weekdays, or over the weekend between 6.30pm on Friday and 8.00am on Monday, or on a bank holiday, please call [111](tel:111). Here you can access GP out-of-hours and urgent care services.

Useful websites:

- **Samaritans** are there to listen (www.samaritans.org)
- **Papyrus Prevention of Young Suicide** (www.papyrus.org.uk)
Charity set up by mum who lost her son to suicide. Supports parents and young people
- **Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)** was set up to reduce the high suicide rate among young men. Runs a helpline and website to support young men (<http://www.thecalmzone.net>)
- **Charlie Waller Memorial Trust**
Raises awareness of depression in young people and adults (www.cwmt.org.uk)