

TeensHealth.org

A safe, private place to get doctor-approved information on health, emotions, and life.



My Friend Is Talking About Suicide. What Should I Do?

Warning Signs of Suicide

Everyone feels sad, depressed, or angry sometimes — especially when the pressures of school, friends, and family become too much to handle. Other times, though, feelings of sadness or hopelessness just won't go away. These feelings may begin to affect many areas of a person's life and outlook. Someone who experiences very intense feelings of depression or irritability may begin to think about suicide.

You may have heard that people who talk about suicide won't actually go through with it. **That's not true. People who talk about suicide may be likely to try it.**

Other warning signs that someone may be thinking of suicide include:

- talking about suicide or death in general
- talking about "going away"
- talking about feeling hopeless or feeling guilty
- pulling away from friends or family and losing the desire to go out
- having no desire to take part in favorite activities
- having trouble concentrating or thinking clearly
- experiencing changes in eating or sleeping habits
- engaging in self-destructive behavior (drinking alcohol, taking drugs, or driving too fast, for example)

As a friend, you may also know if the person is going through some tough times. Sometimes, a specific event, stress, or crisis — like a relationship breaking up or a death in the family — can trigger suicidal behavior in someone who is already feeling depressed and showing the warning signs listed above.

What You Can Do

Ask

If you have a friend who is talking about suicide or showing other warning signs, don't wait to see if he or she starts to feel better. Talk about it. Most of the time, people who are considering suicide are willing to discuss it if someone asks them out of concern and care.

Some people (both teens and adults) are reluctant to ask teens if they have been thinking about suicide

or hurting themselves. That's because they're afraid that, by asking, they may plant the idea of suicide. This is not true. It is always a good thing to ask.

Starting the conversation with someone you think may be considering suicide helps in many ways. First, it allows you to get help for the person. Second, just talking about it may help the person to feel less alone, less isolated, and more cared about and understood — the opposite of the feelings that may have led to suicidal thinking to begin with. Third, talking may provide a chance to consider that there may be another solution.

Asking someone if he or she is having thoughts about suicide can be difficult. Sometimes it helps to let your friend know why you are asking. For instance, you might say, "I've noticed that you've been talking a lot about wanting to be dead. Have you been having thoughts about trying to kill yourself?"

Listen

Listen to your friend without judging and offer reassurance that you're there and you care. If you think your friend is in immediate danger, stay close — make sure he or she isn't left alone.

Tell

Even if you're sworn to secrecy and you feel like you'll be betraying your friend if you tell, you should still seek help. Share your concerns with an adult you trust as soon as possible. If necessary, you can also call a local emergency number (911) or the toll-free number for a suicide crisis line (you can find local suicide crisis numbers listed in your phone book).

The important thing is to notify a responsible adult. Although it may be tempting to try to help your friend on your own, it's always safest to get help.

After Suicide

Sometimes even if you get help and adults intervene, a friend or classmate may attempt or die by suicide. When this happens, it's common to have many different emotions. Some teens say they feel guilty — especially if they felt they could have interpreted their friend's actions and words better. Others say they feel angry with the person for doing something so selfish. Still others say they feel nothing at all — they are too filled with grief.

When someone attempts suicide, those who know that person may feel afraid or uncomfortable about talking to him or her. Try to overcome these feelings of discomfort — this is a time when someone absolutely needs to feel connected to others.

If you are having difficulty dealing with a friend or classmate's suicide, it's best to talk to an adult you trust. Feeling grief after a friend dies by suicide is normal. But if that sadness begins to interfere with your everyday life, it's a sign that you may need to speak with someone about your feelings.

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