

# Suicide In Youth



## What Is Suicide?

**Suicide** is defined as death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior. A **suicide attempt** is self-directed, potentially injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior. A suicide attempt might not result in death or injury.

## Why Are Youth At Increased Risk For Suicide?

Youth undergo many changes and new experiences during adolescence. These changes and experiences can create significant stress and mental health challenges, which can cause youth to think about ending their lives.

## What Factors Increase A Youth's Risk For Suicide?

A range of factors can increase an adolescent's risk for suicide:

- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- Family history of suicide or suicide attempts
- Exposure to others' suicidal behavior, such as a family member, peer, or media figure
- Loss - of loved ones, pets, income, housing, status
- Depression, other mental health disorder(s), problem gambling disorder, or substance use disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Current or past neglect or abuse - physical, emotional, or sexual
- Family violence or violence in romantic relationships
- Bullying
- School problems
- Financial problems, e.g., debt from online sports betting or gambling, student loans, etc.
- Criminal or legal problems; being recently released from jail or prison
- Sense of hopelessness
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies

- Transitions in adolescence can create significant mental health challenges, which can cause youth to think about suicide.
- Knowledge of protective factors can help families, schools, and communities build capacity to prevent youth suicide.
- Understanding the risk factors and warning signs of suicide can alert others that a youth may be thinking about suicide.
- Asking a youth if they are considering suicide will NOT increase their risk for suicide.
- The 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available for immediate help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## What Factors Protect Youth Against Suicide?

Knowledge of protective factors can help families, schools, and communities build capacity to help prevent youth suicide. Protective factors include:

- Support from family and friends
- Feeling connected to people and pets
- Opportunities to participate in and contribute to school or community projects and activities
- Reasons for living
- Effective coping and problem-solving skills
- Availability of consistent, high-quality physical and behavioral healthcare



Wheeler

**CONNECTICUT  
Clearinghouse**  
a program of the Connecticut Center  
for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery

**800.232.4424 (phone)**  
**[www.ctclearinghouse.org](http://www.ctclearinghouse.org)**

**A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness**

## What Are The Warning Signs For Youth Suicide?

Warning signs that an adolescent may be considering suicide should not be ignored. Common warning signs include:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Saying they feel empty or have no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped and not having a way out
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Talking about feeling great guilt or shame
- Showing signs of increased depression, anxiety, or substance use
- Giving away important possessions
- Withdrawing from or saying goodbye to family and friends
- Taking risks that could lead to death, such as driving extremely fast
- Drastic change in mood, i.e., changing suddenly from very sad to happy, calm, and at peace
- Making a plan or looking for ways to kill themselves, e.g., searching online for lethal means, stockpiling pills, or buying a gun

## How Can Someone Help A Youth Who Is Suicidal?

There are five evidence-based steps that **anyone** can use to help a person who may be thinking about suicide.

- **ASK:** Ask the question, "Are you thinking about suicide?" It's not an easy question, but being direct lets the youth know that you are open to talking about suicide. Studies show that asking someone if they are suicidal does not cause them to think about suicide or increase the likelihood that they will attempt suicide; instead, it can reduce their suicidal thoughts and feelings. Talking about suicide lets the person know that it is okay to share their thoughts of suicide; reduces their feelings of isolation; and creates an opportunity to connect them with helpful resources and supports.
- **BE THERE:** Be willing to listen to the youth's response. Allow them to share their thoughts and feelings without judgment. Do not act shocked. Do not promise to keep their thoughts of suicide a secret. Offer hope that alternatives to suicide are available and help them find resources.
- **HELP KEEP THEM SAFE:** Establish immediate safety by finding out: *Has the youth already done something to try to kill themselves before talking to you? Do they know how they will kill themselves? Do they have a specific, detailed plan? What sort of access do they have to their planned method (e.g., guns, stockpiled pills, etc.)?* Remove guns, other weapons, or pills only if it is safe to do so. Do not leave them alone.
- **HELP THEM CONNECT:** Get help from agencies or people specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention. Call the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (9-8-8)** or text the **Crisis Text Line (741741)** for help, guidance, and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Encourage them to save the numbers to their cell phones for future use. Also, help them reach out to a trusted family member, friend, spiritual advisor, and/or counselor for ongoing support. **Call 9-1-1 if there is an immediate life-threatening emergency.**
- **STAY CONNECTED:** Stay in touch with the youth after the crisis or after they are discharged from care. Studies show that ongoing, supportive contact plays an important role in preventing suicide.

In addition, participation in trainings such as [Question, Persuade, and Refer \(QPR\)](#), [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#) and [ASIST](#) can teach people how to talk with someone who is thinking of suicide.

For information on upcoming trainings, email [info@ctclearinghouse.org](mailto:info@ctclearinghouse.org).

## For Emergency Assistance

Call 9-1-1 (ambulance, fire, police)

## Connecticut Resources

Connecticut Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call 2-1-1

Department of Mental Health and  
Addiction Services (DMHAS)

[www.portal.ct.gov/dmhas](http://www.portal.ct.gov/dmhas)

## National Resources

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call 9-8-8

## Crisis Text Line

Text "Home" to 741741

American Foundation for Suicide  
Prevention

<https://afsp.org/>

Substance Abuse and Mental  
Health Services Administration  
(SAMHSA)

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)