
Youth suicide – the warning signs

Summary

- You don't have to be a trained professional to support a young person experiencing suicidal thoughts.
 - Take all suicide threats seriously.
 - You can help by offering emotional and practical support, by listening and helping the person seek support.
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If you or someone you care about is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed:

- call emergency services (triple zero – 000)
- contact your GP or mental health crisis service, or
- go to your local hospital emergency department.

Do not leave the person alone, unless you are concerned for your own safety.

To speak to someone immediately, contact:

- the **Suicide Call Back Service** (Tel. **1300 659 467**) or
- **Lifeline** (Tel. **13 11 14**)
- **Kids Helpline** (Tel. **1800 55 1800**).

Suicide can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, race, income and family background, but some young people are at greater risk of self-harm and suicidal behaviour.

Youth suicide affects families every day in Australia. It is the leading cause of death among young people. In 2017, around 400 young people aged 15–24 died by suicide. Research shows that in this age group, for every one suicide there are approximately 100–200 suicide attempts.

Although these numbers are alarming, the good news is that youth suicide is mostly preventable. Anyone, not just mental health professionals, can provide emotional and practical support to a young person experiencing suicidal thoughts

Warning signs of youth suicide

It is not always possible to know when someone is thinking about suicide but some of the possible warning signs include:

- talking or writing about death or about feeling trapped with no way out
- feeling hopeless and withdrawing from family, friends and the community
- increasing drug and alcohol use
- giving away personal possessions
- doing dangerous, life threatening things
- having delusions or hallucinations
- regularly self-harming
- significant change in mood.

Triggers of youth suicide

Stress can contribute to suicide. A young person or teenager may experience an overwhelming and immediate stress or they may have stress that builds up over a long time.

Stressful experiences that may contribute to or trigger suicide include:

- loss of an important person through death or divorce
- incest or child abuse
- bullying at school or in the workplace
- a sense of failure at school
- a sense of failure in relationships
- a relationship break-up
- the experience of discrimination, isolation and relationship conflicts with family, friends and others because the young person is gay or lesbian
- the recent suicide of a friend or relative, or an anniversary of a suicide or the death of someone close to them.

People who have attempted suicide before are very likely to try again. Those who have a history of self-harming are also at a higher risk of suicide.

Supporting a young person who is experiencing suicidal thoughts

You may be able to help a young person if you:

- Listen and encourage them to talk and show that you are taking their concerns seriously.
- Tell or show the person that you care.
- Acknowledge their fears, despair or sadness.
- Provide reassurance, but do not dismiss the problem.
- Ask if they are thinking of hurting themselves or taking their own life, and if they have a plan.
- Ensure they do not have access to lethal weapons or medications.
- Stay with the person if they are at high risk of suicide.
- Immediately tell someone else, preferably an adult.
- Seek help from professionals, and offer to provide support.
- Let them know where they can get support.
- Provide contact numbers and assist them to call if necessary.

Visit **[Beyond Blue](#)** for more information about how to support a friend experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Things to avoid when supporting a young person experiencing suicidal thoughts

Try to avoid:

- interrupting with stories of your own
- panicking or becoming angry
- being judgmental
- telling them all the things they have to live for
- offering too much advice.

Conversations Matter has basic tips for **[how to talk to someone who you think may be having suicidal thoughts](#)**.

Youth suicide myths

Incorrect beliefs concerning suicide include:

Myth	Fact
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<i>Young people who talk about suicide never attempt to take or actually take their own lives. They are just seeking attention.</i>	Anyone talking about suicide should always be taken seriously.
<i>Once a person is intent on suicide, there is no way to stop them. They will be suicidal forever.</i>	Suicide can be prevented. If they receive the help they seek, they are less likely to attempt suicide.
<i>Suicidal thoughts and behaviours are hereditary.</i>	While suicidal thoughts and behaviours tend to run in families, they are not hereditary. It is important for people experiencing suicidal thoughts to know that there are options other than ending their life.
<i>All suicidal young people are depressed.</i>	While depressed mood is common, this is not true for everyone who suicides.
<i>A marked and sudden improvement in mental state following a crisis indicates the suicide risk is over.</i>	When there have been signs of a possible suicide attempt, a sudden improvement in mood may in fact indicate that the person has finally decided to take their own life.

Where to get support

- Your local community health centre
- **GP** (not necessarily the family doctor)
- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 55 1800**
- **Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14**
- **Headspace** Tel. **1800 650 890**
- **eheadspace** Tel. **1800 650 890**
- **SuicideLine** Tel. **1300 651 251**
- **Beyond Blue forums**

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