

TEEN SUICIDE PARENT INFO PACK



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Teen Suicide Parent Info Pack

“Adolescence is a exciting time, but it can also bring challenges. We recognize the gravity of teen mental health and suicide. Therefore, how can you provide support to your child during this time?”

TEEN ANXIETY

If your child is struggling with worry or anxiety, here are some ways you can support them.

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, fear, panic, or unease. We all experience anxiety, it's the body's natural response to stress or danger. However, when the worries and fears are excessive and interferes with your everyday life that is called anxiety disorder.

Every child and young person experiences anxiety from time to time. This is a common human reaction to stressful situations. For example, a child may feel more nervous than usual before an exam. However, once the exam has passed, they will feel more at ease.

Remember! Anxiety becomes a problem when a child feels stuck in it. When this happens, it can become an overwhelming experience for the child, and can also affect their daily life and limit the things they feel able to do.

What makes young people anxious?

A child may experience anxiety for a variety of reasons. Feeling more worried at times is normal, and there isn't always a clear cause for it. However, if your child is experiencing unmanageable levels of worry, it is typically a sign that something in their life is not quite right. They may require assistance in determining the nature of the problem. The following kinds of things can make some children feel anxious:

- Stress or pressure, such as exams or waiting for exam results. Change or uncertainty such as starting a new school.
- Being bullied or abused
- Other mental health conditions such as depression Dealing with grief, loss, or trauma
- Changes to their physical wellbeing.
- Having difficulty with their sexuality or gender identity

How to help your child when they feel anxious

In a very anxious moment, your child may feel frightened or worried about having a panic attack. If this happens, focus on helping them to calm down and feel safe. The strategies below can help.

Grounding techniques: help you to focus on the present and distract you from anxious thoughts.

Here are few grounding techniques you can try

5,4,3,2,1 Technique (5 things you can see such as patterns lights or buildings; 4 things you can feel such as clothing or objects; 3 things you can hear such a birds, traffic, or clocks; 2 things you can smell such as food, perfume; 1 thing you can taste such as fruit, mint, salt).

Breathing Technique:

- Take a slow breath in through the nose (for about 4 seconds). Hold your breath for 1 or 2 seconds.

- Exhale slowly through the mouth (over about 4 seconds).
- Wait 2-3 seconds before taking another breath (5-7 seconds for teenagers).
- Repeat for at least 5 to 10 breaths.

Here is a video you can watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvflhGzINJ4>

TEEN DEPRESSION

Are they just being a teenager or is something else?

Teenagers go through a lot of physical, emotional, and mental development. Parents and caregivers may find these developments alarming.

What to expect?

As teens are getting ready for adulthood, they may exhibit traits such as self-confidence, poor impulse control, mood swings, irritability, and hyperactive.

Are they Depressed?

When you notice something “off” with your child you might be tempted to attribute it to adolescence. But you know your child best, and you can trust your instincts. When teenagers become depressed, you may observe that they:

- Withdraw from family AND friends
- Are sad and irritable most of the day
- Appear sad or anxious all the time
- Have trouble with more than one area of life (school, work and friends)
- Stop enjoying things that used to make them happy
- Stop caring about the future
- Have major changes in behavior, sleep or appetite

Are they looking for attention?

Teenagers go through a lot of emotional, biological, intellectual, and social changes. Additionally, they may struggle with expressing their emotions. It's not uncommon for them to say things like, “I wish I wasn't born!” or “I want to die!” or even “I should just end it all!” However, it's important to note that these statements may not always indicate a genuine intent. It's possible that they are instead seeking attention. In these situations, it is crucial to offer your child the support and attention they need.

Keep in mind that many teenagers who attempt suicide often express themselves in this manner. It is crucial to take each threat seriously and remain calm. It is important to remember that many teenagers struggle to understand other people's emotions, so they may become defensive if they perceive you to be upset. Sit down with your child and have an open discussion about the situation. You can say something like:

- “I am deeply concerned about what you just mentioned. Are you contemplating suicide?”
- “I love you and I want you to know that I am here to support you.”

Try to find out the underlying issues that are troubling them. Talk to them about healthy ways to express themselves and cope with their emotions. By doing so, you will not only establish trust but also impart valuable skills.

What to do if your teenaged child may be depressed?

If you suspect that your teenager is experiencing depression, be sure to seek help. You can reach out to a school-based support team for a mental health referral. They can assist both you and your teenager in working through the situation.

SELF-HARM

“Self-harm can be very confusing. After all, why would someone intentionally hurt themselves? Many people confuse self-harm and suicide. But they’re truly rather different.”- Aetna

What is self-harm?

Self-harm occurs when someone intentionally hurts themselves as a coping mechanism for painful or overwhelming feelings.

It can take lots of different forms. Sometimes it’s clear that something is a form of self-harm. But other times, they might find themselves doing harmful things and not think of it as ‘self-harm’. Self-harm includes:

- cutting themselves
- using drugs or alcohol to cope with your problems
- not eating, over-eating, or forcing yourself to throw up
- spending all your time on addictive behaviours like gaming, social media or gambling
- over-exercising and/or exercising when you are injured biting, hitting or burning themselves
- hitting walls
- getting into situations on purpose where you risk getting hurt, including fights or risky sexual behaviour.

Suicide vs. self-harm

People who engage in self-harm or attempt suicide both experience emotional pain, although their intentions differ. Individuals who attempt suicide seek to end their sorrow and suffering. Their desire is not specifically to die, but rather they feel unable to envision an improvement in their circumstances or to continue living in pain. On the other hand, those who engage in self-harm are seeking coping mechanisms for life. In certain situations, they may inflict harm upon themselves as a means to “feel” and reaffirm their own existence.

Responding to self-harm

It can be really difficult finding out that your child is self-harming. It’s hard to see them hurting themselves in that way, and you might not know what you can do to help. Just being there and letting them know they’re not alone can be helpful, but it’s also important to remember that you may not be able to help them on your own.

UNDERSTANDING TEEN SUICIDE

Suicide: When a person intentionally takes their own life, they seek to end the pain experienced.

Suicidal thoughts: is the thought process of having ideas, or ruminations about the possibility of completing suicide.

Suicide attempts: An act of self-harm that is intended to result in death but does not. A suicide attempt may or may not result in injury.

How to recognize warning signs?

Warning signs are indications that someone may be in danger of suicide, either immediately or in the near future.

Warning Signs for Suicide that should not be avoided:

Many young people who attempt suicide give warning signs. Look for these signs. It could save a life.

- Talking about death or suicide
- Lacking interest in the future
- Dropping out of activities
- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Giving away prized possessions
- Taking risks
- Saying goodbye like they won't see you again

Teenage Suicide Risk Factors

- Mental Health issues like Bipolar Disorder, Depression, and Anxiety disorders.
- Gender Based Violence and Abusive Relationships
- Physical Health conditions like chronic illness or terminal illness A recent trauma or life crisis like death of a loved one
- Previous suicide attempts and a family history of suicide or depression
- Bullying
- Family problems and issues Relationship problems

How to help

- **Ask questions.** Ask your child if he or she is thinking about death or hurting themselves.
- **Encourage your teen to get treatment.** Know it's not your job to take the place of a therapist.
- Offer to help your child take steps to get support. You can contact school based support team for referral to professional mental health specialists.
- **Remove dangerous items.** Remove things like knives, or razors from your home.
- **Do not make light of suicidal comments or thoughts.** Take all threats seriously.

What can you do if you're concerned about your child?

It's hard to see someone you love hurting. If you are worried that your child is going to try and take their own life, get rid of anything they could use to harm themselves, stay by their side, and get emergency help. It's not all on you, if the situation feels too much make sure you speak to someone, once your child is safe.

General intervention, counselling, and prevention

Cipla

24 Hour Mental Health Line: 0800 456 789

Lifeline

Call: 0861 322 322

WhatsApp: 065 989 9238

LoveLife

Call: 080 012 1900

PLZ Call me: 083 132 2322

Tears Foundation

Dial: *143*7355#

Depression And Anxiety

Adcock Ingram Depression and Anxiety

Helpline: 0800 708 090

South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) :

Call: 0800 567 567

WhatsApp: 076 882 2775

Suicide

Suicide Crisis Line: 0800 567 567

Trauma / Gender Based Violence

Department of Social Development

Gender Based Violence Helpline: 0800 150 150

Please Call Me: *120*7867#

SMS: 31531

Substance Use

Department of Social Development

Substance Abuse Line 24hr helpline: 0800 12 13 14

SMS 32312

SANCA

Call: 0800 12 13 14

SMS 32312

Child / ADHD Related

ADHD Helpline: 0800 55 44 33

Childline: Helpline: 08000 55555 or Dial 116

Emergency Phone Numbers

Emergency (Ambulance, Fire and Rescue): 112

South African Police Services: 10111

References:

South Africa Depression and Anxiety Group: <https://www.sadag.org/>

Aetna: <https://www.aetna.com/health-care-professionals/provider-resources/suicide-prevention.html>

Young Minds: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

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