



Teen Suicide: Understanding & Preventing

With Dick Moore, Mental Health First Aider & Suicide Prevention Campaigner

This factsheet is designed to support distressed parents who are concerned that their teens may be considering suicide or whose teens are struggling with intrusive thoughts about suicide.

It provides an overview of young suicide and attempted suicide, focusing on current trends, recognising signs, strategies for parents, and resources for seeking help. The aim is to offer reassurance and practical advice, acknowledging the fear and uncertainty that parents may feel when faced with such serious concerns.

Young People and Suicide



FACT

One of the most upsetting statistics regarding suicide is that **four school children take their lives every week in the UK.**

FACT

Increased Incidence: In England and Wales, suicide is the leading cause of death for 10 to 14-year-olds.

FACT

Gender Differences:

Three-quarters of completed suicides are by males, while three-quarters of attempted suicides are by females. The suicide rate for girls under 20 is the highest since records began.

There is a notable difference in suicide statistics between genders which might suggest different coping mechanisms and help-seeking behaviours. Boys often internalise their struggles, which could explain the higher rate of actual suicides. In contrast, girls are generally more expressive and communicative about their feelings, picking different suicide methods, which could result in higher survival rates after suicide attempts.

Recognising the signs

- 1. Behavioural Changes:**
Noticeable shifts in behaviour, withdrawal from friends and activities, or changes in sleep, and eating patterns.
- 2. Physical Signs:**
Neglect of personal appearance, decline in school performance, or sudden interest in or disengagement from religious/spiritual practices.
- 3. Emotional Signs:**
Increased anxiety, persistent self-harm, depression, agitation, anger or reckless behavior.
- 4. Verbal Cues:**
Talking about feelings of hopelessness, lack of future plans, being a burden, or expressing a desire to die - are all potential red flags.
- 5. Substance Use & Abuse:**
Look out for risky and addictive behaviour patterns. In studies that examine risk factors among people who have taken their own life, substance use and abuse occurs more frequently among youths and adults, compared to older persons.

Assessing the risk

Suicidal thoughts are not uncommon. Many teens and young adults feel sad and hopeless, but that doesn't mean they'll act on those thoughts, but it also doesn't mean they're just trying to get attention. It means they need help—sometimes immediately. Three important questions to ask are:

1. Are You Thinking About Suicide?

This question needs to be asked directly as it helps to understand if the teen is contemplating ending their life.

2. Do You Have a Plan?

If the answer to the first question is anything other than an unequivocal "no," the next step is to determine if they have a specific plan. This question assesses the immediacy and seriousness of the risk.

3. What Is Keeping You Safe?

Understanding what factors are preventing the teen from acting on their suicidal thoughts can provide insight into their current state of mind and potential protective factors. This could include fear, empathy for loved ones, or other personal reasons.

Key strategies for parents



Understanding Teen Stressors:

Teens face numerous stressors that can impact their mental health. Academic pressures, social dynamics, and the influence of social media can create significant stress and anxiety. What may seem trivial to an adult can feel overwhelming to a teenager. Academic performance and social acceptance are often viewed by teens as critical benchmarks for success and self-worth, leading to considerable stress when they fall short of these expectations.



Impact of Childhood Trauma:

Childhood trauma can cause lasting emotional scars, affecting a young person's mental health and increasing their risk of suicide. Parents can support by being aware of and helping children and teens build an internal sense of safety over time.



Intrusive Thoughts and Ideation:

Intrusive thoughts and suicidal ideation can be distressing and complex. It's important for parents to understand that fleeting dark thoughts, especially during moments of acute stress, are not uncommon among teenagers. However, there is a significant difference between these transient thoughts and persistent, intrusive thoughts accompanied by a detailed plan or intent. Recognising the seriousness and understanding the context of these thoughts is crucial in assessing the risk and seeking appropriate help.



Open Communication:

Create an environment where children feel safe to talk about their feelings without fear of judgement. Engage in normal, open conversations about feelings and stressors so they feel heard and supported.



Listen Actively:

Focus on listening rather than offering solutions. Validate their feelings and let them know you are there for them.



Stay Calm:

One of the most effective ways to help your teen manage stress is by modelling healthy coping mechanisms. Show them how to handle stress in a calm and constructive manner and avoid catastrophising situations.



Educate on Emotional Resilience:

Teach coping mechanisms and stress management strategies. Encourage activities that build resilience, such as sports, hobbies, or creative outlets.



Seek Professional Help:

If you suspect your child is at risk, consult a mental health professional immediately. Early intervention can be crucial.

Seeking help & useful resources for parents & teens

Immediate Danger:

If you are unable to keep your teen safe and they need immediate help, especially if you think they are at risk of acting on suicidal feelings, or they have seriously harmed themselves and need urgent medical attention, call emergency services or go to the nearest Accident & Emergency.

- **Crisis Support:** You can call 111 or look for Crisis Support resources in your local area as some will offer a Mental Health Crisis Line offering emotional support and advice to people who are affected by urgent mental health issues.
- **Mental Health Resources:** For non-emergency situations and during hours, you can contact your child's GP, or a mental health professional, such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, or counsellor. School counsellors can also provide support and referrals.



Maintain open lines of communication, be emotionally honest, and ensure that they know that your love is unconditional.



Dick Moore

“ LET'S ALL TALK mental health

There are sessions on the [Let's all Talk Mental Health hub](#) for you to view on Suicide Prevention as well as related topics such as Depression and Self-harm including the talks linked below.



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LET'S ALL TALK.
mental health

Suicide Prevention in Teens: What parents need to know

Monday 18th March at 8pm

[@letsalltalkmh](#) [@letsalltalk_mentalhealth](#) [@letsalltalk_mentalhealth](#)

Suicide Prevention in Teens: What parents need to know

SESSION SUMMARY Suicide Prevention in Teens: What parents need to know As parents, it's essential to comprehend teen suicide prevention in the same way w...

[Contrast videos](#)

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LET'S ALL TALK.
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Getting help for Teen Low Mood and Depression & CBT

Monday 15th January at 8pm

[@letsalltalkmh](#) [@letsalltalk_mentalhealth](#) [@letsalltalk_mentalhealth](#)

Getting help for Teen Low Mood and Depression & CBT

Understanding and Supporting Teenagers Through Emotional Challenges During this session, we look into the crucial topic of teenage mental health. Our focu...

[Contrast videos](#)

Other Resources for Parents

- **Charlie Waller Trust:** Provides information and resources on mental health and suicide prevention.
- **Papyrus:** Their Hopeline has advisers trained to help young people focus on staying safe from suicide.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** Offers 24/7 support via phone or chat.
- **Mind:** A mental health charity providing advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem.
- **YoungMinds:** UK-based organization focused on children's mental health.

This factsheet is for advice purposes. Please remember that we're not offering medical or clinical health services specific to your situation. If you need help, please contact your GP or other healthcare professionals – don't wait to get help if you or your young one needs it.