

# Parents matter:

## how you can support a child experiencing thoughts of suicide

Parents are crucial sources of support for their children. When children and young people are going through tough times they need someone to talk to whom they trust. Young people tell us that having the support of their parents really makes a difference.



**If you're at all concerned about your child, trust your instincts. Start a conversation and ask if they're ok. Just showing that you care helps.**

Here's some advice on what to do if you're concerned that your child is distressed and not coping.



### 1. If you're concerned about your child, talk to them

- Talking about suicide can be hard. If you're not ready to start a conversation yet, just show your child that you care in whatever way you can.
- When you're ready to talk, find a comfortable and confidential place and time. Ask if they're ok. Tell them you care, are there to help and won't judge them.
- Listen to them with your undivided attention for as long as it takes.
- Let them share as much or as little as they want. They may want to unload despair, sadness and anger. If they're not ready for that, respect their choice and remind them you're happy to listen if they want to talk in the future.
- Telling your child what you think they should do isn't usually helpful. For example, saying, "You should get out more" or "You'd feel better if you ate healthier" sounds like criticism to a young person.
- Just acknowledge how they're feeling, and don't make assumptions or judgements about what's going on.
- Reassure them that help is available, that you're there for them, and that things can get better.
- Encourage them to seek professional help and offer to help them do this. For example, sit with them while they call Kids Helpline or go with them to see a doctor.
- It's ok to ask direct questions about suicidal thoughts. For example, you can ask :
  - "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" or "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
- Ask about their immediate safety:
  - Do they have a specific suicide plan? Have they attempted suicide in the past?
  - If they seem at immediate risk of harm, read the section on immediate risk.
- Help them make a practical safety plan to follow when they're thinking about suicide. This can include things to do or places to go that help them feel better, and a list of people to contact for support.

“ Don't pretend to understand if you don't, we don't want advice we just want someone to listen and be there. We might not want to talk at that moment but knowing you're there in the future is comforting. ”



## 2. Keep checking in

- Serious suicidal thoughts don't disappear overnight. Even with professional support, it can take a long time for thoughts and feelings to change.
- You can help just by being someone they can trust, rely on and talk to. Keep in touch regularly and continue to show that you care.
- Don't judge them if they're not ready to talk or seek further support. Keep listening and encouraging them to talk to a professional.



## 3. Look after yourself

- Learning that someone you care about is thinking about suicide is distressing, and providing support can be challenging. It's important to look after yourself, both for your own sake and so that you can continue to be there for your child.
- You may need to talk to someone yourself. This could be family and friends, but if you're not coping you might want to contact a counsellor or psychologist.
- Remember, you are not expected to be a professional counsellor. Serious suicidal thoughts and behaviours can be too much for family and friends to handle alone. If your child is thinking about ending their life, you too can contact a professional for help. There are several 24/7 helplines available – contact details are provided below.

### Where to get help 24/7

- **Kids Helpline** – for ages 5-25 to talk about anything at all. 1800 55 1800 | [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)
- **Lifeline** – all ages, for support in a personal crisis. 13 11 14 | [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)
- **Suicide Call Back Service** – for 15 years and over, support when you or someone you know is feeling suicidal. 1300 659 467 | [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

“ Please be patient. I know it can be frustrating to see us like this when there is seemingly no reason... Please keep supporting us and trying your best. One day it'll all be worth it. ”

### IMMEDIATE RISK

**If someone is at immediate risk of harm, you can help keep them safe**

- If your child has a specific plan for suicide and might be at risk of hurting themselves soon, call a crisis telephone line (see contact details below).
- Remove any dangerous objects like drugs or knives.
- In an emergency dial 000 or take the person to a hospital emergency room.
- Stay with them until help arrives.
- If you're a young person yourself, call a trusted adult.

“ If you think your loved one seems a little more down than usual or a little more closed off... then check how they are feeling. Even if their problem seems insignificant to you, it may be the end of the world to them. ”

**We're here. Anytime. Any Reason.**

[kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au) | **1800 55 1800**

FREE CALL

Kids Helpline is a service of **yourtown** for 5-25 year olds

