

Protecting Our Youth from Suicide

Being a teenager can be hard. The teen years are a time of growth and increasing independence, but they're also a time of social, emotional and academic pressures, which in turn increase teens' risk of depression, anxiety and suicide. There is no single profile for a youth at risk. It could be any child. It could be your child.

Being a parent can be hard too. We play a key role in protecting our teens, but we don't have all the answers. Working together, a group of community parents and adolescent mental health experts from Children's Hospital Colorado put together these tips that parents can use to lower the risks of depression and anxiety and keep kids safe.



1. Connect

- Teens want and need more time with parents, even if they don't act like it.
- Meet them where their interests are. Go for a hike together. Check out their video game. Have coffee.
- Teens want connection with trusted adults besides their parents. Be that for the kids around you.



2. Listen

- Talk less, listen more. And don't always try to solve the problem.
- Be ready to listen when they want to talk.
- Be present and put electronics away.
- Listen without judgment.



3. Accept

- Respect your teen's values. Let them be their own person.
- Love them for who they are and let them know they are loved.
- Accept that mistakes happen, use them as opportunities for growth.
- Be vulnerable and transparent with your own experiences and failures.
- Model how to respond when things don't go as planned.



4. Build trust

- Be a safe place for them to share the realities of their world.
- Validate where they are coming from and take their concerns seriously.
- Set and respect mutual expectations and limits. It's good to have boundaries, including around electronics.
- If your teen is struggling, don't take away the things that connect them with others.
- Be consistent and stay true to your words.



5. Talk

- Talk to your teen about sex, drugs, screen time, harmful behaviors and suicide.
- Talking about these things will not make teens more likely to do them. Talk about them because they are surely on your teen's mind already, and they need your input.
- Use open-ended questions to draw your teen into conversation. What was the best or most challenging part of their day?



6. Empower

- Teach decision-making skills and let them solve problems on their own.
- Serve as a consultant (ask “What are your options?”) and avoid telling them what to do.
- Foster their resilience. Remind them that they can and will come back from disappointments, losses, and failures.



7. Cultivate a healthy home environment

- Recognize that relationships in families are complex.
- Nurture family rituals and traditions like family dinners, holidays and game nights. Prioritize and protect family time. Have fun together!
- Make the home a safe haven from the rest of world.
- Define and model what your family will stand for – love, laughter, faith or spirituality, honesty, respect. Whatever your family values.
- Make your home safe. Secure any chemicals, medications and firearms.



8. Acknowledge value

- Recognize that our teens have value that has nothing to do with their accomplishments.
- Value effort and character over achievement.
- Encourage service to others; it brings purpose, joy, pride and self-worth.
- Know that every person’s life has value. Choosing life is the norm.



9. Seek help

- Understand that some level of sadness, anxiousness and confusion is normal. Recognize when it goes on too long or gets worse and ask other people in your teen’s world what they’re seeing or hearing.
- Know the warning signs. These include loss of interest in usual activities, withdrawal from social contact, changes in their eating or sleeping patterns, personality changes, declining performance in school, thoughts of self-harm or suicide or even giving away personal items.
 - Ask your teen directly about thoughts of suicide if they exhibit these signs.
 - SEEK HELP if you have concerns about your child’s safety or wellbeing.

Non-Crisis mental health resources: if your teen is not in immediate danger and does not require crisis services, you can find resources at:

Children’s Hospital Colorado, Pediatric Mental Health Institute

 childrenscolorado.org/mentalhealth

 For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call: 720-777-6200

El Paso County, Teen Suicide Prevention

 elpasocountyhealth.org/services/teen-suicide-prevention

Crisis Services

 Life-Threatening Emergencies: dial 9-1-1

 Colorado Crisis Services: Call 1-844-493-8255, or text “TALK” to 38255

Crisis consultation and support for any Mental Health, substance use, or emotional crisis 24 hours, 7 days a week.