

A Companion Piece for Peers

BEING THERE FOR YOUR FRIENDS: A GUIDE TO HELPING PREVENT SUICIDE

Just as we all have physical health, which can vary from day-to-day, we also have mental health, and it's just as important. When you think someone might be going through more than just a hard time, know that you may be able to help by just reaching out to talk and encouraging help-seeking resources. Below are suggestions on what to watch for.

WARNING SIGNS TO WATCH

Suicide is complex and does not happen based on a single event. Suicide usually occurs after several issues (health problems, stress, anxiety over life events, family or relationship problems or any number of other "stressors") converge on someone and leave them with feelings of hopelessness or despair. To help support your friends, watch for the following warnings signs and behaviors:

- Talks about killing themselves, feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Expresses being a burden to others, feeling trapped or experiencing unbearable pain.
- Appears depressed, anxious, disinterested, irritable, humiliated or agitated, or suddenly appears to have rapidly improved after previously displaying those moods.
- Increases use of alcohol or drugs.
- Withdraws from activities and isolates from friends and family.
- Reduces effort at school, stops trying academically or increases absences.
- Exhibits changes in sleeping or eating patterns; is always fatigued or not sleeping.
- Conducts internet searches for materials/ways for self-harm.
- Says goodbye to family or friends; gives possessions away.
- Displays aggressive behaviors.
- Makes unusual or cryptic social media posts related to the above (being a burden, saying goodbye, etc.).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

It starts with simply talking and listening. If your friend seems to be more down than usual, is exhibiting a change in behavior or you just feel like something isn't right, don't wait—talk to him or her. Have the brave conversation. Also understand that what's troubling them isn't something you can—or need to—solve on your own. If you think a friend needs help, identify a trusted adult and let them know what is happening and that help is needed. You can also share resources with your friend, such as the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or the Crisis Text Line, in addition to reaching out to an adult for help.

Don't wait—trust your gut. Starting a conversation will be hard, but it's the right thing to do. Asking your friend directly if he or she is considering suicide will not make them more likely to attempt suicide.

Be ready to listen. It's the best thing you can do when someone is struggling.

Let your friend share at his or her own pace, and let them know that help is available. Talk with them about who else (a trusted adult, such as a school counselor, parent, teacher or coach) might help and offer to support them in talking to a helpful adult. Reassure them that help is available, listen to their concerns and let them know that others care and can help.

Tell your friend about the Crisis Text Line by texting CONNECT to 741741 or call, text or chat the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988.

Continue to invite your friend to chat or to join in on social activities.

Most importantly, find a trusted adult to help support both of you. It doesn't need to be a parent; it can be a teacher, coach or counselor—anyone you trust who can also help your friend. When someone is struggling, telling an adult is not the same as gossiping or breaking your friend's trust. Telling an adult will help to ensure that your friend gets the help he or she needs.

Even if your friend has not shared any plans to harm themselves or others, but you still see the warning signs, you should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible to make sure they are aware and can assist.

To learn more about how to talk to your friends about mental health, including videos and conversation starting tips, visit Seize the Awkward ([SEIZETHEAWKWARD.ORG](https://seizetheawkward.org)).