

# Suicidal behaviour in children and adolescents

Suicide is the act of deliberately taking one's own life. Many of us do not know how to react when someone talks about suicide. However, approximately 700,000 people, including adolescents, die by suicide worldwide each year. Globally, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15-19 year olds. Therefore, we need to be able to recognise the risk of suicide and be able to talk openly about suicide. It can be difficult and upsetting for us, but for the person contemplating suicide, it is usually a relief to be able to talk about it with someone and not be alone.

## How to recognize the risk of suicide

People who are thinking about or are already planning suicide often send warning signals, which can be verbal or non-verbal. Some of these signals may appear in conversations, in their behaviour or in social media posts. Many people may have suicidal thoughts or feelings but not seek help themselves. Recognizing warning signs is an important first step in preventing suicide, for example:

**Behavior:** loneliness, avoiding friends or usual favourite activities, difficulty concentrating, crying, poor school performance, giving away their belongings, saying goodbye,

neglecting personal appearance, self-harm, increased use of alcohol or drugs, change in appetite, seeking information about death or suicide methods, sleep problems, collecting pills, razor blades or other similar items.

**Feelings and moods:** incomprehensible mood swings, anxiety, depression, sudden apathy, passivity, irritability, outbursts of anger, feelings of guilt, shame, lack of energy

### Communications:

- *"There's no point. Nothing matters anymore."*
- *"I wish I'd never been born."*
- *"I wish I'd died."*
- *"Nobody cares about me. No one would miss me here."*
- *"I'm a burden to others. I have nothing to live for."*
- *"You won't have to worry about me anymore."*
- *"I wish I was dead."*



## How can you help when a child or teen confides in you

The topic of suicide evokes fear and unpleasant feelings in every person. You can stick to these points for now if a child or teenager brings up the topic of suicide with you:

- Don't panic, be supportive and listen.
- Be direct and don't be afraid to start a conversation ("I'm here for you... I can see you're not feeling well... do you want to talk?").
- Encourage the person to talk about what they are feeling.
- Don't try to resolve the situation immediately and don't be afraid of silence.
- Try not to tell the individual what they 'should' or 'should not' do, the important thing is to give them emotional support and be with them.
- Encourage them, reassure them that there are options to deal with the situation.
- Ask simple, direct questions.
- Don't promise not to tell anyone.
- Don't be on your own, address the situation with other adults and take care of yourself.
- If you do not know what to do yourself, contact the Parents' Safety Line, which offers crisis assistance and basic social counselling to all adults acting in the interests of children (i.e. not only parents, but also teachers and others working with children) at 606 021 021.

For more information, visit [www.sebevrazdy.cz](http://www.sebevrazdy.cz).



## What can you say

- "Have you ever thought about hurting yourself?"
- "Have you thought about suicide?"
- "When you talk about not wanting to live, about wanting to give up... are you talking about suicide?"
- "Does that mean you want to hurt yourself?"
- "Have you ever hurt yourself?"
- Ask about the suicide plan, "Have you thought about taking your own life? Do you have a specific plan?" "Have you thought about when you would do it? Do you have the means to do it?"



*We adults sometimes think that asking about suicide will lead a person to suicidal thoughts. But that's not the case. If a person is not thinking about suicide, our question will not drive them to suicide. However, if a child/teen is thinking about suicide, our questions can save their life - it can be the first step to finding the help and support they need. Talking openly about suicide helps because it allows us to really talk about our feelings. If you suspect your child is suicidal, try to open the subject sensitively.*