

Be Direct: Addressing Suicidality in Youth and Young Adults

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According to the most recent survey released by SAMHSA, 1 in 10 youth ages 12-17 report experiencing serious thoughts of suicide, with 2.1% reporting they have attempted suicide in the last year. It can be scary to think about your child experiencing these thoughts, but it's important to remember that help is always available. One of the biggest myths about youth suicide is that talking directly about it will make a child's suicidal thought worse – in fact, it's exactly the opposite! Below are a few tips for approaching the topic, as well as how to respond if a child tells you they've been thinking of harming themselves:

BE ALERT

Keep an eye out for any unusual or out-of-the-ordinary changes to the way your child is talking, feeling, or behaving. Talking about being dead or dying, researching methods of self-harm or suicide, and feeling seriously depressed, anxious, hopeless, or trapped are key warning signs that your child may be struggling with thoughts of suicide.

BE DIRECT

Don't be shy to ask the question flat out – "Are you experiencing thoughts of suicide?" Asking this question opens the opportunity to turn suspicion into action to support children who may be in crisis.

BE RESPONSIVE

If a child admits to self-harming or thoughts of suicide, take it seriously – but don't panic! Keep calm and thank the child for asking for help!

- **STEP 1:** Take the time to listen to what they are thinking and feeling, expressing concern and care along the way.
- **STEP 2:** Plan for safety! Review the child's personal triggers and warning signs, effective coping skills, opportunities for distraction, and personal and professional supports.

If anyone confirms they're having thoughts of self-harm or suicide, it's important to seek care right away. Work with the child (and their parents) to seek mental health support from a licensed therapist or counselor, or schedule a sooner appointment if they are already connected to someone. While you wait, there are several 24/7 crisis resources available free of charge. Additionally, never be afraid to reach out to emergency responders (911) if your child feels they are unable to avoid acting on their thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

- Text **HOME** to 741741 (*National Crisis Text Line*)
- Call 988 (*National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline*)

WHEREVER YOU ARE, HELP IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE.