

No one likes to talk about suicide. It's hard to know what to say; you worry about saying the "wrong thing". Taking the time to ask and **REALLY** listen means a lot, regardless of your words. Whether this is your first time asking someone about suicide or your 10th, here is a list of questions that might help you get a conversation started.



What about self-harm?

Self-harm is also a situation where your peer needs support and help. Even though it's different than suicide, many of the tools in this resource can help.

When to get help right away:

- They are struggling with feeling down and have things that could be used to try to end their life.

They are doing risky things, like

- drinking more than usual, doing drugs, taking chances and doing things that are dangerous.



When you should ask:

- You notice that someone's behavior has changed - they don't hang out with people anymore; they don't talk as much; or they seem really sad.
- You hear someone say, "I wish I could go to bed and never wake up" or "I wish I had never been born."

Examples of what to say:

- "I noticed you seem really sad lately and haven't been around a lot, which is different. Would you like to catch up together and talk?"
- "Can you tell me more? What do you mean when you say that? Has something been happening lately that you want to talk about? Is there a reason you might be feeling that way?"

Once you ask and listen to their answer, then what happens?

- **Invite courage:** "Thank you for talking about this with me." Validate their feelings and what is on their mind.
- **Reflect:** "I hear you saying you're in a tough spot right now, what can I do to help?"
- **Focus on the moment:** "What can we do right now? Are there people we can talk to right now for support?"
- **Lend your support while being aware of your own needs:** Don't over promise if you can't make the commitment to support further. If you can check in, you can ask, "Do you want me to check in with you tomorrow?"
- **Acknowledge resistance:** Don't feel bad about yourself if someone doesn't feel comfortable sharing.
- **Connect to support:** Sometimes someone may not recognize all the support options available to them. There are different options that you can talk with someone about, like the suicide prevention hotline, Trevor Project, and more.

You don't have to do this alone, there is help and support.

- You can always call a suicide prevention hotline (**National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 988**) or **911** for more information and support.
- **911** is available if you are worried about someone following through. Some signs include a plan for suicide as well as a means to make an attempt.

Suggested Citation: Barker, A., Zullo, L., Colorado, M., Simmons, H., Acero, A. (2021). *Words to Use When Talking About Suicide*. Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

Acknowledgment: The authors of this fact sheet series also want to thank Chris Foreman and Ty Asher for their valuable support and guidance.