

# SUICIDE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

LEARNING SIGNS • ASKING QUESTIONS • GETTING HELP



## PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE



## Glossary

**Suicide** – death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with intent to die.

**Suicidal ideation** – thinking about, considering or planning suicide.

**Suicide attempt** – a non-fatal self-directed and potentially injurious behavior with any intent to die. A suicide attempt may or may not result in injury.

**Death by Suicide or Died by Suicide** – preferred wording when talking about taking one's own life. **Committed suicide** implies a crime and perpetuates stigma.

**Self-directed violence** – behavior directed at oneself that deliberately results in injury or the potential for injury. Self-directed violence may be suicidal or non-suicidal in nature.

**Mental illness** – a condition that affects a person's thinking, feeling or mood. Such conditions may affect someone's ability to relate to others and function each day. Each person will have different experiences, even people with the same diagnosis.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



# Possible Risk Factors for Children & Teens

The following factors may increase the risk of suicidal ideation or attempted suicide. However, these risk factors do not always lead to a suicide:

## **A family history of:**

- mental health issues
- substance abuse
- violence
- suicide

## **Being:**

- LGBTQ with no family or home support
- prone to reckless or impulsive behavior
- in trouble with the law
- under the influence of alcohol or drugs / having a problem with substance abuse

## **Having:**

- a feeling of hopelessness
- feeling of seclusion, loneliness and/or shame
- attempted suicide before
- a psychiatric disorder or mental illness
- disciplinary, social or school problems

## **Additional factors:**

- enduring intense bullying
- possessing a gun
- knowing, identifying, or being associated with someone who has died by suicide
- experiencing dramatic life changes

Source: adapted from <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/kc/suicidal-thoughts-ideation-193026>

For additional suicide and mental health resources, visit [JTeach.org](http://JTeach.org)



## Warning Signs

People who are considering suicide often display one or more of the following signs. Suicide most often occurs when stressors and mental health issues converge to create an experience of hopelessness and despair.

### **If a person talks about:**

- Killing themselves
- Feeling hopeless
- Having no reason to live
- Being a burden to others
- Feeling trapped
- Unbearable pain

### **Behaviors that may signal risk, especially if related to a painful event, loss or change:**

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Looking for a way to end their lives, such as searching online for methods
- Withdrawing from activities
- Isolating from family and friends
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Giving away prized possessions/money
- Aggression
- Fatigue

### **People who are considering suicide often display one or more of the following:**

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loss of interest
- Irritability
- Humiliation/Shame
- Agitation/Anger
- Relief/Sudden Improvement

Source: <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/risk-factors-and-warning-signs/>



# Help Prevent Suicide - Everyone Can LEARN™

Most people can relate to a time when they have felt all alone. Sometimes, we just needed a reminder—I see you. I care. For those who may be in a deep crisis and considering suicide, we suggest using the LEARN™ acronym. We truly believe that everyone can play a role. Everyone can learn to recognize and respond to someone who may be thinking about taking their own life. Most suicides are preventable. You could help save a life. To learn more, go to [www.intheforefront.org](http://www.intheforefront.org)

## LOOK FOR SIGNS

- Talking, joking or researching about death.
- Feeling hopeless, depressed, trapped, irritable, agitated, anxious, ashamed, humiliated or burdensome.
- Changes in personality, academic/work performance, sleep, withdrawing from friends/activities.
- Abusing alcohol/drugs, reckless behavior, self-harm/cutting, giving away possessions.

## EMPATHIZE AND LISTEN

- Most importantly, just listen.
- Listen with compassion, remain calm, avoid judgement and validate their feelings.
- Don't offer quick fixes, tell them everything will be OK, show anger, panic, or ask "why" questions.
- People who have survived suicide attempts report what was most helpful to them—just listen.

## ASK ABOUT SUICIDE

- Ask in a way that invites an honest response. Use any signs you've noticed as part of the ask.
- Be direct. Use the word "suicide" and be prepared to hear a "yes."
- Asking about suicide will NOT put the idea in someone's head. Not asking is far more dangerous.

## REDUCE THE DANGER

- Means reduction is a proven approach to help make your home Suicide Safer.
- If they say yes, ask them "Do you have a plan?" "Do you have access to those means?"
- Restrict or remove access to firearms, medications, belts, ropes, knives, alcohol and chemicals. Report concerning posts on social media. See reporting links here: [www.helpingcasey.com](http://www.helpingcasey.com)

## NEXT STEPS

- Never leave the person alone. There are resources to help you and the person in crisis.
- Provide a warm hand-off (stay with the person until they receive help).

Source: [http://www.intheforefront.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PDT\\_Learn\\_OnePagerColor\\_2018\\_03\\_06.pdf](http://www.intheforefront.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PDT_Learn_OnePagerColor_2018_03_06.pdf)

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## Helpful conversation starters to talk with a student, friend or loved one about suicide or their mental health:

**“Are you okay?”** Ask the question and mean it. Show you are listening by sitting alongside the person, maintaining an open body position and maintaining comfortable eye contact.

**“Are you thinking about suicide?”** If you are concerned that someone is considering suicide, ask the question directly. Asking a person if they have been thinking about suicide or have made plans will not increase the risk that they will complete suicide.

**“I’ve noticed that…”** Open the conversation by explaining behavior changes you have noticed. For example, “I’ve noticed that you’ve been showing up to work late a lot lately.” Then, express genuine concern.

**“Do you want to take a walk?”** Engaging a friend, family member or loved one you are concerned about in a health activity like taking a walk together can be a great way to start a conversation. Doing an activity while you talk can take some of the nerves and discomfort out of the conversation.

**“How are you, really?”** Sometimes when someone says they’re fine, they’re not. Know the warning signs to look for so you can know when to offer extra support.

Source: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2018/06/5-tips-conversation-mental-health/>



# Immediate Help

Take a moment to put these numbers in your phone now.



**1-800-273-TALK**  
**(8255) 24/7 crisis talk**  
**line**



**TEXT: 741741**  
**24/7 crisis text line**  
a live, trained  
crisis counselor receives  
the text and responds  
quickly



**[www.imalive.org](http://www.imalive.org)**  
**24/7 crisis online**  
**chat**

## Understanding Your Limits

Remember, though the desire to help may be great, even with education and experience, lay people are not equipped to handle the depth of pain and range of emotions reported by many who have contemplated or attempted suicide.

If you think someone is in trouble, please speak confidentially to an authority at your agency or congregation.



# Can a Jewish person who dies by suicide be buried in a Jewish cemetery?

Yes, in most cases.

It is widely – and mistakenly – thought that a Jewish funeral cannot be held for people who die by suicide and that they cannot be buried in a Jewish cemetery.\*

Though rituals vary among traditions, the majority of clergy of all denominations do all that they can to ensure a respectful and loving funeral and burial.

Source: <https://www.ou.org/torah/machshava/tzarich-iyun/tzarich-iyun-jews-with-tattoos/>

## Following a Death by Suicide, Grief Can Ripple through the Community

### Things to Say and Do

- Comfort the mourner
- Go to the funeral and/or shiva
- Talk about the person in a loving way
- Listen with an open heart
- Study in the person's honor
- Acknowledge that it was death by suicide
- Give Tzedakah

### Things Not to Say or Do

- Do not pass judgement
- Do not ask for details
- Do not tell mourners that their loved one is "in a better place"
- Do not share mental health challenges or stories about suicide
- Do not talk about other things that could have been tried to help that person while still living



## Jewish Texts

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרִיבִים זֶה בְּזֶה

All Israel are responsible for one another  
Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shevuot 39a

וְחַי בְּהֵם וְלֹא שְׂיָמוּת בְּהֵם

"And you shall live by them" (Vayikra 18:5) - and not that you shall die by them.  
Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 27b

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ אֱלֹקָנָה אֵי שָׂה חֲנָה לָמָּה תִבְכִּי וְלָמָּה לֹא תֹאכְלִי וְלָמָּה יָרַע לְבַבְךָ

"Hannah, why are you crying and why aren't you eating? Why are you so sad?  
I Samuel 1:8

לֹא תַעֲמוּד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ לֹא תַעֲמוּד עַל עֲצַמְךָ מִשְׁמַע אֲלֵא חֲזוֹר עַל כָּל צַדִּיקִין שֶׁלֹּא יֵאבֵד דָּם

"You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor," means "you shall not rely on yourself, alone. Rather, you must turn to all available resources so that your neighbor's blood will not be lost.  
Rashi on Sanhedrin 73a

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמֵּר, וְלֹא אַתָּה בֶן חוֹרִין לְבַטֵּל מִמְּנָה. אִם לְמַדְתָּ תוֹרַת הַרְבֵּה, נוֹתְנִים לָךְ שְׂכָר הַרְבֵּה. וְנֹאמָן הוּא בְּעַל מְלֹאכְתְּךָ שְׂיִשְׁלֵם לָךְ שְׂכָר פְּעֻלָּתְךָ וְדַע מִתּוֹן שְׂכָרְךָ שֶׁל צְדִיקִים לְעֵתִיד לְבֹא.

He would [also] say, It is not upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it...  
Pirkei Avot 2:16

קָטָן הַמְּאֵבֵד עֲצָמוֹ לְדַעַת, חָשׁוּב כְּשֶׁלֹּא לְדַעַת. וְכֵן גְּדוֹל הַמְּאֵבֵד עֲצָמוֹ לְדַעַת, וְהוּא אֲנוֹס כְּשֶׁאוֹל הַמְּלָךְ, אֵין מוֹנְעִין מִמֶּנּוּ כָּל דְּבָר.

A minor, who knowingly commits suicide - is counted as if it was done unknowingly. Such is also the case with an adult who knowingly commits suicide but does so under distress, like King Saul – we do not withhold anything from him.  
Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 345:3