

# Parent Strategies for Protecting Youth From Suicide

COMPILED BY PARENTS FOR PARENTS TO HELP MINIMIZE YOUR CHILD'S RISK

**Being a young person is hard.** Youth face greater social, emotional, and achievement pressures, which increases the risk for substance use, depression, anxiety, and suicide.

**Being a parent is hard.** We do the best we can with what we have and what we know. As parents, we play a key role in protecting our youth.

This guide is intended as a tool for supporting and connecting with youth, and resource when we need to seek help, especially to prevent suicide.

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## Connect

- Youth want and need more time with parents, even if they don't act like it.
- Meet them in their interests (hiking, eating out, coffee, etc.).
- Youth want connection with other trusted adults. You can be that for the youth around you.

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## Listen

- Talk less, listen more.
- Be ready to listen when they want to talk.
- Be present by putting distractions away.
- Listen without judgment.

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## Accept

- Let them be their own person.
- Love them for who they are and let them know.
- Accept that mistakes happen, use them as opportunities for growth.
- Be vulnerable and transparent with your own experiences and failures.
- Model how to fail well.

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## Build Trust

- Be a safe place for them to share the good and bad realities of their world.
- Validate where they are coming from and take their concerns seriously.
- Set and respect mutual expectations and limits. It's good to have boundaries.
- Be consistent and stay true to your word.

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## Talk

- Don't be afraid to talk to your youth about sex, drugs, screen time, harmful behaviors, and suicide.
- Talking about it won't make them more likely to do these things.
- Open the door to these conversations with you because they are already happening all around them.
- Use open-ended questions to draw your child into conversation (What was the best/worst part of your day?).

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## Empower

- Let them solve their own problems, encourage decision-making skills.
- Serve as consultant. Ask, “What are your options?” Avoid telling them what to do.
- Build their confidence by expanding their responsibilities with age.
- Foster their resilience—remind them that they can and will come back from failures, disappointment, and losses.

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## Cultivate a Healthy Home Environment

- Recognize that families are innately challenging.
- Nurture family rituals and traditions (e.g. family dinners, holidays, game night).
- Prioritize and protect family time. Have fun together!
- Make the home a safe haven from rest of world.
- Define and model what your family will stand for – love, laughter, faith, honesty, respect, spirituality, etc.
- Secure medications and firearms.

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## Acknowledge Value

- Recognize that your kids have value that has nothing to do with their accomplishments.
- Value effort and character over achievement.
- Encourage service to others; it brings purpose, joy, pride, and self-worth.
- Every person’s life has value. Choosing life is the norm.

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## Seek Help

- Understand that some level of sadness, anxiousness and/or confusion is normal. Recognize when it goes on too long or gets worse, and ask other people in your youth's world what they're seeing or hearing.
- Warning signs may include: loss of interest in usual activities, withdrawal from social contact, changes in their eating or sleeping patterns, drastic mood swings or personality changes, and declining performance in school, thoughts of dying or suicide, and/or giving away personal items of value.
- Ask your youth directly about thoughts of suicide if they exhibit these signs.
- Seek help if you have concerns about your child’s safety or well-being.
- **Non-Crisis Mental Health Resources:**
  - If an individual is not in immediate danger and does not require crisis services, resources may be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/ttsrpc>
  - For safety concerns, make an anonymous report to SAFE-2-Tell (1-877-542-7233).
- **Life-threatening emergencies: dial 911**
- **Crisis Services:**
  - Call or text 988 to speak to a trained mental health specialist.
  - Visit the 24/7 walk in Crisis Center for help at no charge: Diversus Lighthouse Walk-in Crisis Center is located at 115 S. Parkside Dr. in Colorado Springs or call 719-572-6100.