



NEWS RELEASE

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Experts Recommend Talking with Youth about Suicide

Having open conversations could save lives

COLUMBUS, Ohio – As kids head back to school this year, many of them will be struggling. According to national statistics, we lose more than 2,000 children and teens per year to suicide.

Experts say parents who check in regularly with their child could have a life-saving conversation.

“A conversation about depression or suicide is going to be difficult, but you can have it without putting a young person at risk and it can be very helpful,” says John Ackerman, PhD, clinical psychologist and suicide prevention coordinator for [the Center for Suicide Prevention and Research at Nationwide Children's Hospital](#). “For the young person, having this discussion can be incredibly relieving. It is a powerful opportunity to understand that being emotionally open, especially about thoughts of suicide, can lead to healing and connection rather than shame and isolation.”

According to suicide prevention experts, asking a child directly about suicidal thoughts is usually the best thing a parent can do to help their child open up about their emotions. Even if their child is not struggling with suicide or depression, parents can model for their child that it is good to talk about serious emotional concerns with trusted adults and important to reach out to friends to have these conversations, too.

According to Dr. Ackerman, if your child's friend tells them they are feeling suicidal, your child should tell their friend that they care about them and acknowledge that they are hurting. After their friend knows they are being listened to and supported, the next step is to ask specifically if they are thinking about suicide or have tried to kill themselves. This should be done in a compassionate way free of judgement. If they say “yes” or even “I'm not sure,” a trusted adult should be told right away. Never leave someone alone if they are showing warning signs of suicide.

“This is a conversation that saves lives,” said Dr. Ackerman, who says his goal is to identify kids before they have a crisis or go years without treatment. Statistics from the National Institutes of Mental Health indicate that half of mental health issues start by age 14.

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Tips for parents, families and teachers include:

- Do not wait for a crisis. A good opportunity to talk about suicide or mental health issues is when things are going well.
- Check in regularly and ask your child directly how they are doing and if they have ever had thoughts about ending their life.
- Look for changes in mood or behavior that might be a warning sign that something is wrong. For example, if the child seems really down, they stop doing things they normally enjoy, or you notice significant changes in eating or sleeping.

“It is not hopeless, and there are lots of ways loved ones can help youth get support when they need it,” said Dr. Ackerman. This involves timely treatment, building connections, helping other people know what to say when a family member or friend is struggling and having [a safety plan](#) in place to help get through a crisis.

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, contact the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255), or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting “START” to 741-741.

The Center for Suicide Prevention and Research is a partnership with [Big Lots Behavioral Health Services](#) and the [Center for Innovation in Pediatric Practice](#) in [The Research Institute](#) at Nationwide Children's.