

# PREVENTING SUICIDE CONTAGION THROUGH INCREASED CONNECTION

Support from adults like parents, family members, coaches, teachers, and mentors, and others can help youth grieve a death by suicide and prevent suicide contagion.

While this is a difficult topic and adults are grieving as well, young people need adults to take supportive and protective actions during difficult times.

Talking with a young person in your life is one way of supporting them and increasing your connection with them.

## Terms to Know

**Suicide contagion** means the increased risk or likelihood for suicidal thoughts and suicide among people who know someone who has died by suicide.

**Postvention** actions are actions community members can take in the aftermath of a death or deaths by suicide to help decrease suicide contagion.

**Connection** means having meaningful and supportive relationships. Young people's level of connection to caring adults can help protect against mental health challenges like depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide.



**Talking to youth about suicide in one-on-one conversations and asking whether they are having suicidal thoughts is a gateway to building connection and getting a young person help if they need it.**

While it can be difficult to think of a young person you know in distress, children and teens do not necessarily have to seem “at risk” for them to be so.

**Risk factors for suicide are complex and often invisible.**



# Tips for Talking to Young People About a Death by Suicide



Set the Stage

Prepare yourself ahead of time so you can be a source of strength and calm during the conversation.

Limit distractions. Make sure phones are off or on silent so you can be present in the conversation.

Start Things Off

You can ask the young person what they already know about a death by suicide, but be prepared to just listen and help them process.

Things to Avoid

Use “died by suicide” instead of “committed suicide” or “took their own life”.

Avoid details of how a death took place (e.g., discussing means).

Avoid making suicide seem like an obvious choice for someone having mental health struggles.

Things to Cover

Be a source of hope. Life’s challenges can be painful, but intense struggles usually pass and people who get support for mental health struggles can and do get better.

Be prepared to ask if the young person is having suicidal thoughts. This question is important to getting a young person help when they need it.



**Don’t forget to thank the young person for talking with you, and remind them how much you care about them. Let them know you’re a resource now and in the future.**

**If someone is having suicidal thoughts**

Remain calm and assure the young person they did the right thing by telling you.



Call /text 988, and/or other professional help.

This resource is not meant to take the place of clinical care or other mental health supports. The science of preventing suicide contagion (also called postvention) is not exact, or specific to any child or youth. Communities for Youth is not a postvention organization, but this resource was compiled using best practices from research and clinical practice.