


# COMMUNICATING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE




**PAPYRUS**  
PREVENTION OF YOUNG SUICIDE



# IS A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON YOU KNOW HAVING THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE?

Talking about suicide with a young person can feel really daunting. Whether you suspect that a young person you know is having thoughts of suicide or if you're already supporting a young person who has told you that they are having thoughts of suicide – knowing what to say and what not to say can feel like a minefield.

So how do you support a young person who is having thoughts of suicide? This leaflet contains a checklist of everything to include in your conversation with a young person, and how to get support.





## STEP 1: ASK THEM DIRECTLY ABOUT THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

Asking questions about suicide can be really difficult, painful and scary – but it saves lives.

Break the silence around young suicide – make it easier for them to talk about how they feel by using the word “suicide”. By doing this, you are showing the person who you are supporting that it is okay to talk about suicide with you. Make yourself approachable and show them that they can speak to you openly.

Worried about how to ask about suicide? Have a look at our helpful ‘Conversation Starters’ on the POPYRUS website for tips on how to word your questions and responses.



**But what if asking about suicide puts the idea in their mind?**

All of the advice we give at POPYRUS is based on a wide range of research we do to support young people and suicide prevention. There is strong evidence which shows that by asking about suicide you are not putting the idea into someone’s head if it is not already there. In fact, talking openly about suicide has been proven to help young people reach out for support.



### **Be careful how you talk about method.**

Ask open questions without making suggestions. If a young person discloses to you that they have a plan for suicide then you may need to work with them to help disable their plan.

For practical advice on disabling a plan you can contact HOPELINE247 (see overleaf).



### **If someone tells you they are feeling suicidal – What do you do next?**



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## **STEP 2: LISTEN**

When someone tells you that they are having thoughts of suicide it can be tempting to try and fix things for them. Telling someone that they have so much to live for might seem helpful, but it can appear dismissive or belittling of their concerns. This can shut them down and make them less likely to talk about it. It can be really challenging to understand why a young person is feeling suicidal but their feelings are valid, and unfortunately many young people do end their lives by suicide, so it's really important to listen.

Remember to be patient – it can be difficult for young people to express what's going on for them. Don't rush them, give them the time and space to tell you how they're feeling. Listen to what they have to say and allow them to speak freely.

- ✘ Don't assume you know.
- ✘ Don't try to make their problems seem smaller.
- ✘ Don't tell them it's just a phase.
- ✘ Don't panic.



## STEP 3: REASSURE AND SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

**Do tell them you are here for them.**

For many people, experiencing thoughts of suicide can be a really lonely and isolating experience. Connecting with people who care can be a protective factor – so it's really important to show your support.

**Do thank them for being honest and open.**

Opening up about thoughts of suicide can be really scary – especially for a young person. Thanking them for their honesty encourages them to speak up when they feel the thoughts are becoming unmanageable or if they feel at risk of acting on their thoughts. Open conversations help to keep young people safe.

**Do recognise how hard this is for them – even if you don't understand.**

For parents, friends, teachers or anyone else who is supporting a young person with thoughts of suicide it can be confusing. Trying to understand why they are feeling this way can feel really frustrating. Opening up about suicide is an incredibly brave thing to do. The reasons for thoughts of suicide can be complex, and these differ from person to person. You may never fully understand why the person is experiencing thoughts of suicide but it's important to reflect back to them that you recognise they're hurting so that they don't feel alone.

**Do remember: It is okay if you don't know how to help them.**

Hearing "I don't know how to help you right now, but I am here for you, let's look for some support together" can bring a huge amount of comfort to a young person who is experiencing some really difficult feelings. It's supportive, it's honest and it helps you both to work towards getting the right help.





## STEP 4: GETTING HELP

You've gotten through the first conversation about thoughts of suicide and it's time to look for some help – remember not to panic, there is help available and young people can learn to manage or overcome their thoughts of suicide.

**Thoughts of suicide do not have to end in suicide. You need to ask yourself:**

- Is the young person willing and able to engage with support? What kind of help do they think would be most useful for them?
- Can you support the young person to make an appointment with their GP?
- The most important thing to remember: If you ever feel that someone is at immediate risk of suicide you can contact the emergency services on 999.

# HOPELINE247

If you are thinking about suicide or are concerned about a young person who may be, you can contact HOPELINE247 for confidential support and practical advice.



Call: **0800 068 4141**

Text: **88247**

Email: **pat@papyrus-uk.org**

**[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)**

Our Suicide Prevention Advisers  
are ready to support you.



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