



The Village Health
Counselling Wellbeing Support Belonging

Staying Connected:

A Parent's Guide to Suicide



You don't have to do it on your own.

If you're here, it's likely because you're facing something you never imagined: supporting your child as they navigate thoughts of suicide.

First, take a deep breath. We know this is a lot to carry, and it takes so much strength and courage just to seek help. Please know that you're not alone in this. Many parents have walked this path, and you're showing up for your child in one of the most powerful ways possible.

Why is my child feeling this way?

Young people can experience suicidal thoughts for many reasons, often rooted in overwhelming feelings of pain, isolation or hopelessness. Sometimes, these thoughts arise from circumstances or challenges that feel overwhelming. Knowing the common struggles young people face can help us understand and support them.



Here are some of the reasons that may contribute to these painful feelings:

- **Bullying or Social Rejection:** Experiencing bullying, exclusion, or constant criticism can deeply impact a young person's self-worth and sense of belonging.
- **Academic or Social Pressure:** The pressures of school, extracurriculars, and friendships can sometimes feel too much to bear.
- **Trauma or Abuse:** Past or ongoing experiences of trauma, can lead to feelings of despair or fear that feel inescapable.
- **Loss of a Loved One:** The death of a friend, family member, or even a pet can lead to grief that sometimes feels unmanageable.
- **Struggles with Identity:** Discrimination or rejection related to sexual orientation, gender, race, or culture can make young people feel isolated and misunderstood.
- **Family Conflict or Change:** Instability can leave young people feeling insecure.
- **Mental Health Challenges:** Mental health struggles can make it hard to see beyond immediate pain.
- **Feeling Like a Burden:** Believing that others would be better off without them, which can lead to intense feelings of guilt and hopelessness.
- **Emotional Intensity and Sensitivity:** Adolescents often experience emotions more intensely than adults, which can make challenges unmanageable.
- **Desire for Independence and Autonomy:** Feeling conflicted between wanting support and wanting space. Feeling misunderstood can amplify distress.
- **Brain Development:** The adolescent brain is still developing, this can sometimes make it difficult for them to manage or articulate intense feelings and reactions.
- **Sensitivity to Peer Perception:** Adolescents can be highly attuned to the opinions and acceptance of their peers. A lack of connection can impact sense of worth.
- **Lack of Perspective:** Adolescents don't always have the life experience or perspective to understand that painful feelings are often temporary.
- **Perfectionism and Fear of Failure:** Many young people feel pressured to achieve high standards. Fear of failure can lead to feelings of inadequacy or self-blame.
- **Difficulty Seeking Help:** Young people may feel uncomfortable asking for help due to shame, stigma, or thinking they should be able to handle things alone.

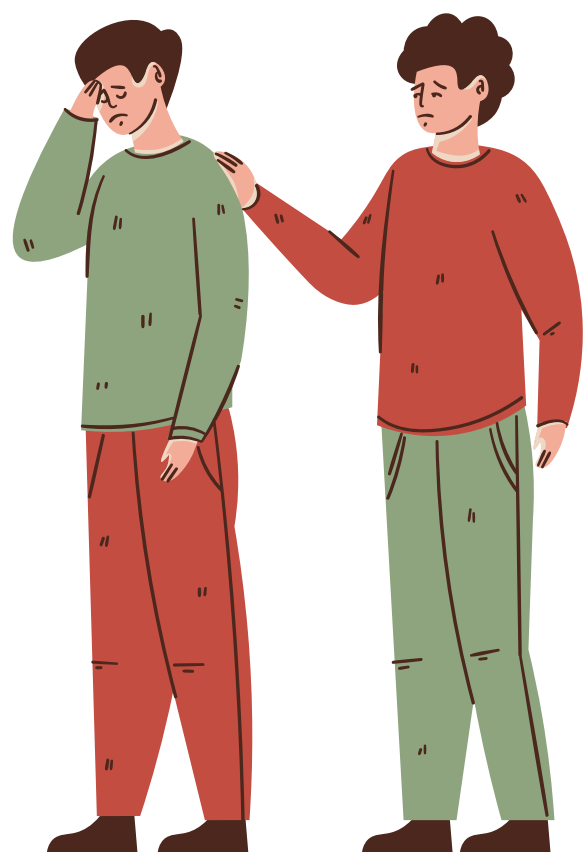
Knowing these factors can help you better understand what your child may be feeling and create space for open, compassionate conversations. **It's not about finding the "one reason"** but rather creating a safe place where your child can share whatever they're going through, knowing that they are seen, valued, and not alone.

What are the warning signs?

It's only natural to wonder, "How would I know if my child was at risk of suicide?" Trusting your instincts can be incredibly valuable, especially if you sense that something feels off. Here are some common warning signs to be aware of. If you notice any of these, or even if you just have a feeling that your child might need extra support, don't hesitate to reach out.

- **Withdrawal from Friends and Family:** If your child seems to be isolating themselves, it may be a sign that they're struggling.
- **Loss of Interest in Activities:** A sudden lack of interest in hobbies, sports, or things they once enjoyed can indicate feelings of hopelessness.
- **Changes in Sleeping or Eating Patterns:** Sleeping too much or too little, or changes in appetite may be signals of emotional distress.
- **Mood Swings or Increased Irritability:** Frequent or intense changes in mood, sadness, or anger could mean something deeper is going on.
- **Giving Away Valued Possessions:** If your child is parting with items that are meaningful to them, this might be an attempt to say goodbye.
- **Expressing Feelings of Worthlessness:** Statements like "I don't matter," or "I wish I wasn't here" are serious signs of intense emotional pain.
- **Risky or Self-Destructive Behaviours:** Self-harm, or substance use can sometimes be coping mechanisms or ways to escape overwhelming feelings.
- **Dropping Grades or School Avoidance:** A noticeable drop in academic performance or avoiding school altogether could be due to emotional struggles.
- **Talking About Death or Dying:** Any mention of death, dying, or not wanting to be here should be taken seriously, even if it seems indirect or casual.

Not all signs are easy to see, and some may feel unclear or confusing. For instance, self-harm doesn't always mean a young person is contemplating suicide; sometimes, it's a way for them to cope with intense feelings they don't yet know how to manage. But if you're noticing any of these behaviours, or if you simply feel something isn't right trust yourself. Your instincts as a parent are powerful and often right on target.



How do I talk to my child about this?

The reassuring news is that suicide is preventable. One of the most powerful ways to support your young person is talking openly and honestly. If your child is having thoughts of suicide, starting a gentle, caring conversation and working through the next steps together can make all the difference.

Follow our three step guide, **CALM, CONNECT, COMMIT** to begin the conversation and support them through this time.

Calm

Take a deep breath.

Finding out that your child is struggling with thoughts of suicide is a lot to take in, and it's perfectly natural to feel a wave of emotions, shock, sadness, fear, maybe even anger. These feelings are valid, and you deserve the time and space to feel them fully.

**Deal with
your own
emotional
response first.**

Give yourself permission to process what's come up, whether that means talking to someone you trust, journaling, or simply taking a moment to gather yourself. When you're ready, approaching your child with a calm and caring presence can help them feel safe to open up. Staying steady isn't about hiding your feelings but about showing them they're not alone and that you're here for them, no matter what. Taking this time to care for yourself first will help you show up for your child with the compassion and calm they need right now.

Speak confidently and calmly.

Using the word "suicide" directly and calmly with your child can feel intimidating, but it's one of the most powerful ways to show them they're safe to share what's really going on inside. When you approach this conversation with a steady, caring tone, it sends a message: "I can handle this. I'm here to listen, without judgment."

**'Have you had
thoughts about
suicide?'**

Your calmness gives your child permission to speak openly and honestly about the hard stuff, without the worry of shocking or upsetting you. This openness tells them that their feelings however painful are okay to talk about. By naming what's happening, you create a space where they don't have to keep it hidden, which can be such a relief for them.

Remember, you don't have to have all the answers or the perfect words; just being present and willing to hear them out can help your child feel seen, accepted, and understood. This simple act of courage and compassion can make a world of difference in their healing journey.

Connect

Be curious and open.

When you're ready to talk with your child, approach the conversation with warmth, curiosity, and a truly open heart. Listening without judgment is one of the greatest gifts you can offer in this raw conversation. It shows your child that they're safe with you, even in their hardest moments.

'Help me understand how you are feeling. You can tell me anything.'

Start with gentle, open questions that let them know you're here to understand, not to criticise. By taking this caring, open approach, you're reminding them that the bond between you is strong enough to hold whatever they're carrying. It reassures them that no matter how heavy their feelings may be, they're not alone in this. Keep the conversation steady and patient, and let them share at their own pace. This openness and acceptance can be a powerful anchor for your child, showing them that they're seen, heard, and loved just as they are. And remember, it's okay if the conversation isn't perfect; what matters most is that they know you're here, unconditionally, every step of the way.

Affirm your relationship.

In moments like this, it's so important to remind your child that they're not alone and that you're by their side, every step of the way. Expressing your love and gratitude for their honesty can make all the difference. You might say something like, "Thank you for trusting me with this. I'm really glad you opened up to me." Let them feel the warmth of your love and the depth of your care.

'There is nothing you can say that will make me stop loving you.'

Reassure them that even though it might feel overwhelming right now, together, you'll figure out the next steps. You could say, "I love you so much, and we're in this together. Let's talk about what we can do next to help you feel better, because you deserve that."

Your words of reassurance not only remind them they are loved, but they also reinforce that the strength of your relationship can hold them through even the hardest times. When they hear you express gratitude for their openness, it helps them feel less isolated, and more connected to you. You're offering them a lifeline, one of love, understanding, and support. Through this, you're showing them that no matter what they're facing, you will walk alongside them and help them find their way through.

Commit

Commit to taking action

Taking steps to make sure your child is safe is an act of deep love and commitment. When you approach this with your child, rather than for your child, you're reinforcing that you're in this together and that they can trust you. Boundaries set with love are like building a safety net, helping your child feel cared for, understood, and connected.

One of the first steps is to bring in support from trained professionals (see our suggestions on the last page). Building a team around your child shows that their well-being is a priority and can be an enormous support to the whole family.

If you're concerned about immediate safety, take practical steps to remove anything that could be harmful. Let them know that these precautions are about protecting them, not restricting them. You might say something like, "I care about you deeply, and right now, I want to make sure you're as safe as possible." Staying close to them during this time can offer a sense of security and comfort. Work together to complete the Suicide Safety Plan in this pack.

Taking these steps together is not just about safety, it's about connection and commitment, showing them that they're not alone in this journey. These moments of action, grounded in love and respect, let them know that you're fully here for them, committed to navigating this path side by side.

Check in

Let your child know that this isn't a one-time conversation, let them know that you're here for them and will keep checking in to see how they're feeling. Committing to ongoing support is a way of saying, "I'm with you in this, and I'll keep showing up." You might even come up with a simple way to communicate when talking feels hard. Sometimes just saying, "not good" or a single word can be enough to let you know they're in a dark place and need a little extra support.

Assure them that they can come to you anytime, whether it's for a quiet conversation, a quick check-in, or just to sit together without saying a word. Remind them that you'll be there, no matter what, ready to listen and help however they need. It's this steady, gentle presence that lets them know they don't have to carry their burdens alone.

Commit to a plan together. Do this with them, not to them.

Resist the temptation to step into fixing mode. Your mindful presence is powerful.

How do I know how serious this is?

Suicidal thoughts are always serious. Even if your child does not intend to act on their troubling thoughts, they are an indicator of internal pain and turmoil.

It's helpful to know that there are some key differences between moderate-risk and high-risk suicidal thoughts, and understanding these can guide you in offering the right kind of support. **Moderate-risk** thoughts may involve feelings of hopelessness or "I don't want to be here," without a specific plan or intention to act on them.

High-risk thoughts, however, often involve more concrete elements, like a specific plan, access to means, or a clear intent to follow through.

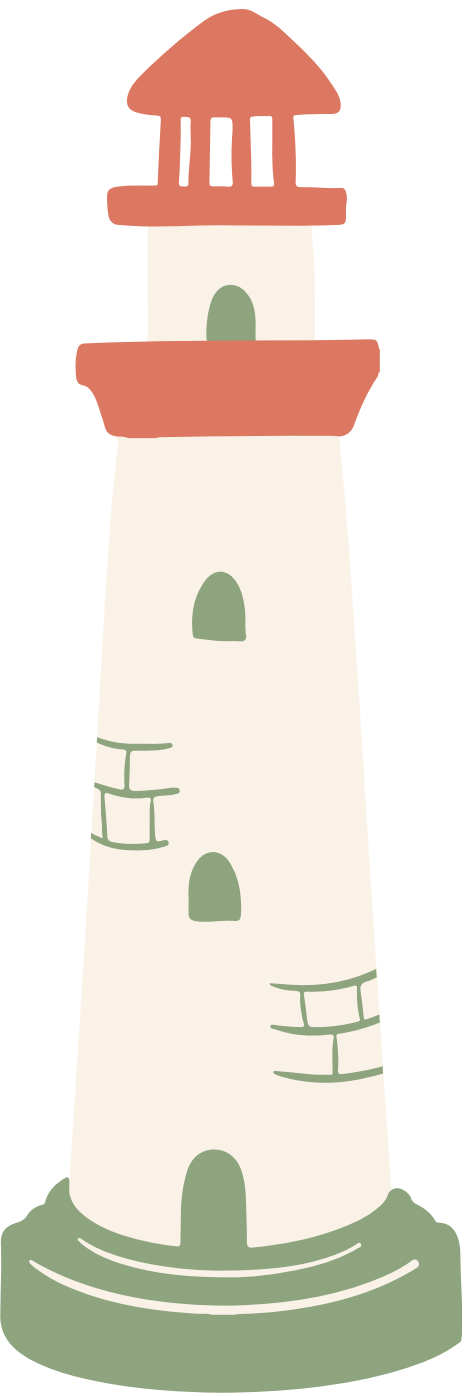
Dr. Andres Pumariega, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Florida the following 6 question model for community and carers to accurately screen for suicide risk. Have you wished you were dead or wished you could go to sleep and not wake up?

1. Have you actually had any thoughts about killing yourself?
 - a. If the loved one answers "yes" to question 2, ask questions 3, 4, 5 and 6.
 - b. If the person answers "no" to question 2, go directly to question 6.
2. Have you thought about how you might do this?
3. Have you had any intention of acting on these thoughts of killing yourself, as opposed to you have the thoughts but you definitely would not act on them?
4. Have you started to work out or worked out the details of how to kill yourself? Do you intend to carry out this plan?
5. Always ask question 6: In the past three months, have you done anything, started to do anything, or prepared to do anything to end your life?



Talking about this openly, without fear or hesitation, can give you important insight into your child's level of risk. It's okay to ask these questions directly. Approach it calmly, letting them know you're there to support and not judge. You're not putting ideas in their head by asking, what you're doing is creating a safe space where they can be honest about the intensity of their feelings. If you discover high-risk factors, reach out to a professional immediately. The courage you're showing by having these conversations truly matters and could make all the difference for your child.

Find a lighthouse.



Helping your child identify at least one **“lighthouse person”** is another beautiful step you can take together. A lighthouse person is someone who shines light into the dark, offering hope and stability when things feel overwhelming. They’re a safe, trusted adult outside of you, someone your child can turn to when talking to you feels too hard or when they want a different perspective.

It’s often best if this person isn’t another young person but rather a caring adult, such as a teacher, family member, coach, counsellor, or family friend.

Encourage your child to choose their lighthouse person, someone who feels trustworthy and comfortable for them. Respecting their choice is important, as this relationship is theirs to shape. Giving them this option for another source of support can be powerful, especially if they feel they want to protect you from their pain or if relationships feel fragile.

While you don’t need to pry into the details of their conversations, it can be reassuring to check in gently with the lighthouse person. Simply asking, “Are things going okay?” can help you feel connected and give you peace of mind without intruding on your child’s privacy.

Having one safe person to talk to can bring a sense of hope and stability for your child, like a lighthouse guiding them through dark waters.

Remember, lighthouses lean in with compassion and act as a safe, predictable base for a child or teen to help them to pause, regroup, recover, replenish and grow. - Maggie Dent

While young people are often closest to their friends and may feel an urge to support them during tough times, they’re not always equipped to handle the complexities of a mental health crisis. Adolescent brains are still developing, especially in areas of emotional regulation and decision-making. It can be incredibly challenging for them to process and respond to intense situations that can overwhelm adults.

Young people often face social pressure to keep secrets or “handle things on their own,” which can make it hard to get the right help when it’s needed most. That’s why having another trusted adult involved provides the stability and guidance that both the young person in crisis and their supportive friends really need.

Things to avoid.

Avoid Dismissing or Minimising Their Feelings

Hearing that your child is feeling this way can be shocking, and it's natural to feel the urge to reassure them by downplaying it. But saying things like, "Oh, you're not really feeling that way," or "You have a good life, this must be for attention," can make them feel misunderstood and might even cause them to shut down. Instead, show that you take them seriously and that their feelings, whatever they are, are valid and worth talking about.

Don't Make It About Yourself or Others

Focusing on how your child's thoughts and feelings impact you can make them feel worse. When someone is in intense pain, it's harder for them to think about others' feelings. They may already feel like a burden, and hearing that their pain hurts others could increase their sense of guilt. Instead, try to focus on them, letting them know that you want to understand and that you're here to support them.

Don't Ignore It

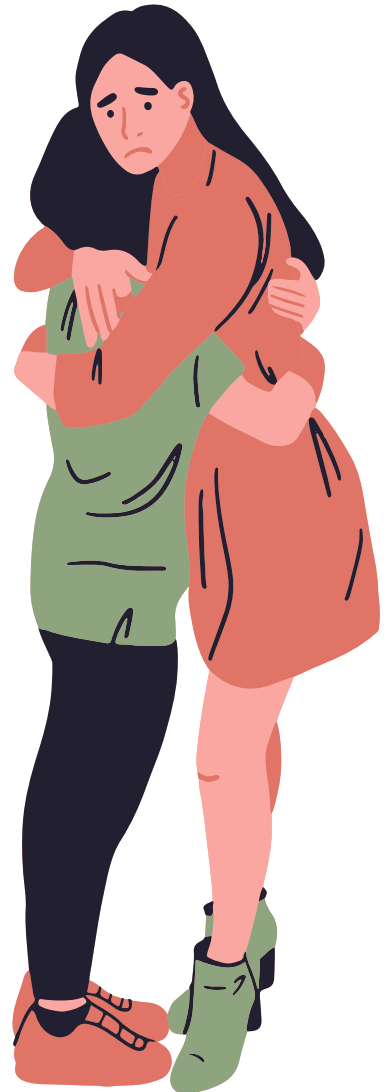
This is perhaps the most crucial point: don't let this go unaddressed. Ignoring it or hoping it will pass can leave your child feeling even more isolated. Reaching out for professional support right away is a key step, even if they say it's not needed. It shows that you're taking their feelings seriously and that you're willing to help, no matter what.

If You've Made a Mistake, It's Okay to Repair

If you've reacted out of shock or fear and said something you regret, it's never too late to come back and reconnect with your child. Apologise and let them know you're listening now.

All relationships have moments of "rupture," and it's the "repair" that matters most. Repairing shows your child that you're committed to being there for them and willing to learn together how best to support them.

Let your child know you're there to walk alongside them, and remember that your love, patience, and willingness to stay in the conversation are powerful ways to help them through this difficult time.



Look after yourself too.

Your wellbeing is key to supporting your child through what can be a long and difficult journey. It's important not to neglect yourself along the way. Here are some important self-care reminders for parents supporting a child through difficult times:

Acknowledge Your Own Feelings

It's normal to feel overwhelmed, scared, sad, or even frustrated. Give yourself permission to feel all of it and know that your emotions are valid.

Reach Out for Support

Connect with friends, family, or support groups who can offer empathy and encouragement. Talking to others who understand can be incredibly grounding.

Take Time to Recharge

Even short breaks are essential. Read a book, go for a walk, or do something that brings you peace. You can't pour from an empty cup.

Remind Yourself of Your Strength

You're walking through something incredibly challenging, and it takes resilience and love to show up the way you are. Take a moment to recognise the courage it takes to support your child.

Let Go of Guilt and Self-Criticism

If things feel imperfect or if you've made mistakes, know that you're learning and adapting. Parenting through this is hard, and showing up with love is what truly matters.

Your well-being is important, not only for you but for your child, too. Taking care of yourself allows you to be the calm and steady support they need right now. Even in dark moments, hold onto the belief that things can improve. Remind yourself that healing is a process, and each day brings new opportunities for connection and improvement.



Where to get help:

The Village Health

Counselling and family support face to face and telehealth.

thevillagehealth.com.au

03 5632 0017

Our dedicated team of mental health professionals is passionate about supporting individuals and families through every stage of their mental health and well-being journey. We are committed to working across the entire span of mental health and well-being. From prevention, early intervention, and minimisation to management, restoration, and healing, we provide comprehensive support tailored to each unique story.

Our mission is to support people of all ages with person centred, heart led, evidence-based care, ensuring that every individual receives the compassionate, scientifically grounded care they deserve. We understand that mental health is not one size fits all, and we strive to meet you exactly where you are, embracing your strengths and addressing your challenges with empathy and expertise.

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child.

We believe it also takes a village to heal an adult.

Calm

**Take a deep breath.
Speak openly and calmly.**

Connect

**Be curious and open.
Affirm your relationship.**

Commit

**Commit to taking action.
Check in.**

In case of
emergency contact

000

For immediate crisis
support contact
lifeline

13 11 14

Suicide Safety Plan

When life feels overwhelming, a suicide safety plan is there to help you stay safe. It's a reminder that you are not alone and that there are reasons to keep going, even in your darkest moments. Your plan connects you to the people and resources who care about you and can offer support.

My warning signs:

These can be thoughts, feelings or behaviors that indicate you are at risk.

My internal coping strategies:

These are things you can do to help lift your mood, or distract yourself.

People and places that are a good distraction:

1:

2:

3:

People I can reach out to when I need help:

1:

2:

3:

Things to make my environment safer:

Things to add to or remove from your space.

Professional services:

Local Service:

Mental Health Triage:

Crisis Hotline:

Emergency Services: 000



The Village Health
Counselling Wellbeing Education Belonging

Crisis Support Services

03 5632 0017
thevillagehealth.com.au

West Gippsland Community Mental Health Services Phone: 1300 363 322

24 hrs Triage Service

Mental health case management.

Lifeline Australia Phone: 13 11 14

Website: www.lifeline.org.au

Provides 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.

Beyond Blue Phone: 1300 22 4636

Website: www.beyondblue.org.au

Offers support for mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and suicide prevention.

Kids Helpline Phone: 1800 55 1800

Website: www.kidshelpline.com.au

A free, confidential counselling service for young people aged 5-25.

Suicide Call Back Service Phone: 1300 659 467

Website: www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

A 24/7 service offering support to people who are experiencing feelings of suicide or those affected by suicide.

MensLine Australia Phone: 1300 78 99 78

Website: www.mensline.org.au

A 24/7 national helpline providing support for men dealing with issues like relationships, mental health, and family violence

QLife Phone: 1800 184 527

Website: [www.qlife.org.au](http://www qlife.org.au)

Provides support for LGBTQI+ people, including mental health services and counselling.

13 YARN Phone: 13 92 76

Provides culturally appropriate crisis support, focusing on mental health, suicide prevention, and wellbeing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

1800RESPECT Phone: 1800 737 732

Website: www.1800respect.org.au

A 24/7 helpline for anyone affected by domestic or family violence, providing support, information, and referral to services.

Mental Health Emergency Response Line Phone: 1300 651 251

Available in Victoria, this line provides immediate support for people in mental health crises, offering assistance with referrals and interventions.