



Keeping the Door Open for Honest Conversation about Suicide

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

Young people today face real stress, and checking in with them is one of the most powerful ways to keep them safe. You don't need perfect words; just openness, gentle curiosity, and care. This handout offers simple language you can use when you're concerned about your child's emotional wellbeing.

Why These Conversations Matter

- Asking about suicide **does not** put the idea in a young person's head.
- Honest conversations help teens and young adults feel seen, supported, and less alone.
- You don't need to have all of the answers, or know how to fix things; you just need to notice changes and stay connected.

How to Start the Conversation

It's always helpful to begin with what you've noticed. Keep your tone calm, warm, and non-judgmental.

Examples:

- "I've noticed you've seemed really overwhelmed lately, and I care about you."
- "You haven't seemed like yourself, and I wanted to check in."
- "Some of the changes I'm seeing make me wonder how you're feeling."

These statements open the door without pressure.

Ask About Feelings First

Asking open ended questions can help start the conversation.

Try:

- "How have things been feeling for you lately?"
- "What's been the hardest part of [school, sports, friendships...etc.] right now?"
- "Are you feeling more stressed or down than usual?"

This builds trust and helps them feel safe sharing more.

Asking Directly About Suicide — Gently and Clearly

It's always best to ask, even if you aren't sure. If you're worried, it's important to ask **directly**. Use calm, compassionate language.

Examples:

Start with, *"I really care about you and your safety and wellbeing are the most important things to me."*





- “Sometimes when people feel really overwhelmed, they have thoughts about not wanting to be here or taking their life. Has anything like that been happening for you?”
- “When things get this heavy, some people think about ending their lives. I want to understand if that’s been true for you.”
- “I care about you so much. Have you had any thoughts about suicide or wanting to end the pain you are feeling?”

Direct questions show you’re not afraid of their feelings and that you’re someone they can trust.

Reassure Them They’re Not in Trouble

Young people often hide distress because they don’t want to worry their parents.

You can say:

- “You’re not in trouble and nothing you say will change how I feel about you. I just want to understand what you’re going through.”
- “You don’t have to protect me from your feelings. I can handle them.”
- “Whatever you’re feeling, we can figure it out together.”

This reduces shame and encourages honesty.

Keep the Door Open

Even if they don’t talk right away, your openness matters.

Try:

- “If now isn’t the right time to talk, that’s okay. I’m here whenever you’re ready.”
- “You can always come to me about anything.”
- “I’m going to keep checking in because you matter to me.”

Consistency builds safety.

A Simple Script to Remember

“I’ve noticed some changes, and I care about you. When people feel this overwhelmed, they sometimes have thoughts about not wanting to be here and ending their life. Has that been true for you? Whatever you’re feeling, we can figure it out together.”

- “What’s been the hardest part of [*be specific-middle school, sport team, college, being a kid...etc*] right now?”
- “Are you feeling more stressed or down than usual?”

Listen more than you speak. Your presence matters more than perfect words. Think carefully about your responses, validate feelings, refrain from judgment or need to fix or solve anything right now.

