



## Parent Action Plan

### *What to Do When You're Worried About Your Teen or Young Adult*

When you notice changes in your child's mood, behavior, or talk, it can be hard to know what to do. This action plan offers simple, practical steps to help you respond with confidence, care, and clarity.

**1. Start With Connection** Your first job is to open the door, not to fix everything at once.

#### How to begin:

- Approach them calmly and privately
- Use observations, not accusations
- Keep your tone warm and steady

#### Try saying:

"I've noticed some changes, and I care about you. I want to check in."

**2. Ask About Feelings** Give them space to talk about what's going on. Don't push, silence is okay.

#### Helpful prompts:

- "How have things been feeling for you lately?"
- "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.

**3. Ask Directly About Suicide, Gently and Confidently** Always ask, even if you are not sure. Trust your gut. It's important to ask clearly and calmly.

#### You can say:

"I really care about you and your wellbeing is my top priority. Sometimes when people feel overwhelmed, they have thoughts about not wanting to be here or wanting to end their life. Has that been happening for you?"

Asking directly is protective. It shows you're not afraid of their feelings.

**4. Stay Calm and Supportive** If they share suicidal thoughts, respond with steadiness and care. Again validate that this is normal, acknowledge the bravery it took to share with you.

#### Helpful responses:

- "Thank you for telling me. It was really brave of you to share this."
- "You're not in trouble and nothing you said changes how much I care about you. We'll figure this out together."
- "You're not alone in this."

Avoid reacting with shock, anger, or panic. Your calm helps them feel safe. Avoid trying to convince them why their life is worth living, or arguing with them.





**5. Ensure Immediate Safety** If they express suicidal thoughts, focus on reducing risk.

**Steps you can take:**

- Stay with them or that someone is with them. Do not leave them alone.
- Remove or secure medications, sharp objects, or other dangerous items
- Help them take a break from overwhelming situations
- Encourage them to pause any substance use

You don't need to solve everything right away, just focus on safety in the moment.

**6. Reach Out for Support** You don't have to handle this alone. Connecting with professionals is a strength. If your youth has a plan to act on their thoughts in the next 24-48 hours, it is important you seek immediate assistance from a professional.

Always take your child seriously even if it feels like they are attention seeking.

**Options include:**

- A mental health provider
- A primary care doctor
- School or campus counseling services
- Crisis Support Hotlines
- Emergency Department
- Local Mobile Mental Health Crisis Services

Let your child know you'll help them find the right support.

**7. Keep Checking In** Follow-up is essential. It shows your child that your care is ongoing.

**Try:**

- "How have things been feeling since we talked"
- "I'm here, and I'm going to keep checking in because you matter to me."
- "Let's keep talking about what helps and what doesn't."

Consistency builds trust and safety.

**8. Take Care of Yourself, Too** Supporting a struggling child is emotionally heavy. You deserve support as well.

**Consider:**

- Talking with a trusted friend or partner
- Seeking guidance from a therapist
- Using your own coping strategies (movement, rest, connection)

Your steadiness helps your child feel steadier.

**Notice → Connect → Ask → Stay Calm → Ensure Safety → Get Support → Follow Up**

You don't need to be perfect. You just need to be present.

