

# Self-Harm and Suicide Risk

It is important that you are aware that sometimes, self-harm is associated with suicidal behaviour or ideation. It is also important to know that whilst self-harm is common in young people, suicide is rare.

We do know from research that more than half of people who die by suicide have had a history of self-harm (NHS 2018)

50% ↑

If you are concerned that your child may be experiencing thoughts of suicide, the only way to be sure is to ask them directly.

We know that this can be difficult and some parents would worry about talking to their child about suicide. Research tells us that talking about suicide does not put the idea into their head.

In fact, talking with your child about suicide creates a safe space for them to be open and honest about how they feel and they will see you as a safe person to turn to.



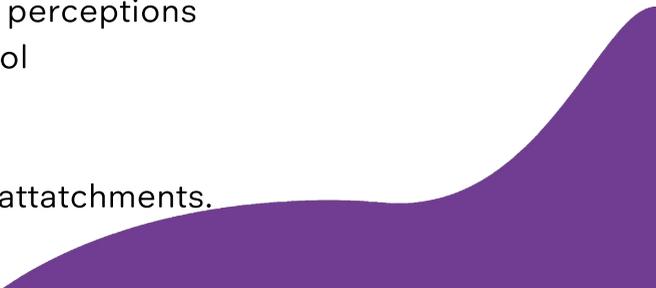
# Why might my child self-harm?

Every child is different. They have different experiences and different ways of dealing with challenges. Some young people will self-harm to help them to cope with a particular challenge in their life. They could be struggling with anger or anxiety and use self-harm as a way to release these feelings or to communicate their emotional pain.

It is also common for those who self-harm to feel powerless or lack self-esteem and therefore use self-harm as a way to regain some control. We also hear from young people who have feelings of self-loathing and that self-harm is used to punish themselves.

## Risk Factors

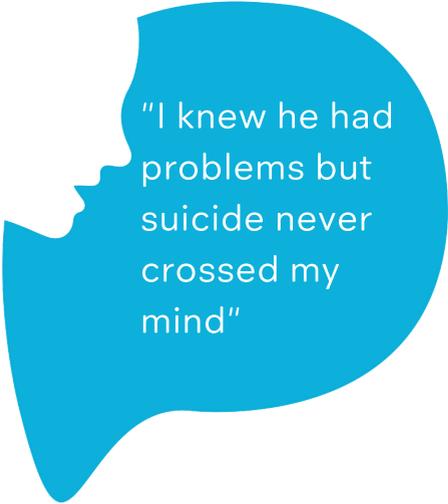
Young people are more likely to be at risk of self-harming if certain risk factors are present in their lives. This is not an exhaustive list and not every child who is experiencing a challenge outlined below will self-harm. Equally, not every child who is self-harming will be experiencing these issues.

- Loss of a parent
  - Childhood illness or surgery
  - Childhood sexual or physical abuse
  - Family substance abuse
  - Negative body image perceptions
  - Lack of impulse control
  - Childhood trauma
  - Neglect
  - Lack of strong family attachments.
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# Talking about suicide

Talking to your child about suicidal thoughts can be difficult and feel very daunting. Remember - starting the conversation is the most important thing.

Parents who have lost a child to suicide often tell us that they never thought suicide was something that would ever happen to them.



"I knew he had problems but suicide never crossed my mind"



"Suicide doesn't happen to people like us"

By talking openly and safely, we can break the silence that exists around suicide.

# Asking the question

These simple steps may help you to ask your child if they are thinking about suicide.

**Ask directly.** Use the word suicide. Practice asking first if this helps. It may give you more confidence.

**Stay calm.** This is important as your child may be looking at how you react to decide how much they should tell you.

**Be clear and direct.** Look them in the eye and ask 'are you thinking about suicide?'



If you are unsure of how to start the conversation, contact our helpline HOPELINEUK. Our specially trained advisers can talk you through what to say and how to support your child during this conversation.

Talking with a young person about suicide can be very difficult. If you need support following your conversation our advisers are on hand to de-brief with you and help you to process what has been said and where to go next.

**0800 068 4141**

# What if they say yes?

If your child says that they have had, or are currently experiencing, thoughts of suicide the most important thing to do is **STAY CALM**. Acknowledge how difficult it must be for them to open up and tell them you are there to listen.

As a parent it can be really hard to understand what is happening to your child. **Trying to understand why they are feeling this way can be frustrating**. Some parents have said that they felt that their child was trying to punish them or deliberately hurt them.

**Revealing thoughts of suicide is a difficult but incredibly brave thing for a young person to do. The reasons why people experience thoughts of suicide are complex and differ from person to person and you may never fully understand them and that is OK.**

**Stay calm - Ask directly - Be clear and direct**

**HOPELINEUK**

Call: 0800 068 4141

Text: 07860 039 967

Email: [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)

9am - 10pm weekdays

2pm - 10pm weekends and bank holidays

# How can I help?

As a parent your first reaction will probably be to try and fix things for your child and to make things better for them.

Hold back. Use your strength to **stay calm and let them talk**. They will need time and space to feel safe in talking through how they are feeling. **Allow for silences and listen non judgmentally to what they have to say**.

Experiencing thoughts of suicide can be extremely isolating and very daunting. You may be unsure of the best way to respond and be worried about saying the wrong thing.

**Just being there in the moment with your child will show that you care and that you are a safe person for them to talk to. Connect with them and let them know how brave they are and that you are there to help them.**

There may be times when your child is struggling and they feel like a stranger to you. You may not recognise some of their behaviours. Remember that often when a child experiences distress they lash out at the ones they love the most.

This is a result of what they are going through and they still need your support.



# How can I help?

There are lots of things you can do to help your child cope right now.

Help them to just focus on getting through this moment rather than thinking too far ahead into the future

Help them to stay away from drugs or alcohol

If they contact you and they are away from home encourage them to get to a safe place

Encourage them to spend time with other people

Let them know the importance of doing things they enjoy

Work with them on a plan to keep them safe

