

Suicide and self-harm

As a parent, it's important to have open and honest conversations with your children about sensitive topics, such as suicide and self-harm. Suicide is the act of intentionally taking one's own life, while self-harm involves intentionally causing harm to oneself, such as cutting or burning. Both of these behaviours can be incredibly harmful and it's important that we talk about them to help our children understand and stay safe. Having these conversations can also help to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and encourage your child to seek help if they need it.

Empower confidence.
Start the conversation using these strategies:

- 1. Emphasise seeking help**
Let your child know that it's okay to reach out for help and support when they're feeling overwhelmed, sad or hopeless. Encourage them to talk to a trusted adult or counsellor, call a crisis hotline or seek help from a medical professional.
- 2. Do not judge**
Make sure your child understands that you are there for them no matter what. Ask them to explain how they feel when engaging in self-harming behaviours. This can enable you to attain a better understanding of your child's emotional state.
- 3. Discuss warning signs**
Talk to your child about the warning signs of suicide, such as talking about wanting to die, feeling hopeless or trapped, withdrawing from loved ones and exhibiting drastic mood swings. Let them know that they should seek help if they or someone they know is exhibiting them.
- 4. Promote a positive self-image**
Encourage your child to build a positive self-image by focusing on their strengths, interests and accomplishments. Let them know that they are valuable and worthy of love and respect.
- 5. Educate on the effects of self-harm**
Explain to your child that self-harm can lead to serious physical and emotional harm. Discuss the dangers and explain that there are safer ways to manage stress and negative emotions.
- 6. The importance of mental health**
Encourage your child to prioritise their emotional wellbeing. Let them know that seeking help for mental health issues is just as important as seeking help for physical health problems.
- 7. Address any misunderstandings**
If your child has misconceptions about suicide or self-harm, take the time to correct them and provide accurate information.
- 8. Discuss the impact of bullying**
Emphasise the importance of treating others with kindness and respect. Let them know that bullying is never okay and encourage them to speak up if they or someone they know is being bullied.
- 9. Listen and validate**
When talking to your child about suicide and self-harm, make sure to listen to their thoughts and feelings. Validate their experiences and let them know that their emotions are normal and important.
- 10. Encourage open communication**
Keep the lines of communication open and encourage your child to talk to you or another trusted adult if they're feeling overwhelmed or need support. Let them know that you're there for them and that they can talk to you at any time without judgement.