

# Talking to young people about suicide

## A guide for parents and carers



Talking to young people about suicide can feel daunting. Many people fear it will cause increased distress or even lead to the development of suicidal thoughts

However, talking about suicide in a calm and straightforward way, as well as providing information and support, is actually very important in helping young people to manage their feelings, find coping strategies and make sense of what has happened.

### 1. Give accurate information about suicide

Suicide is caused by a range of factors. For some people who take their own life, they may have been living with mental distress or physical and/or mental illness. This illness can make people feel hopeless and impact on their ability to think clearly and rationally. Providing accurate information about mental distress and illness, can encourage people to seek help for themselves or others.

### 2. Avoid blame or scapegoating

Young people often want answers about why a suicide has occurred, and this can lead to them blaming the death on a particular event or person. Explain that suicide is not simple and is often the result of a range of factors.

### 3. Don't focus on the method of suicide

Talking graphically or in detail with young people about how the person died can be overwhelming and distressing. Keep the focus on how to manage the emotions brought up by the person's death.

### 4. Address feelings such as anger and responsibility

Provide reassurance that a range of feelings following a suicide are normal. Young people may feel angry or think that they could have prevented the death in some way. Such feelings can lead to increased confusion and distress. Normalising these feelings, giving reassurance and allowing young people to talk can help.

### 5. Feelings of overwhelm or distress

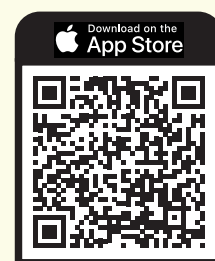
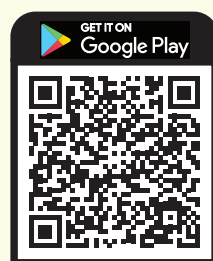
Asking questions directly can be a huge relief for a young person if they find themselves or a friend feeling overwhelmed, unable to cope or struggling with thoughts of suicide. Ask them directly 'Are you thinking about suicide?' By using the word suicide, you are telling the young person that it's OK to talk openly about their thoughts of suicide with you or someone else. They are not alone and there are people there to help.

## Sources of support

Not one size fits all when it comes to support. Here you will find a range of crisis and general information for young people and others of all ages.



[highlandmentalwellbeing.scot.nhs.uk](http://highlandmentalwellbeing.scot.nhs.uk)



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