

IS A YOUNG PERSON THINKING OF SUICIDE? RISKS, SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

RISK FACTORS

Suicidal thoughts and feelings can affect anyone at any time. When it comes to young people, there are some experiences or circumstances that make them more vulnerable.

We've shared some below, but it's important to remember that this is not a definitive list. If you notice an uncharacteristic change, or have a gut feeling something's up, always take action by asking and exploring further with a young person.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR:

- Bullying - In real life or online
- Discrimination -like facing racist, sexist or homophobic abuse
- Bereavement by suicide – this could be a friend, peer, or family member
- A life-changing event like a breakup, family breakdown, or academic disappointment. Remember, what feels life-changing to a young person may feel small to you.
- Self-harm
- Loss of a loved one
- Experiencing violence or abuse
- Discrimination, rejection or hostility due to sexual or gender identity
- Childhood illness or surgery
- Sexual or physical abuse
- Family substance abuse
- Body image pressures and concerns
- Lack of impulse control
- Childhood trauma
- Neglect
- Lack of strong family attachment



INVITATIONS

When someone is thinking about suicide they may indirectly talk about it. Often they're looking for support, but don't know how to get it. This is especially the case for young people who may not fully understand or be able to articulate the intense feelings they are having.

That's why it's important to look out for 'invitations'. These are exactly as they sound - invitations from young people to talk about what they're going through.

At first, spotting them might seem difficult, but by turning on your active listening skills and being aware of what to look out for you'll be able to identify when a young person is looking for more support.

Here's some phrases and behaviour to look out for

→ Changes in behaviour

This could be a loss of interest in things they used to enjoy, isolating themselves more than usual, withdrawing from people and activities they would usually engage with, or giving away their possessions.

→ Physical changes

Losing interest in their appearance, losing weight, not sleeping, or sleeping more than usual.

→ Expressing negative thoughts and feelings

Listen out for talk about feeling hopeless, a waste of space, of not seeing any point in things, or comments blaming themselves for things that have gone wrong.

→ Talking about 'not being around'

Listen out for phrases like "I can't take it anymore", "Everyone would be better off without me". Hints they're thinking about suicide by saying things like "I'd like to go to sleep and never wake up" or "I wish I wasn't here" - comments like these could be a way of telling you they are thinking about suicide.

→ Self-harming

Self harm can take lots of forms. Find out more about the signs of self harm [here](#).

→ Talking about death or suicide (even in a joking way).

Listen out for jokes or comments that suggest their own suicide or death - no matter if they seem jovial. Any talk of suicide and death could be a sign a young person is beginning to experience suicidal thoughts.

→ Social media

Watch out for any behaviour that seems out of the ordinary - this could be posting more or less, posting very intense or emotional images or thoughts, posting about death, dying, suicide or self-harm.

→ Be aware of unfamiliar language

The language young people use is ever changing. Watch out for any language you don't understand. Recently 'kms' (kill myself) and 'unalive myself' have become alternative terms for suicide on social media.

→ Increased drug or alcohol use or other risky behaviours

Don't dismiss this as regular young person behaviour - if you notice something different, always start a conversation.

→ Sudden positivity

It's counterintuitive, but often when someone decides on suicide they experience a sense of elation and positivity. This can be down to them finding what they consider a solution to their pain or issues. Knowing they won't have to struggle, or be a burden for friends and family can lead them to seem uncharacteristically happy. If you notice this, make sure you talk to them about it.



If you notice these changes, don't dismiss them as 'part of growing up'. If you're concerned for any reason, **always ask**. [The C.A.R.E. Kit](#) has loads of tools and resources to help you start a conversation and keep a young person safe.