

Children and teens are uniquely challenged by stay-at-home orders. Social relationships are very important for young people and being isolated can be especially painful for them. The pandemic has also disrupted many of their milestones and activities, such as participating in sports and school clubs, graduation, prom, or leaving for college.ⁱ Many youth are also coping with grief and worries for their family members' health.

It's normal for youth to experience some sadness, stress, or loneliness during the pandemic, but some young people will experience worsened mental health and increased risk of suicide. **Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people aged 10-24.** If you're worried about your child, take these concerns seriously.

This tip sheet is written for **Orange County (OC) parents, family members, and other caregivers.** It offers tips for what to do if you're concerned, plus links to local Orange County resources and safety planning tools for youth.

Note: this tip sheet is not a replacement for mental health services. If your child is in immediate crisis, please call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The following signs may indicate that youth are in mental health distress and/or considering suicide.^{ii,iii}

- Talking, writing, or posting on social media about suicide, wanting to die, or being better off dead
- Talking about feeling hopeless, feeling worthless, or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling helpless, being in unbearable pain, or being a burden to others
- Drawing or sharing images related to death or suicide
- Giving away important possessions
- Stopping talk of future plans or goals
- Looking for ways to kill themselves (e.g., online searches)
- Withdrawing or isolating from others
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Becoming easily angered, showing rage, having extreme mood swings
- Using alcohol or drugs
- Sleeping too much or not enough
- Serious neglect of hygiene and changes to personal care

WHAT TO DO

It's upsetting to think that your child might be in emotional distress or considering suicide, but you CAN help.

If you think your child might be considering suicide:

- **Talk with them.** Try to talk at a time and place when you can both focus on the conversation. The conversation can start as simply as, "Are you okay?" Listen without judgment and resist the urge to "fix" their problems.^{iv} Tell them specifically what has you concerned. For example, "I've noticed that you've been sleeping a lot more lately, and you haven't wanted to talk to your friends. How are you feeling?"^v
- **Don't be afraid to ask about suicide directly and use the word "suicide."** Talking to your child about suicide won't give them the idea to do it. Talking about suicide CAN help them feel like someone cares enough to have noticed that they're in pain.^{vi} You can ask your child, "Are you thinking about suicide?" or "Are you thinking about killing yourself/ending your life?"
- **You know your child—use words that are appropriate for their age and understanding.** For example, with younger children, it may help to take things slow. You might say that when people are in a lot of emotional pain, they sometimes think about killing themselves, before asking if your child ever has thoughts like that.^{vii}
- **If your child has been thinking about suicide, ask if they have a plan** (which may include a timeline and a means of suicide).
 - If they have a plan, or if they don't have a plan but they're in acute crisis, get immediate help. Contact the Orange County Children and Youth Behavioral Health Crisis Assessment Team (866-830-6011), take them to the emergency room, or call 911. Do not leave your child alone.
 - If your child has had thoughts of suicide, but doesn't have a plan and is not in immediate crisis, it's important to get them mental health treatment. Talk to your mental health provider, your pediatrician, or the trained mental health navigators at OC Links Information and Referral Line: 855-OC-Links (855-625-4657). OC Links will connect you live with an individual who will guide you through the referral process and ensure that the options are appropriate for you and your child, including language, insurance/non-insurance, and developmental needs.
- **Remove guns and ammunition from the home.** Alternatively, store guns in a locked safe or lockbox, unloaded and separate from ammunition (which should also be locked away). Many families underestimate the risk of guns for youth who are depressed.^{viii} Ninety percent of suicide attempts by gun are fatal, compared to 4% of suicide attempts with other means.^{ix}
- **Dispose of old medications at a drug take back site or pharmacy.** Secure your current medications in a locked cabinet.
- **Be aware of the location of other potential lethal means in your home, including ropes and kitchen knives.**^x
- **If you have reason to believe that your child is at risk for suicide, talk to other adults in your household or to those who might take care of them.** Help them understand what they need to do to be your child's ally: for example, knowing when to call you, or knowing not to leave your child unattended with lethal means.^{xi}
- After your child's immediate crisis passes, they will need mental health treatment and support. Suicide is not a one-time problem: youth who have attempted suicide in the past are at higher risk to attempt again. If they created a safety or treatment plan to prevent future suicide attempts, help them follow it.^{xii}

If you're worried about caring for your child's mental health, but they're not currently thinking about suicide:

- Tell your child's doctor you have concerns about your child's social and emotional health. Your pediatrician can screen for depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges that contribute to suicide risk.^{xiii} For teens, give them privacy to talk to their doctor about what's going on.

- Help them get help. You can contact OC Links Information and Referral Line (855-625-4657), Monday through Friday, to talk to a trained system navigator who can help you access mental health services. Another option is to call your health insurance provider or visit their website to find a mental health provider who has experience working with children and youth.
- If your child has a mental health treatment plan, help them stay on track with the plan. Support them in other healthy activities that may build their resilience as well.^{xiv}

Proactive strategies to support your child’s wellness during the epidemic:

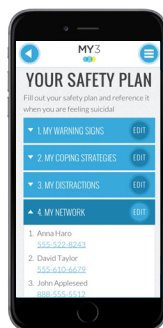
- Encourage your children to continue socializing with their friends and family in healthy ways (over the phone, through video chat, etc.).^{xv}
- Children have a harder time than adults with understanding that this won’t last forever. Talk to your child about how there are better days ahead, and that many adults are working hard to end the pandemic. Focus on the positive where you can.
- If you work outside the home, talk to your children about the safety precautions that you and your workplace take to protect you from getting sick.
- Talk to them about suicide, even if you don’t think your child is considering suicide. It can help them see that you’re comfortable talking about this, so that they’re comfortable coming to you if they’re at risk. For example, you could ask what they think about suicide in the news,^{xvii} or if they know what they would do if they were concerned that a friend was thinking about suicide.
- You are also going through this pandemic, and you are experiencing your own worries, fears, and losses. It’s normal to not feel your best all the time, but pay attention to what messages your emotional reactions are sending to your children. Talk to your children about how you regulate fears and anxieties: (“I’m going to take a break from the news for today”).^{xviii} Model self-compassion to help them learn that it’s okay to make mistakes.^{xix}

HOW TO CREATE A SAFETY PLAN

When someone considers or attempts suicide, their mental health provider may work with them to create a “safety plan” that the person can use when they have thoughts of suicide in the future. The following are apps and questions you can use with your child to create a safety plan for mental health crisis, urges to self-harm, or suicidal thoughts. They should create the plan when they are feeling calm, not during a crisis.

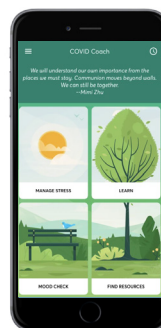
Note: A safety plan is one coping tool youth and families can use. It is not a replacement for mental health treatment or for a safety plan created with a mental health practitioner.

APPS



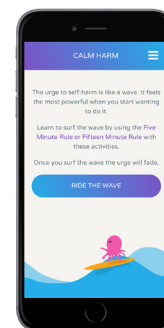
MY3

Safety planning tool that prompts users to store three contacts they can reach out to when they are having suicidal thoughts. The app also includes resources for youth and suicide prevention lifelines.



COVID COACH APP

This app was created specifically to support mental health and coping during the pandemic.



CALM HARM

Brief activities and exercises to help teens get through urges to self-harm.

YOUTH SAFETY PLAN QUESTIONS

Adapted in part from [Students Against Depression Module 1: Make a Safety Plan](#); [CHEO Suicide Safety Plan for Youth](#); and [Be You Suicide Prevention Resources: Safety Planning](#).

Fill out the safety plan with answers that are honest and helpful for YOU. Answer the questions in your voice (use “I” sentences).

What sets me off? What are some situations, events, or triggers that are really stressful for me or that might make me want to hurt or kill myself?

(Examples: reading or watching the news too much, missing out on something I used to do before COVID-19, thinking about someone I lost, fighting with friends or family, having a bad day in school.)

What are my warning signs (emotions, thoughts, behaviors, feelings in my body) that I need to use my safety plan? How do I know I might start wanting to hurt myself or kill myself? How do I know when my well-being is just not good right now?

(Examples: I feel hopeless, I think about hurting myself, I think I can't handle this anymore, my heart races, I have trouble breathing, I don't want to talk to my friends, I can't stop thinking about COVID-19, I'm tired all the time.)

What will I do for myself to cope when I feel this way? How can I distract myself or make myself feel better?

(Examples: play with my dog, take a break from social media, watch my favorite movie, do yoga, watch ASMR videos, take a walk, do breathing exercises.)

Who are the people or animals that I want to stay alive for? (Put their phone numbers and/or photos somewhere that is easy to see during mental health crisis.)

What are other things I have to live for? (Examples: future goals, events I'm looking forward to, hope that things get better, favorite activities, art or creative hobbies.)



Who can I talk to when I'm feeling overwhelmed?

Someone who will help take my mind off things—name and phone: _____

Someone who will listen to me—name and phone: _____

Someone who always has my back—name and phone: _____

When I need help immediately, who will I talk to so that I can get help before I try to hurt or kill myself?

Name and phone: _____

Name and phone: _____

Name and phone: _____

WHERE TO FIND HELP

There are a number of local and national resources that you can use to find help for your child. The following section highlights some of these invaluable services, and it also provides strategies and suggestions for discussing them with your child.

Local Resources and Strategies for Sharing Them

TEEN LINE

(Orange County/LA Region)

Call 310-855-HOPE (310-855-4673) to talk to a teen peer counselor

6 p.m. - 10 p.m. Pacific Time every night, (service provided for individuals 19 and under)

Or text "TEEN" to 839-863

6 p.m. - 9 p.m. Pacific Time every night

The TEEN LINE is answered by Orange and Los Angeles County teenagers who can relate to what your child is going through. The service is completely anonymous, and in addition to phone calls, TEEN LINE listeners also respond to text messages and emails nightly, which might feel more comfortable for some children. Regardless of how your child chooses to use TEEN LINE, it's important to help them feel comfortable about using the service. If they are not in immediate danger and they can be safely left alone, make sure that they have privacy—and just as importantly, that they know they have privacy! —when they're using TEEN LINE. Have a conversation with your child in which you tell them about TEEN LINE and its teenage listeners, and encourage them to give it a try. Emphasize that the service is staffed by other teenagers who are familiar with the feelings and stressors that they are experiencing, and that it might be helpful tool, especially during this period of increased isolation. Consider volunteering to take a walk or perform some other activity that will give them a sense of privacy while they use TEEN LINE.

When talking about Teen Line with your child for the first time, emphasize that:

- TEEN LINE is staffed by teenagers from the area who can relate
- TEEN LINE listeners are just that: listeners. They won't tell you what to do, but they will provide emotional support and information about resources
- TEEN LINE listeners won't judge you or tell you what you're feeling is stupid. Many of them have felt things like what you're feeling, and they are all there to support you
- TEEN LINE is an anonymous service
- TEEN LINE listeners provide emotional support on a variety of topics, including but not limited to suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Listeners provide support on topics that impact you and your mental health, such as romantic relationships, family challenges, anxiety, etc.
- It takes maturity and bravery to seek help



Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention Crisis Line

(Orange County): call 800-273-8255

English and Spanish, 24/7

Or call 877-727-4747

Korean, 4:30 p.m. - 12:30 a.m.

Text support for hearing-impaired individuals: text the word "HEARME" to 839863. This service is available 24/7.

The Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention Crisis Line is a local member of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. All calls made to the TEEN LINE during hours that it is closed are automatically redirected to this service. Although many children prefer TEEN LINE because of its age-specific services, some might prefer speaking to an adult. Consider having a conversation with your child first about TEEN LINE, and if they suggest that they'd be more comfortable talking to an adult—or concern that they might speak to someone that they know—suggest the Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention Crisis Line as an alternative.

If your child does choose to use the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Crisis Line, many of the strategies discussed above about the TEEN LINE are applicable. You can emphasize that although the chat counselor will be an adult, they are trained to support callers of all ages. And just like the TEEN LINE listeners, they are there to listen and provide support, not to judge.

This line is also a valuable resource for you to call if you think your child is in or entering a mental health emergency, but you do not think they are in immediate physical danger and in need of 911 assistance.

The OC WarmLine

Call or text 714-991-6412

Orange County Children and Youth Behavioral Health Crisis Assessment Team

Call 866-830-6011

English and Spanish (translation services available), 24/7

The Crisis Assessment Team (CAT) assists all minors under the age of 18 who are experiencing a psychiatric emergency. This is a valuable resource for parents to call if they are concerned that their child is in crisis. The assessment team can connect them to in-home crisis stabilization, psychiatric in-patient care, or another crisis-support service in the area. The team is staffed by behavioral health clinicians who are further supported by local law enforcement.

Not an emergency, but unsure how to get help for your child? Call OC Links Information and Referral Line: 855-OC-Links (855-625-4657). Trained navigators will help connect you to Orange County Health Care Agency's behavioral health services. Available 8 a.m. - 6 p.m., Monday to Friday. Navigators speak English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Farsi; other languages available by translation.

24/7 National and State Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat>

Español: Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio, 1-888-628-9454

Crisis Text Line

Text "HOME" to 741-741

Trevor Lifeline (LGBTQ youth)

Call 1-866-488-7386 or text "START" to 678-678

California Youth Crisis Line

1-800-843-5200



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