



Teen Suicide Prevent Week

14 - 21 February 2021

Last week we commemorated Teen Suicide Prevention Week in South Africa. This week, we are reminded that the crisis of hopelessness, for many young people, does not only exist for 7 days of the year, but that young people's mental wellbeing are vulnerable to social, environmental and biological factors, every day of the year. Here are some supportive tools and guidelines to help parents and caregivers. Please visit www.sadag.org for more information. Call our Suicide Hotline on 0800 567 567 or SMS 31393 for counselling assistance.



Suicide Prevention and Awareness.

[click here to watch video](#)

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"Things I wish people knew about teen suicide... Suicide is the third leading cause of death for teenagers. Most teenagers attempt suicide a few times before actually ending their lives. Most teenagers overdose. Therefore it's important for parents to monitor medicines at home. Teenagers are often faced with an identity crisis at a young age, hence society should not impose norms on teenagers. They should love and respect each teenager and appreciate them for their uniqueness."

~SADAG KZN VOLUNTEER, DURBAN~

SADAG Suicide Helpline 0800 567 567 | SMS 31393
#MentalHealthMatters #SADAGKZN

The importance of open and honest communication between parents and teens: A good place to start as a parent is to be aware of the risk factors for suicide. Among others, here are things that could increase risk for thoughts of suicide.

- **Feeling like a burden.** If your child believes they are a burden to people in their life, this increases risk for suicide. Keep in mind that it doesn't matter whether or not this is actually true. It's about what your child may mistakenly believe.
- **Being disconnected or isolated from others.** No matter how much support you try and give, your child may feel lonely or think no one cares about them. This may be especially true if your child feels they do not have any friends.
- **Repeated engagement in self-harm behaviours or suicide.** The more your child harms themselves or makes attempts at dying, the "better" they get at it. They are also better able to tolerate pain. Studies show they experience less pain with more self-harm, and become less scared of dying.
- **If your child believes that things will stay this way and not get better, there is greater risk.** Again, this is not about what is actually happening, but what your child believes to be true.

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"As someone who has endured mental health struggles myself, I found that thinking about myself in the third person, helped. When you think of what you are going through, as if you were a friend and they were asking for advice, what would you say? Take yourself out of the situation, give yourself advice, and stick with it, because when you are in a bad place it is difficult to understand and do what is good for you."

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Unintentional errors by parents

More often than not, parents/caregivers are doing a great job of reaching out for support and guidance when it comes to a child's mental health. There are times, however, when adults inadvertently engage in verbal and non-verbal behaviours that can increase or exacerbate risk factors for suicide in children and young people. While these behaviours can be perceived as harmless by adults, to a young person, who is already struggling with suicidal thoughts, they can make the difference between ideation and intent. Examples of these behaviours can include:

- **Avoiding conversations about the current state of events**, including COVID-19, may accidentally increase distress in youth. This may include avoiding discussing your own thoughts and feelings regarding the impact of COVID-19. Attempting to protect children from the current state of life creates the impression that COVID-19 is too scary to talk about, potentially increasing anxiety or hopelessness about the situation.
- However, **oversharing information** — such as financial burdens, parental stress, workload and constant news updates — can also increase suicidal ideation in adolescents by creating what feels like a flood of negative messages that they feel they can't escape from.
- Adults sometimes try to help youth feel better by **telling them they are overreacting**, that things aren't that bad, or by saying things could be worse. This accidentally increases the intensity of those emotions, leading to escalations of experiences like depression, anxiety and self-harming behaviours.
- Expecting children and teens to continue functioning at the same pre-COVID-19 levels can place **unrealistic pressure on them**. Many adults

make adjustments to their own expectations for “normal” functioning. Youth also need to know that they are allowed to make adjustments and that not everything needs to be perfect.

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"I would like at-risk teenagers to know that they are unique and valued. There is help out there and they should never struggle alone but seek professional help. Life is precious and worth living. Difficulty only lasts for a while, your breakthrough will come. Do not give up on yourself. You are going to make it through and come out a stronger person."

~SADAG KZN VOLUNTEER, DURBAN~

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What can you do as parents especially at this time of COVID-19

- **Stay connected.** With social distancing guidelines in place, it may be difficult to find safe and appropriate ways to keep your child socially engaged that meet your needs. Set up virtual hang-outs with friends, or meet at an outdoor space like a park where social distancing can be maintained if everyone agrees to wear a face covering.
- **Stick to a routine.** Maintaining predictability in the day can help your child build structure and have a sense of security. Daily routines also help increase engagement in activities, which can increase feelings of accomplishment and self-confidence, directly reducing things like hopelessness and feeling like a burden.
- **Have a conversation.** Setting aside time to talk to your child about how they are feeling is important. Give them a safe space to share their thoughts and feelings. Show them you are there to help by validating them and being supportive. Let them know it's OK to feel the way they feel and that you will get through it together.
- **Find time for self-care.** Keep your child engaged in things they like that are fun and/or relaxing. It works best if you do this with them! Do fun things or a favourite activity, do things you are good at, learn a new skill,

- **Take care of basic physical needs.** A healthy body helps us be as prepared for the daily stresses as possible. Get enough sleep, move your body and eat balanced foods.
- **Limit screen time.** Even though our lives revolve almost exclusively around screens, make time to disconnect and seek social connection, fun, relaxation and joy using “old school” ways.
- **Self soothe.** We could all use some extra comforting these days. Teach your children to use their physical senses to comfort themselves by listening to relaxing music, finding a soft comfort object such as a blanket or T-shirt, or using a favourite scented candle or lotion.
- **Seek mental health support when needed.** If your child seems to be having a pretty hard time and does not already have mental health services like therapy or counselling in place, this would be a great time to start. Medication may also be an option. Talk to your doctor, insurance, or school about where to get connected.
- **Get immediate help if needed.** If your child continues to express thoughts about harming themselves or dying, go to the nearest emergency room.
- **Help your child identify reasons to live.** What is important to your child? What are their values and goals? Helping them get connected to these things can be a very powerful way to recognise that they have things in their lives that are important and matter – and that this situation is not going to last forever.

Excerpts from article:

“THE LINK BETWEEN COVID-19 AND SUICIDE: WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW”

CHOC BLOG INTERNET, Dr. Meredith Dennis, post-doctoral fellow at CHOC; and Alva Alvarez and Christopher Reeves, mental health social workers,

<https://blog.chocchildrens.org/the-link-between-covid-19-and-suicide-what-parents-should-know/>



Supported by Survivors of Loved Ones of Suicide (SOLOS), KwaZulu-Natal.