

Suicide Prevention Month:

How do I start a conversation?

Stephanie Kim
Mental Health Counselor
Redeemer Counseling

SUICIDE STATISTICS CDC



**1 PERSON DIES
BY SUICIDE EVERY
11 MINUTES**



**2ND LEADING CAUSE
OF DEATH FOR AGES
10 - 14
20 - 34**



**DIED BY SUICIDE
IN 2022:
49,500**

From 2010 to 2021, the suicide rate for adolescents, ages 10-14, increased by 167%. Because of how widespread suicide and thoughts of suicide are, we want to be ready to help. This Toolkit has tips to help you assess someone's suicidality and how to respond. We will start with what to look for, how to start the conversation, provide a step-by-step question and response guide for discussing suicidality with someone you are concerned about, and offer guidance around what not to do when someone has thoughts of suicide.

1

What are some warning signs someone may be thinking about suicide?

Rarely does a person act out on suicidal thoughts without sending signals that they are not doing OK. We can watch for changes in mood, words, or behavior. They may seem hopeless, withdraw, or have a sudden sense of calm. They may say, "I would be better off dead;" "no one will miss me;" or "I'm a burden." They may start to give away treasured possessions or meet with people for closure.

2

How do I start a conversation if I am concerned?

It is a myth that talking about suicide may give someone the idea and increase their risk. Instead, people who are feeling suicidal often report feeling a sense of relief when someone brings it up and those who were not feeling suicidal are not offended. Talking openly and honestly can save a life because it opens the door for an intervention and shows the person you see and care for them.

If you are concerned that someone may be suicidal, be prepared to **ask**.

1. Start to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Try having practice conversations about suicide with a friend or colleagues. Before talking with the person you are concerned about, take a few minutes to calm yourself and pray to get centered.
2. Create a safe space. Your presence and posture can signal safety, as can the setting where you meet the person. Is it as private as possible? Is it too noisy or distracting?
3. A simple way to start is to put words to the warning signs. "I've noticed..." Invite them to share more about what's going on for them.
4. If you suspect that they are at risk of suicide, follow up with direct language. "Do you have thoughts of dying or suicide?" This lets the other person know you are open to talking about these difficult topics non-judgmentally.

3

How do I gauge whether they are suicidal?

Ask these questions in order. If they say yes, proceed to the next question and follow the steps below, which are also provided in a step-by-step guide at the end of the Toolkit.

1. In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead or been thinking about killing yourself?
2. If the person answers yes to the first question, then continue asking: Have you thought about how you would kill yourself?
3. Have you thought about when you would kill yourself?
4. If the person has ready answers to the

above questions, ask: Do you have the means to carry out how you would kill yourself?

What do I do if they say yes to all my questions? (actively suicidal)

If someone states that they have a plan, have thought about a time to commit suicide, and have the means to carry out the plan—or if they refuse to answer—then that person is actively suicidal. They are in imminent danger and need a full psychiatric mental health evaluation. Follow the steps below.

1. Stay with or on the phone with them until you have made a hand-off to a qualified professional who can give them a mental health evaluation.
2. Keep the person in your sight.
3. Call 988 immediately or go with them to an emergency room, preferably one that has a Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program (CPEP). Please do your research and prepare a list of CPEPs in your area.



What if they say yes to some but not all of the questions? (passive suicidal ideation)

If they have no plan of when or how they will kill themselves but still have suicidal thoughts at times, they have passive suicidal ideation.

They do not need an immediate full psychiatric evaluation, but you should recommend that they connect with a professional counselor. Create a safety plan with the person, which we have provided as a [one-page resource](#).

4

What not to do

1. Do not argue with them. You may be tempted to argue with them about why they should not end their life, but that can seem invalidating. It is better to ask open-ended questions to understand what it is like for them to feel so hopeless.
2. Do not act shocked. This is where practice can help you control your reactions.
3. Do not promise confidentiality. Because if they do express that they intend to hurt themselves or others, you should tell the appropriate professional—for example, the 988 operator or hospital staff—or their loved one in the area.
4. Finally, do not blame yourself. We are responsible to others, not for others. Our role is to ask the questions, do what we can to promote safety, try to connect them with appropriate care, and follow up. Each of us is responsible for our own actions. We cannot fix or control other people but we can trust them to God.

Redeemer Counseling offers training on suicide prevention and how to respond if someone dies by suicide within your organization, ministry, or church. [Learn more.](#)

Suicide Prevention Assessment

