

HOW TO ENGAGE

Knowing how to talk with an **emerging adult** about **suicide** can be anxiety-provoking. It's important to remember the following 3 "How To's" in engagement: **Recognize, Respond, and Connect** and to always use language that helps instill hope that things can get better:

Recognize

Common signs that someone is at risk for suicide include:

Topics of Conversations

- Killing themselves
- Feeling hopeless
- Having no reason to live
- Feelings like a burden

Changes in Behavior

- Withdrawing from activities
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Telling people goodbye
- Giving away possessions
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Sudden changes/behaviors outside of norm

Displaying New Moods

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Humiliation or Shame
- Relief or Sudden Improvement

How to talk about it

- **Why is it important to engage in the conversation?**
 - One person asking may mean the difference between life and death.
 - Depression and suicidal ideation are treatable.
 - People can and do get better.
- **Talk in private**
 - Find a quiet place to talk.
 - Approach the topic of suicide with care and compassion.
 - Give them your full attention.
 - Ensure them you are there to support them.
Be clear about what can/can't be kept confidential.
- **Questions to ask directly**
 - "Do you have a plan to end your life?"
 - "Do you have the means?"
 - "Do you intend to kill yourself?"
- **Avoid¹³**
 - Debating the value of life.
 - Offering advice to fix it.
 - Minimizing the person's feelings.
 - Begging/pleading with them to not end their life.
 - Telling them they are selfish.

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Respond

How you engage through verbal and non-verbal cues should include:

How to respond

- **Stay calm, nonjudgmental, and hopeful**
 - "Thank you for trusting me enough to share this with me."
 - "I am sorry that you are in so much pain, things can get better and I am here to help/support you."
 - "There are other options, but we need you alive to figure them out."
- **Be a skilled listener**
 - Believe them.
 - Validate their emotions.
 - Be supportive and empathetic.
- **Assure them**
 - "I am here for you."
 - "There is help available."
 - Remain hopeful and give them hope that things can and will get better.
 - Remind them their thoughts don't have to become actions.
- **Practice**
 - It can be scary to ask someone if they are having thoughts of suicide.
 - Practice saying the words to make it easier.
 - Stand in front of a mirror or as a trusted friend or colleague if they will role play.

Be aware of your facial expressions



Get comfortable with asking: "are you thinking of killing yourself?"



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Connect

Understand the connection between suicidal thoughts, a plan, and a means so you can connect them to the most appropriate safety steps:

Severity Flow Chart for Suicidal Ideation

SUICIDAL IDEATION

PLAN

MEANS

Do not leave them alone; if you are on the phone, remain on it with them

Assist them with calling 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, or go with them to the emergency department (or a local crisis stabilization center)

Ensure safety for you and the person experiencing suicidal ideation by removing any objects that could be used in a suicidal attempt

NO MEANS

Stay with them; do not leave them alone. If on the phone, remain on it with them

Connect them to a crisis hotline, behavioral health professional, or hospital emergency department

NO MEANS NO PLAN

Refer them to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Refer them to mental health services/a therapist

Encourage and assist them with sharing their suicidal ideation with their support system

Suggest they talk to a family member, case manager, school counselor, or trusted friend

Do your best to ensure they share their suicidal ideation with a trusted family member or friend. If they are a minor, encourage them to share this with a parent/caregiver

Plan

having a decided time, place, and method to complete suicide

Means

having access to a gun, access to pills, or a nearby bridge