

# SAFEGUARD CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH PREVENT YOUTH SUICIDE

Children at puberty experience drastic changes in physical and mental growth, and may feel distressed, helpless and hopeless when they encounter challenges and adversities during this transition. Some may even have suicidal thoughts. As key gatekeepers, parents should seek professional support from school and the community once they become aware of their children's display of suicidal warning signs. Parents should not take such signs lightly or keep these to themselves. This fact sheet aims to increase parents' understanding of youth suicide through an introduction to risk factors, protective factors, suicidal warning signs and support measures.

Let us work together to safeguard children's mental health and prevent youth suicide.



Suicidal behaviours are complex, involving multiple contributing factors and causal relationships. The accumulation and interaction of a number of risk factors will increase one's vulnerability to suicidal behaviours, while protective factors can counterbalance risk factors and improve one's resilience.

## Risk Factors

Risk factors refer to any aspect of an individual that may increase the possibility of suicidal behaviours. Knowledge of risk factors enables parents to assess their children's risk of committing suicide.

- **Biological:** Mental illness, puberty, etc.
- **Psychological:** Hopelessness, low self-esteem, etc.
- **Cognitive:** Weak problem-solving skills, perfectionism, etc.
- **Environmental:** Previous suicidal attempt or instance of self-harm, change in family structure, etc.
- **Family relationship:** Family conflicts, physical or psychological abuse by family members, etc.
- **Peer relationship:** Poor peer relationships, loss of friendships or instance of being bullied, etc.

## Did you know?

Asking your children whether they have any thought of suicide will not encourage them to execute a suicidal plan. On the contrary, they will feel cared for, understood and relieved when you patiently listen to them and have a talk with them.

## Protective Factors

Parents can actively enhance protective factors for their children and thus reduce children's risk of committing suicide. Below are major protective factors and ways to enhance children's resilience:

### (1) Family support and cohesion

- Spend more time with your child and make your concern for him known
- Listen to your child and identify with his feelings (e.g. distress); avoid criticising and blaming your child
- Spend quality time with your child and foster positive parent-child relationship

### (2) Peer relationship and social support

- Encourage and support your child to make and keep friends

### (3) Close connection with school and the community

### (4) Adaptive coping strategies and problem-solving skills

- Guide your child in approaching situations from different perspectives and acquiring effective problem-solving skills
- Show your child how to release feelings, solve problems and take good care of oneself

### (5) Positive self-esteem

- Help your child explore interests and identify strengths

# Suicidal Warning Signs

- Talking about, writing about or making artwork about death or suicide
- Looking for ways to commit suicide
- Making final arrangements, such as giving away prized possessions
- Saying goodbye to family members and friends as if they would not be seen again
- Displaying physical symptoms, such as increasing physical complaints and change in sleep pattern or eating habits
- Fluctuations in mood; marked emotional instability
- Change in behaviours, such as isolation from others and engagement in high-risk or self-destructive acts
- Increasing inability to concentrate and think; emergence of negative thinking



## When there are imminent suicidal risks

- Ensure that your child is not left alone
- Prevent suicidal behaviours by, for example, removing sharp objects and medicines, and securing window grilles with a lock
- Accompany your child to hospital for emergency service
- Seek urgent support by calling 999 under life-threatening circumstances

## Responding to Suicidal Warning Signs, Suicidal Ideation or Suicidal Behaviours



- Stay calm and avoid criticising
- Lend an ear and reflect your child's feelings, such as saying "It seems to me that you have been unhappy these days..."
- Use open-ended questions to make your child talk more about his situation, such as asking "How's your mood/headache lately?"
- Directly express your care and touch on the issue of suicide, such as asking "Have you thought about taking your own life?"
- Share your concern and reassure your child that help can be obtained, such as saying "I am concerned about you and we will seek help together."
- Guide your child in finding ways to take care of himself and cope with the situation, such as asking "What will you do to release your emotion?"
- Keep observing closely
- Secure professional support for your child in school and the community



### Related websites

## Helplines

**The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong**  
2389 2222

**Suicide Prevention Services**  
2382 0000

**Caritas Family Crisis Line**  
18288

**Social Welfare Department Hotline**  
2343 2255

**Hospital Authority Psychiatric Hotline**  
2466 7350



[Education Bureau](#)  
["Mental Health @ School"](#)  
[One-Stop Student Mental Health](#)  
[Information Online](#)



[Advisory Committee on](#)  
[Mental Health](#)  
["Shall We Talk" Programme](#)



[Hong Kong Jockey Club](#)  
[Charities Trust](#)  
["Open Up" Programme](#)



[Hospital Authority](#)  
["Psychosis" Service Programme](#)

**Education Bureau**  
2022

