

Talking to kids and teens about mental health



Our kids are struggling.

More and more high school students say they feel constantly sad or hopeless. Struggling with these feelings without support for a long time can lead to even bigger mental health struggles. This could include depression or suicide.

Signs your kid or teen may be struggling with mental health or having suicidal thoughts:

- Underreacting or overreacting to everyday things
- Doing something that's not their usual routine — a change in sleep, eating habits, school success or social behavior
- Pulling away from family and friends
- Complaining of aches with no medical explanation, like a stomachache or headache
- Expressing hopelessness or being hard on themselves

You may see some warning signs if they're struggling, but sometimes there are no warning signs.

There is a way for you to support your kids' and teens' mental and behavioral health.

It's important to talk to your kid or teen regularly about mental health. Even when nothing seems wrong, this lets them know you're a safe person who will support them when things get tough.

Tips for talking about mental health with kids and teens:

- Find time every day to talk about their emotions. Build these chats into your daily routine.
- Remove distractions and make sure you are both focused when chatting.
- Listen and let them know that you understand what they are feeling.
- Pause before reacting. Put your own discomfort or thoughts aside. Work together to problem solve.

Conversation starters about mental health:

- Ask about their favorite and least favorite parts of their day.
- Notice when they're feeling worried or sad and ask direct questions.
- Talk about others' experiences with mental health — people you know, people in the community or fictional TV/ movie characters. Identify things that are the same in your own lives.

Interested in more tips, videos and resources?



childrenswi.org/shinethrough

Approximately
2 million
adolescents
attempt suicide
each year.



You can bring mental and behavioral health into the light by talking with a kid or teen in your life.

Here are some resources to help start talking:

- Children's Wisconsin has tips and information to help discuss mental health with kids at childrenswi.org/shinethrough
- Mental Health Literacy's ToolBox has resources for parents, health providers and teachers at mentalhealthliteracy.org/toolbox
- KidsHealth provides kid-friendly tips for coping with life stressors at kidshealth.org/teens

If your kid or teen is having suicidal thoughts:

Call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at **988**, call **911** or bring your child to the nearest emergency room.



Creating Solutions for Mental & Behavioral Health