



# Talking with Teens about Death By Suicide

It can be intimidating to talk to your teen about death by suicide, but honesty is important in establishing yourself as someone they can talk to. Having these open and honest conversations with the teens in your life is also an important piece of suicide prevention work.

## Answer with honesty

Remember that though this feels difficult to talk about with your teen, they will be discussing it with their peers, and it is important that they hear from you as well. Be factual and brief if your teen has questions about the death. Remember to ask them what they know/think about the death as well. The more they can share with you, the more you can mirror their language, which can help them feel more comfortable talking openly.

## Acknowledge the stigma

Our society often does not talk openly about mental health and deaths by suicide because there is stigma surrounding these types of deaths. You can explain stigma as when a death brings all of the emotions of grief, but also commonly includes feelings of guilt, shame, regret, anger, and fear that can make it feel harder to talk openly about. Acknowledging this to your teen and putting stigma out in the open can help to begin breaking down stereotypes about mental health, a critical piece of suicide prevention work. It will be helpful for your teen to begin to understand stigma and its impact on the grieving process as they grieve the loss of their friend or loved one.

## Validate

Another complicated piece of grieving a death by suicide is that many people experience a sense that they should have somehow known or been able to stop the person who died from taking their own life. Validate for your teen that this is an intensely difficult and painful emotion to feel, and compassionately explain to them that they are in no way responsible for the death. Know that this part of the conversation will be ongoing.



**Ask how they are doing - and be ready to respond**

Part of talking with your teens about death by suicide is normalizing conversations about their and our mental health. Acknowledge how hard it can be to grieve this type of death and ask if they have ever felt hopeless or like they did not want to live? Have they ever had thoughts about harming themselves? Do they know who they could reach out to if they do? These are difficult, uncomfortable questions to ask. *These conversations establish with your teen that nothing is off limits, they can trust you to hold this difficult information and support them.*

Familiarize yourself with local and national suicide prevention resources (some listed below) so that you can make your teen aware, too (and so that they can spread the word to their friends).

**Make it a habit**

Similar to how the grief over losing the person who died will always be a part of your teen's life, make these conversations about their grief and their mental health a regular part of the conversations you have together.

**Suicide Prevention Resources**

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: 988

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line: 741741

Chester County's Valley Creek Crisis Center: 610-918-2100

**You are not in this alone.** We are here as a resource to you, your team, and your community.

Please contact us for more information, let us know how we can best support you.

