

# Suicide prevention: 6 ideas for parents to help children cope with stress

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Special to the Bonanza



It is not always easy for parents to know what to do for their children if they are feeling stressed.

*Courtesy Don DeBold |*

## WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE\*

- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated or recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

\*The more of these signs a person shows, the greater the risk. Warning signs are associated with suicide but may not be what causes a suicide.

## WHAT TO DO

If someone you know exhibits warning signs of suicide:

- Do not leave the person alone.
- Remove any firearms, alcohol, drugs or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt.

TAHOE-TRUCKEE, Calif. — To adults, childhood can seem like a carefree time, but youth still experience stress. Things like school and social lives can at times create pressures that can feel overwhelming to adolescents.

As a parent, you cannot protect your kids from stress — but you can help them develop healthy ways to cope with stress and solve everyday issues.

Youth deal with stress in both healthy and unhealthy ways. While they may not initiate a conversation about what is bothering them, they do want their parents to reach out and help them cope with their problems.

It is not always easy for parents to know what to do for their children if they are feeling stressed. Here are a few ideas:

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## NOTICE OUT LOUD

Tell them when you notice that something is bothering them. Put a name to the feeling you think they are experiencing.

This should not sound like an accusation; it is just a casual observation that you are interested in hearing more about your child's emotions.

Be sympathetic and show you care and want to understand. For example, instead of saying "What happened next? You're still mad about that?" try a more open response such as "It sounds like you're still upset about what happened at lunch."

## LISTEN TO YOUR CHILD

Ask them to talk to you about what is wrong. Listen attentively and calmly — with interest, patience, openness, and caring.

• Call the U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255).

• Take the person to an emergency room or seek help from a medical or mental health professional.

Avoid any urge to judge, lecture, or say what you think they should have done. The idea is to let their concerns and emotions be heard.

### **COMMENT BRIEFLY**

Comment briefly on the feelings you think your child was experiencing.

For example, you might say, “that must have been upsetting,” “I understand why you felt mad,” or “that must have seemed unfair to you.”

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READ MORE: Even with friends and family around, [someone experiencing emotional pain or suicidal thoughts](#)  can feel isolated.

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This demonstrates that you have empathy and understand what they felt, why, and that you care.

Feeling heard and understood helps them feel supported in times of stress.

### **PUT A LABEL ON IT**

Many adolescents do not have words yet for their emotions.

If your child seems angry or sad, use those specific words to help them learn to identify those emotions by name.

Putting feelings into words will help kids communicate and develop emotional awareness – the ability to recognize their personal emotional state.

### **JUST BE THERE**

Kids do not always feel like talking about what is bothering them. That is OK – be patient.

Let your child know you will be there. Even when kids do not want to talk, they usually do not want their parents to leave them alone.

You can help your child feel better simply by just being there – keeping him company, spending time together.

If you notice your child is having a bad day and does not want to talk, go for a walk with them, bake cookies, or go for a car ride.

Initiate something you can do together. Studies have shown that driving or walking with your teen are effective ways to help you both open up.

### **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF LOCAL SUPPORT**

North Tahoe High, Truckee High, and Sierra High have Wellness Centers on campus providing a resource for peer support groups, referrals to outside support, or simply a relaxing place to hang out.

“What is Up?” Wellness Checks are available to any high school students.

These anonymous check ups provide the opportunity to check in with teens and open the line of communication around mental health and wellness.

Parents cannot solve every problem their adolescent has however, by teaching healthy coping strategies you will prepare your kids to manage the stresses that come in the future.

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READ MORE: [Please visit suicideispreventable.org to learn more about the signs](#) , find the words, and how to reach out.

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Just as important as recognizing the inability to solve every problem is the ability to ask for help in parenting when needed.

How a child feels should always outweigh how one is viewed as a parent.

The best thing a parent can do for their youth is to be selfless in commitment to getting their child’s emotional needs met.

For more information on the “What is Up?” Wellness free and anonymous checkups visit <http://www.whatsupwellness.com>  or <http://www.ttusd.org> .

For further resources about child behavior, health, and development visit <http://www.kidshealth.org> .

– Sarah McClarie is the facilitator for the Tahoe Truckee Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition. Contact her at [smcclarie@ttusd.org](mailto:smcclarie@ttusd.org) or by calling 530-582-2560.

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