

# SUICIDE

## IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



We can all play our part  
to help prevent it.



OXFORDSHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL



Every child or young person who dies by suicide is a precious individual and their deaths represent a devastating loss for parents, siblings, grandparents, carers, guardians, extended family and friends. Suicide leaves a legacy for families that can have an impact on future generations and the wider community. We can all play our part to help prevent it.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in children and young people in England. In 2022, there were 185 deaths of children and young people aged 10-19 years, 17 of these were 10-14 years and 168 were aged 15-19 years<sup>1</sup>.

Between 2015-2020, suicide rates for under 18s were higher in boys than in girls across all years<sup>2</sup>.

Evidence also suggests that the suicide rate is highest in the year following hospital discharge for self-harm, particularly in the first month<sup>3</sup>. Rates of self-harm

requiring hospital admission are significantly higher in young girls, particularly in the 13-17 year old age range<sup>4</sup>.

## Risk factors

Common risk factors linked to children and young people who have died by suicide include<sup>5</sup>:

- Factors within the home that contribute to a child's vulnerability
- Mental health needs of the child

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<sup>1</sup> Deaths registered in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics ([ons.gov.uk](https://ons.gov.uk))

<sup>2</sup> Number of suicides in children aged under 18 years in England, occurring between 2015 and 2020 - Office for National Statistics ([ons.gov.uk](https://ons.gov.uk))

<sup>3</sup> Suicide prevention strategy for England: 2023 to 2028 - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

<sup>4</sup> ONS statistics for self-harm in the UK for 2020 and 2021 - Office for National Statistics

<sup>5</sup> NCMD-Suicide-in-Children-and-Young-People-Report.pdf

- Loss of key relationships / bereavement
- Risk taking behaviours i.e. attempting suicide or engaging in non-suicidal self-harm, dangerous driving or anti-social behaviour
- Conflict/arguments within key relationships
- Poor communication or information sharing between professionals
- Abuse and neglect
- Problems at school or missing school
- Bullying
- Drug or alcohol misuse by the child or young person
- Social media and internet use
- Neurodevelopmental conditions
- Sexual orientation/identity and gender identity
- Problems with the law

Children and young people who have experienced a death of a parent or family member are at an increased risk of suicide, and individuals who lost a parent at a young age seem to be at higher risk than those who were bereaved later in life.<sup>i</sup>

Anniversaries, such as the date of death or the funeral can be a very challenging time for children and young people who have been bereaved, which elevates their own risk of suicide.<sup>ii</sup> All individuals working with or supporting a bereaved child or young person should be aware of these dates in order to provide additional support if required.

Booklets to support children and young people who have lost a parent can be found [here](#).




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<sup>i</sup> Are young people more vulnerable at anniversaries of deceased parents' death dates?  
- The Lancet Public Health

<sup>ii</sup> Are young people more vulnerable at anniversaries of deceased parents' death dates?  
- The Lancet Public Health



“I CAN'T  
TAKE IT  
ANY MORE”

## How to tell if a child or young person may be having suicidal thoughts

Although not always apparent, there are several behaviours within children and young that may indicate that they are experiencing thoughts of suicide. Some of these include<sup>6</sup>;

- Changes in behaviour (loss of interest/withdrawal, giving away possessions)
- Physical indicators (weight loss, lack of interest in appearance)
- Expressing thoughts or feelings (hopeless, sad, guilty, worthless)
- Words/language being used (“I can’t take it anymore”, “Everyone would be better off without me”)

“EVERYONE  
WOULD BE  
BETTER OFF  
WITHOUT ME”

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<sup>6</sup> How do I know if someone is suicidal? | PAPYRUS UK ([papyrus-uk.org](http://papyrus-uk.org))



## Supporting a child or young person

Talking to your child about suicidal thoughts can be difficult and feel very daunting. Remember - **starting the conversation is the most important thing<sup>7</sup>.**

**Ask directly** - Use the word suicide. Practice asking first if this helps. It may give you more confidence.

**Stay calm** - This is important as your child may be looking at how you react to decide how much they should tell you.

**Be clear and direct** - Look them in the eye and ask 'are you thinking about suicide or making suicidal plans?'

**Talking to someone about their suicidal thoughts doesn't usually make them more likely to end their life.**

<sup>7</sup> [Supporting-Your-Child-A-Guide-for-Parents.pdf \(papyrus-uk.org\)](https://www.papyrus-uk.org/supporting-your-child-a-guide-for-parents.pdf)

You could also follow Samaritans  
**SHUSH** listening tips:



### *Show you care*

Focus on the other person, make eye contact, put away your phone.



### *Have patience*

It may take time and several attempts before a person is ready to open up.



### *Use open questions*

That need more than a yes/no answer, and follow up e.g. 'Tell me more'.



### *Say it back*

To check you've understood, but don't interrupt or offer a solution.



### *Have courage*

Don't be put off by a negative response and most importantly, don't feel you have to fill a silence.

## Supporting a child or young person

### Urgent care or crisis support

If the child or young person has made plans to make a suicide attempt, or has already made an attempt or been injured, call **999** for an ambulance straight away. You can also call the police by dialling **999** if there is a risk to the safety of other people.

Call **111** for the 24/7 mental health helpline, this is available to people of all ages in Oxfordshire.

help

### GP support

If you're concerned that the child or young person is experiencing suicidal thoughts, but you don't think they are at immediate risk, ask for an urgent appointment and speak to the GP who can provide information and advice and discuss the options around treatment and support with you. The GP may refer the child to a specialist mental health team.

If the young person is already accessing [CAMHS](#) in Oxfordshire, contact the service directly on 01865 902515 or [OxonCAMHSSPA@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk](mailto:OxonCAMHSSPA@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk)

### Local and national support services

- [Oxfordshire Mind](#)
- [PAPYRUS - 24 hour helpline](#)
- [Young Minds](#)
- [Childline](#)
- [Shout](#)
- [Samaritans](#)



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