

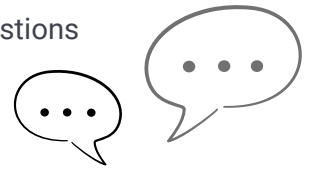


How to Talk to Your Child about Suicide

Guidance for Parents and Carers in Hong Kong

Children and adolescents in Hong Kong may hear about a suicide through school, classmates, messaging apps, or media coverage. In a closely connected community, information can spread quickly and may include rumours or emotionally intense discussion. Many parents and carers feel unsure whether to bring up the topic with their child. Research consistently shows that calm, open communication does not increase suicidal thoughts or behaviour. In contrast, supportive parent-child relationships and open dialogue are among the strongest protective factors for young people.

You do not need perfect words. What matters most is that your child feels able to ask questions and share how they are feeling.



Talking With Your Child: What Helps

There is no single right way to have these conversations. Your openness, calm presence, and willingness to listen make the biggest difference.

1 Start by asking what they've heard

Begin with curiosity to understand their perspective and correct misinformation.

"What have you heard about what happened?"

"How are people talking about this at school?"

2 Keep information simple

Offer brief, factual explanations **without** graphic detail or speculation. Suicide is complex and rarely caused by a single factor. **Avoid** describing the method, attributing the death to one cause, or using dramatic or moral language, (e.g., calling someone 'selfish', 'weak', or 'sinful').

"Sometimes when a person feels so overwhelmed with difficult feelings, and thinks they have no other way to cope, they may think about ending their life (suicide). When people feel that way, it's important they get help."

3 Focus on asking for help and support

Reassure your child. Some young people worry about "burdening" their families. **Make it clear that seeking help is welcome and supported.**

"When people feel overwhelmed by their emotions, there are ways to get help."

"You can always talk to me or ____ (name of another trusted adult)."

4 Ask directly about feelings, especially with adolescents

Asking does not increase risk and talking about this can reduce stigma.

If your child says yes, stay calm, thank them for telling you, and seek professional support. A calm response builds safety and trust.

"Have you felt that overwhelmed before?"

"Have you had thoughts about hurting your body, or thoughts of ending your life?"

Checking In On Overall Wellbeing

Beyond asking directly about emotional feelings or suicidal thoughts, check in regularly on their daily behaviours. Children and adolescents often express psychological distress through physical discomfort or shifts in daily routine before they have the language to describe emotional pain.

- At **bedtime** or during routine shifts: "How have you been sleeping been lately?"
- When noticing **changes in appetite**: "How has your tummy been feeling recently?"
- If they look **physically uneasy** or uncomfortable: "How are you feeling in your body?"
- When observing changes in **homework habits**: "How is your focus right now?"

These check-ins don't need to happen all at once. The goal is to build a natural, ongoing habit of care.

Age Considerations

These age ranges are approximate. Adjust your language according to your child's maturity and developmental level.

Primary School



Younger children (**6 -11**) may worry that something similar could happen in their own family. Consistent reassurance and predictable routines help restore a sense of safety.

- Use clear and concrete language
- Reassure them they are safe
- Make it clear they are not responsible in any way
- Limit exposure to media coverage

Secondary School



Adolescents (**12 -18**) may identify strongly with peers, be influenced by social media narratives, and experience academic and social pressures.

- Talk about what they are seeing online
- Encourage breaks from repeated exposure
- Reinforce that stress is temporary and manageable
- Promote healthy coping strategies and help-seeking



Recognising Signs & Seeking Support

After a suicide in the school or community, children and adolescents may show changes in their feelings or behaviour. Consider seeking extra support if these reactions persist, intensify, or affect daily life.

- **Overall Wellbeing:** Changes in sleep, eating, focus, or physical complaints (e.g., chest tightness, tummy aches, trouble breathing)
- **Mood & Thoughts:** Sadness, anxiety, anger, numbness, guilt, helplessness, feeling trapped, or feeling like a burden
- **Behaviours:** Withdrawal from family/friends, drop in school attendance, self-harm, substance use, or increased risk-taking
- **Preoccupation with Death:** Repeated talk about the death, searching for details online, or expressed desire to join the deceased

Support may come from a school counsellor, social worker, grief counsellor, psychologist, family doctor, or other mental health professional.

SEEK URGENT HELP NOW

Seek urgent help now if your child says they want to die, has thoughts of suicide or self-harm they cannot control, has a plan or means to harm themselves, has harmed themselves, or may be in immediate danger.



Call 999 or go to the nearest Accident & Emergency department. You may also contact a crisis hotline for immediate support.

Do not leave your child alone if you believe they are at immediate risk.

24/7 Multi-lingual Crisis Hotlines

Number

Mental Health Support Hotline (情緒通)

18111

The Samaritans (撒瑪利亞會)

2896 0000

Suicide Prevention Services

2382 0000

References

Further Information for Parents and Carers

For more information on talking to your child about suicide please see the following resources:

- [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)
- [Kids Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Education Bureau \(Hong Kong\)](#)
- [Samaritans UK](#)



References

- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Teens and suicide: What parents should know.](#)
- [Blades, C. A., et al. \(2018\). The benefits and risks of asking research participants about suicide. Clinical Psychology Review, 64, 1–12.](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. \(2026\). Preventing suicide.](#)
- [Education Bureau, Hong Kong. Student Mental Health Information Online.](#)
- [Johns Hopkins Medicine. Teen suicide.](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Talking to your child about a suicide death: A guide for parents and caregivers.](#)



Disclaimer

This resource provides general information for parents and caregivers. It is not a substitute for professional medical or mental health advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

If you are concerned about your child's safety or wellbeing, seek professional support promptly. **In an emergency, call 999** or go to the nearest Accident & Emergency department.

