

# Youth Suicide Prevention for Teachers

## Start Early When it Comes to Mental Health

According to the National Alliance for Mental Illness, one in five teens and young adults live with a mental health condition, such as anxiety, panic attacks or depression, and 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14.

Make discussions about emotions and mental health in your classroom normal by working with your school's counselor on social-emotional learning activities. Asking how your students feel about different events helps them to see you as someone they can talk to. Listen more than you speak. Offer small encouraging responses, such as "That sounds difficult," or "It sounds like you're feeling sad, are you?" Encouragement will help more than offering advice or dismissing emotions.

## Understanding Mental Health Signs and Symptoms

Signs are what you can see: withdrawal from friends or activities the student used to like, poor appetite or overeating, or poor hygiene. Symptoms are what's inside: feeling hopeless, unhappy, depressed, anxious or angry.



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
Services

## How to Talk to Youth About Mental Health

*\*Always reach out to your school's counselor if you are unable to speak with the student.*

**Stay calm.** Take a deep breath before engaging in a conversation.

**Choose a good time and space.** If possible, try and minimize distractions and allow enough time for the conversation to last for as long as is needed.

**Lead with an "I" statement.** Start with, "I care about you," and then tell them about the signs you have seen or changes you have noticed.

**Check your own feelings.** Keep your own emotions in control. Remember, this is how they are feeling and thinking.

**Be patient.** If they are not ready to talk, let them know you are always there, that asking for help is okay, and that you care and support them.

**Thank them.** Listen carefully and thank them for telling you how they are feeling and what they are thinking. It takes a lot of strength.

**Look for help together.** Say, "Let's look for help together." It is a great way to show that you care and allows them to be a part of the solution.

## When it's a Crisis

*\*Always reach out to your school's counselor if you are unable to speak with the student.*

You may need to ask your student, "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" It is a very difficult question, but do not worry about asking it. The question does not put the thought into their head. Rather, it shows them how much you care for them.

Reassure your student by saying things such as, "I care about you and I am here for you."

If you feel comfortable and if your student is safe and needs support, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **800-273-8255**. You will be connected to a trained person who can help you find resources in your area.

If your student is in imminent danger, if they are trying to harm themselves or have already made a suicide attempt, it is time to get help. Don't wait. Call **9-1-1**.

## Resources

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** **800-273-8255**, 24/7/365, English and Spanish
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text TX to 741-741
- **The Trevor Project:** 866-488-7386, 24/7/365
- **County Services Search Page:** [texashhs.org/countyservicessearchpage](https://texashhs.org/countyservicessearchpage)
- **The Suicide Prevention** wallet card is available in PDF format:  
**English:** [texashhs.org/preventionwalletcard](https://texashhs.org/preventionwalletcard)  
**Spanish:** [texashhs.org/prevenciondelsuicidio](https://texashhs.org/prevenciondelsuicidio)

## Remember These Quick Tips:

- Mental health is just like physical health – students deserve both.
- Make it normal for students to talk about their feelings.
- Keep an eye out for signs of problems with students' mental and emotional health.
- Be calm when you talk to a student about what you see.
- Listen to their answers.
- Never stop checking in with a student.
- Thank them for talking to you.
- Find help together.
- If a student is in crisis or talks about suicide, don't wait. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **800-273-8255** or **9-1-1** if the danger is imminent.
- Keep crisis hotline numbers, suicide hotline numbers and mental health services numbers in your phone for yourself and others. Also consider posting these resources in a classroom.

