



# How to help someone after a suicide attempt

If someone you love has attempted suicide, you may feel unsure about what's next. To help someone who has recently attempted suicide, it's important to let them know that they're not alone — and that you're there to support them. As a caregiver, there are many other things you can do to help your loved one get back on their feet:

- **Take time to listen and be with your loved one.** Staying close to them in person is best, but connecting by phone, text or social media can help, especially during the first few weeks.
- **Know that recovery takes time.** Coming back from treatment or the hospital after an attempt doesn't mean your loved one is healed. Recovery can be a slow process. Remind them to keep seeing their therapist and talk about their feelings with people they trust. The first six months are especially important to their long-term recovery.
- **Take steps to support their recovery.** Whether they need help with daily tasks, making healthy choices or connecting with others through a supportive community, there's a lot you can do to help lighten their load.
- **Connect regularly with your loved one's therapist.** Ask the therapist how you can help your loved one stay safe. This may mean removing guns or medications from your loved one's environment — anything that may pose a threat in a crisis situation.
- **Help support their safety plan.** This is a customized plan that your loved one creates with their therapist to help them get through a crisis. It may include personal warning signs of a crisis, steps they can take to cope and contact information of people they can reach out to for help.

When someone you love has attempted suicide, it's also important to pay attention to your own feelings. As you

help your loved one recover, make sure to take care of yourself and get extra support if you need it.

Note: This information is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for professional health care. You should consult an appropriate health care professional for your specific needs and to determine whether making decisions based on this information is appropriate for you. If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, seek help right away.

**Sources:**

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE). For suicide attempt survivors.  
[save.org/find-help/attempt-survivor-resources/](https://www.save.org/find-help/attempt-survivor-resources/)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Help yourself. Make a safety plan.  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org/how-we-can-all-prevent-suicide/](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/how-we-can-all-prevent-suicide/)

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. When a loved one has made an attempt.  
[afsp.org/when-a-loved-one-has-made-an-attempt](https://afsp.org/when-a-loved-one-has-made-an-attempt)

NIH National Institute of Mental Health. Suicide prevention.  
[nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/](https://nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/)

# Self-harm support for children

Also called self-injury, self-harm is when someone intentionally harms their own body. It can take different forms, such as cutting, hitting or burning oneself. Although self-injury is typically not intended as a suicide attempt, people who harm themselves may be at increased risk for suicidal thinking.

## Why do young people self-harm?

Self-injuring behaviors are an unhealthy way to deal with emotional pain, such as frustration or anger. Young people who have been abused or who have experienced trauma or neglect have the highest risk for self-injuring behaviors. They may have developed these types of behaviors as a coping mechanism for an unstable or abusive childhood, for example.

## It is not a mental illness

Know that self-harm is not a mental health condition. However, there are certain related illnesses, such as anxiety, borderline personality disorder, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

## How common it is

College students and teens are at the highest risk for self-harm. Studies show a high risk in college students with rates between 17% and 35%. Rates among teens are also high with about 15% of adolescents reporting some type of self-injury, versus about 4% of U.S. adults.

## Warning signs

Along with wounds, like cuts, bruises, scratches or bite marks, the following are also signs and symptoms you may notice in others:

- Scars or scars in a pattern
- Trouble in relationships with others
- Frequently reporting accidents or injuries
- Burns or areas that look burned from rubbing
- Long-sleeved shirts or long pants when it's hot out
- Impulsive, unpredictable or unstable behaviors or moods
- Keeping sharp things with them, such as like razor blades
- Saying they feel helpless or worthless or like there's no hope

## Steps you can take

If your child reports self-harm, it's important to take them seriously and to seek professional support. You can speak with your child's doctor for a referral to a mental health professional. Also, while your child is receiving treatment, you can consider taking the following steps:

- Learn what you can about self-harm.

- Encourage your loved one to follow their treatment path.
- Don't push too hard with conversations. Recovery takes time.
- Avoid becoming isolated and resume "normal" activities with your child, like going to the movies.
- Listen and try to recognize and acknowledge their feelings if they open up to you.
- Prepare a crisis plan that includes phone numbers, such as the local crisis intervention team.
- Take an active role in advocating for your child with their medical team, so you better understand the treatment plan.
- Find others to talk to who understand the support you're offering. It's easier to handle stress when you don't keep it to yourself.
- Take care of yourself, too.

**Source:**

Kids Health. Helping teens who cut.

[kidshealth.org/en/parents/help-cutting.html](https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/help-cutting.html)

Mental Health America. Self-injury (cutting, self-harm or self-mutilation).

[mentalhealthamerica.net/self-injury](https://mentalhealthamerica.net/self-injury)

Mayo Clinic. Self-injury/cutting.

[mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/self-injury/symptoms-causes/syc-20350950](https://mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/self-injury/symptoms-causes/syc-20350950)

National Alliance on Mental Illness. Self-harm.

[nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Self-harm](https://nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Self-harm)

# Mental health support for teens and young adults during COVID-19

For many young people, the pandemic has taken a toll. Even if they haven't been sick or lost a loved one, they may be experiencing grief due to missing significant life events.

## Elevated depression rates

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "Bereavement, isolation, loss of income and fear are triggering mental health conditions or exacerbating existing ones."

While studies vary globally, many have shown just how much depression has climbed in various populations during the pandemic:

- 7x increase in depression for all ages
- 28% prevalence of clinical depression symptoms in children and adolescents in China (vs. previous 13.2%)
- 33% of U.S. college students experience depression
- 24% of U.S. high school students know someone who has had suicidal thoughts since the start of COVID-19

## A time for empathy and support

If you have a teen or young adult in your life, there are things you can do to support them during the pandemic. Give these tips a try:

- **Start with a conversation.** Ask how they're doing, and take their feelings seriously. Acknowledge what they've lost, and tell them it's OK to not be feeling great right now. Also, watch for any concerning symptoms including behavior changes.
- **Explore options for telehealth counseling.** According to a WHO survey, "The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93% of countries worldwide while the demand for mental health is increasing." In many countries, online counseling is a great option right now. Look for organizations that can connect you with resources, or call your employee assistance program.
- **Recommend healthy schedules.** Encourage students to set routines when they're doing online school. And keep in mind that exercise can have a big impact on mental health. So can sleep. One study of teens found that not getting enough sleep was linked to a 62% increased risk of depressed mood. Also, remind them to social distance, wear masks and wash their hands.
- **Reestablish your rules for screen time.** If your teen still lives at home and you have screen time rules, consider whether they're appropriate for the pandemic. Technology is essential for young people to remain socially connected during a time of distancing, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends reaching out to friends by phone, text, video chat and social media. But be sure to discuss the dangers of being online, too. The CDC warns that "increased online activity also puts them at increased risk for online harms, such as online sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, online risk-taking behavior and exposure to potentially harmful content."

- **Be mindful of potential substance use.** A study done in Canada showed teen alcohol use is up during the pandemic — and that teens are drinking with their friends while they connect on social media.

**Sources:**

World Health Organization. COVID-19 disrupting mental health services in most countries, WHO survey. Accessed May 13, 2021. [who.int/news/item/05-10-2020-covid-19-disrupting-mental-health-services-in-most-countries-who-survey](https://www.who.int/news/item/05-10-2020-covid-19-disrupting-mental-health-services-in-most-countries-who-survey)

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Duan L, et al. An investigation of mental health status of children and adolescents in China during the outbreak of COVID-19. *J Affect Disord*. 2020;Oct 1/75:112–118.

Chegg.org. COVID-19 and mental health: How America’s high school and college students are coping during the pandemic. Accessed May 13, 2021. [chegg.org/covid-19-mental-health-2020](https://www.chegg.org/covid-19-mental-health-2020)

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Dumas T, et al. What does adolescent substance use look like during the COVID-19 pandemic? Examining changes in frequency, social contexts and pandemic-related predictors. *J Adolesc. Health*. September 2020;67(3):354–361.