



Wellbeing Support: Self Harm and Suicidal Feelings

We know the conversations about self harm and suicidal feelings can be difficult, worrying and often deeply upsetting. It can be very hard to know what to say at the time but we hope this guide will help. Although it seems counterintuitive, if a child is expressing feelings of suicide, self-harm or depression it means that they trust you enough to tell you and that you have created a safe space where that child feels they can express those emotions.

If a child expresses these feelings to you (for example saying they want to die or kill themselves) it's important to remember the following:

Acknowledge. It's really crucial that we acknowledge these feelings. Saying phrases like, 'that must be really hard to feel like you want to die' or 'I'm hearing that you're feeling depressed' is helpful. It takes away the stigma and makes the child realise it's ok not to be ok, which is calming and regulating in itself, helping the child's intensity of feeling dissipate.

Listen without judgement. Sometimes children just really need someone to listen to them talk. This can be really hard when you're desperately worried about your child.

Give support. Help the child to realise that feeling sad or down is ok. You can reassure your child that all feelings pass or reduce in intensity eventually and that you are there for them, always. Help them to think of ways they could make themselves feel different in some way: read a book; play with their friends; ask for a soothing massage from you; go to bed a little earlier; listen to music; cooking; have a bath.

Seek support. Listening to your child express these big emotions can be overwhelming. Talk to your friends, family or trusted professionals. Young Minds has an excellent website with mental health advice and helplines for parents and young people. These are the pages about suicidal feelings: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/suicidal-feelings/>
<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/a-z-guide/suicidal-thoughts/>

Visiting the GP might be daunting but is advised so that the GP can signpost you towards appropriate support services.

Remember that talking about suicidal feelings does not make it more likely to happen. This is a common misconception. It is important to use the language your child has used when



talking to them e.g. 'What is it that makes you feel you want to die?' rather than using vague language to avoid inciting shame.

Children are often confused by their own feelings and suicidal feelings are often more about children feeling completely overwhelmed by what they feel and wanting the feelings to stop. Having experiences where adults they trust help them to regulate and come to realise that big, overwhelming feelings do pass helps children understand their emotional responses more. They come to know that heavy sadness does not mean they need to end their life and that they need to be able to tolerate the feeling, which is often a valid response to their life experiences.

What isn't Supportive

- Telling the child to cheer up or to put a smile on their face
- Suggesting they just need to play with their friends or have a run around
- Dismissing their feelings with phrases like, 'You seem ok to me' or by telling them they don't really feel like that or they are just having a bad day.
- Ignoring the comment and talking about something else

If you feel your child is in immediate danger then contact the emergency services.