

CAREGIVER'S TOOLKIT

DEAR FRIEND,

It means a lot that you have opened this toolkit. It means you are an adult who cares about children, and children need caring adults now more than ever. Every child deserves someone who listens, encourages, and reminds them that they are not alone. Just one caring adult can make a huge difference in a child's life. Sometimes that support can even save a life because thoughts of suicide and self-harm can happen much earlier than we expect.

I have been a clinician for nearly 20 years, and I have sat with children as young as four who have shared suicidal thoughts. They did not always understand death and its permanency, but they did understand wanting their pain to stop. That is why these conversations matter so much. Children need words for their feelings, and they need adults who believe them when they show us their pain.

That is where PATH Pals comes in. PATH created this puppet show to give children a safe and gentle way to begin talking about their feelings, especially the ones that may feel overwhelming or scary to share. We believe that when feelings are mentionable, they can also be manageable. Through the PATH Pals, children are invited into conversations that might otherwise feel too big or too hard to begin. When children can share even their most uncomfortable feelings, those feelings become something they do not have to carry alone.

We created this toolkit for you so you can feel more prepared if these conversations ever happen in your home, your classroom, or your community. These are not easy topics, and most of us were never taught how to respond to a child who shares something so heavy. This guide will give you some places to start. But please know that what matters most is not having the perfect words. What matters is being there, keeping the door open, and showing children that you will walk beside them.

Thank you for being someone who cares enough to listen. Your presence in a child's life truly matters. Together, we can give children hope, language for their feelings, and the reminder that they are never alone.

-DR. ADAM CARTER, CEO OF PATH

WHAT IS PATH?

PATH was founded in the early 1970s by volunteers committed to addressing social issues like drug abuse, mental health, and suicide prevention. Over the years, PATH expanded its services to include specialized hotlines and after-hours support for community agencies and, in the 1990s, played a pivotal role in establishing the 2-1-1 service in Illinois to connect people with health and human services. PATH also became a key part of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, now 988, extending its reach across most of Illinois. Today, PATH continues to provide critical support to the community.

At PATH Inc. (Providing Access to Help), we envision a world where everyone is treated with compassion and support, where barriers to essential services are actively dismantled, and where individuals and communities thrive through mutual care and empowerment, aiming to create an interconnected community where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

WHAT IS 988?

988 is the nationwide Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Trusted counselors are available 24/7 by call or text to provide support in three key ways:

Emotional Support: Phone-based intervention through empathetic listening when individuals are experiencing severe emotional distress.

Safety Planning: Assistance developing clear "next steps" to prevent recurring crises and facilitating connections to additional resources or regular mental health support. Follow-up calls are provided to ensure continued well-being.

Connections to in-person crisis intervention: In-person intervention services, such as psychiatric mobile response teams, can be arranged. The primary aim of both 988 and the psychiatric mobile response teams is to minimize hospitalizations and involve mental health professionals instead of law enforcement.

988 is the new NSPL (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline), as of July 2022. All services are free to callers and confidential.

HOW DO I CONTACT 988?

Call or text "988". Your call or text will be routed to the designated call center. If your designated call center is unable to answer within 2 minutes, your call will automatically be routed to a back-up call center. Do NOT hang up – if you hang up, you will lose your place in line.

You can also reach 988 by dialing the old NSPL number (800-273-8255).

There is no alternate number to reach PATH's 988 call center directly- you must be routed through the regular 988 call distribution system.

SOME TERMS TO KNOW...

CRISIS

Perhaps you've heard of a crisis before, and can even list some things you would consider a crisis; a catastrophic fire, a hurricane, a pandemic... But a crisis as we use the term, a mental health crisis, is a human condition. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) describes a mental health crisis as "any situation in which a person's behavior puts them at risk of hurting themselves or others and/or prevents them from being able to care for themselves or function effectively in the community".

COPING SKILL

Coping, or a coping skill, is what we do to deal with situations that are stressful, overwhelming, or difficult. What coping skills work depend on the person and the situation. Coping skills work differently for everyone.

SAFETY PLAN

A safety plan is a personalized plan created to help people in moments where they feel suicidal or in crisis. Safety plans should be, above all, personal and doable.

Most safety plans contain the following elements: warning signs, coping skills, distractions, personal contacts, professional contacts, safe environments.

SELF HARM

Self harm is the action of purposely harming one's body. It's important to note that self harm does not always mean someone is suicidal, however, people who engage in self harm can be more likely to attempt suicide in the future.

SOME TERMS TO KNOW...

MEANS

“Means”, or “lethal means” are any objects that can be used to end one's life or used to self harm. Eliminating someone's access to means (also known as “separation of means”) can help ensure their safety.

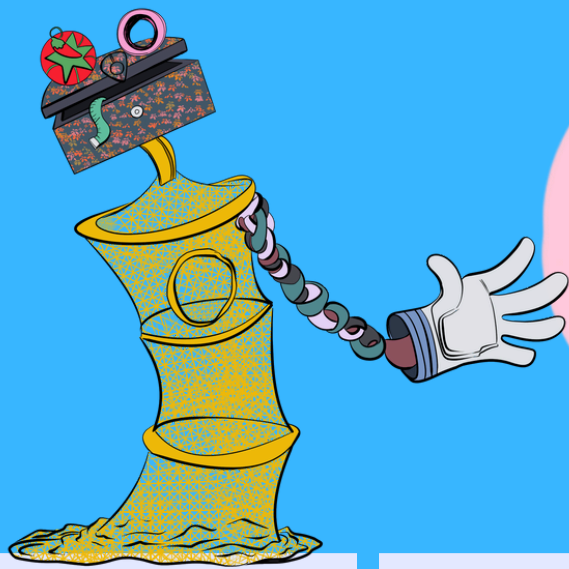
RISK ASSESSMENT

A suicide risk assessment is an assessment to determine if someone is at immediate risk for ending their life. This assessment takes into account ideation, suicidal intent, risk factors, protective factors (such as supports), and access to means to determine someone's risk. A risk assessment can be performed in a professional clinical setting, but some situations may require us to assess someone's risk quickly and safely in an open and collaborative conversation.

SUPPORTS

A support is any one person, group of people, or organization that can help someone who is experiencing suicidal ideation.





WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS/ IDEATION

Suicidal ideation (thoughts) are thoughts about dying or taking your own life. Suicidal thoughts can be both passive and active. Passive suicidal ideation are thoughts of suicide without a plan or intent to act on it. Active suicidal ideation are thoughts of suicide compounded with a plan and intent.

SUICIDE PLAN

A suicide plan is a specific plan (place, time, method) someone may have in place to take their life. It's important to note that someone may have a suicide plan in place, but not necessarily intent to act on it.

SUICIDAL INTENTION

Someone with suicidal intent intends on ending their life by suicide. A person with suicidal intent has active preparations to take their life.

It's vital to never minimize someone's suicide ideation, regardless on whether they have intent or not.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

How do we start a conversation with children about suicide and mental health?

It's important to facilitate conversations in a calm, supportive, and judgment free zone.

Be direct.

Be cognizant of your body language.

Be sure to actively listen and ask questions.

Thank the child for sharing.

It can be difficult or uncomfortable to start conversations about mental health. Below are some prompts that might help you begin the conversation at home.

Kids can sometimes feel so sad, they want to no longer be alive. Have you ever had thoughts like that?

Have you ever thought about harming yourself?

I've noticed you've been feeling angry lately. Is there something happening that has been causing you to feel this way?

How have you been feeling recently?

When you said you didn't want to wake up tomorrow, did you mean that you wanted to end your life?



SAFETY PLAN EXAMPLE

A safety plan is a personalized plan to help support someone in times of crisis. Safety plans can vary from person to person, as it is important that each stage of the plan is doable to the individual.

What are some of my warning signs?

Sweating Heavy breathing Ignoring friends
Trouble sleeping

What are some coping skills that work for me?

Count to 10 Going on a walk Self mirror talk
Deep breathing Making lists

What are my favorite distracrtrions?

Listening to music Dancing Gardening with mom

What is an enviornment I feel safe in?

The theatre With my dog
My room

Who are people in my personal life I can contact?

Grandma Jean AJ
Mom Ms. Tammy (my neighbor)

What are professional resources I can contact?

488 (suicide hotline) Mrs. Mary (school counselor)
Dr. Jones



MY SAFETY PLAN

What are some of my warning signs?

What are some coping skills that work for me?

What are my favorite distractors?

What is an environment I feel safe in?

Who are people in my personal life I can contact?

What are professional resources I can contact?