

Depression, Suicide & Self-Harm

Suicide deaths among 10- to 24-year-olds increased by 62% from 2007 to 2021, during the period when smartphone usage became commonplace among teens. For youth ages 10+, suicide is now the second leading cause of death. (*National Vital Statistics System*)

Depression: *Persistent sadness and hopelessness.*

Self-harm: *Hurting oneself on purpose to deal with painful emotions without the intent to end one's life.*

Digital self-harm: *Posting insulting or disparaging comments about oneself online/on social media.*

Suicide: *Deadly violence directed at oneself with the intent to end one's life.*

40% of US high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year.

20% reported seriously considering attempting suicide in the past year.

9% reporting attempting suicide in the past year.

— CDC's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey among US high school students

▶ Social Media Companies Admit Harms

According to TikTok's own records, young users are more vulnerable to online harms, including disrupted sleep, depression, increased loneliness, decreased empathy, increased anxiety, and more.

Internal Meta documents found 13% of UK teenagers and 6% of US teenagers surveyed traced a desire to kill themselves to Instagram.

Suicide content was recommended to a teen account within **2.6 minutes**.

— Wall Street Journal

Suicide risk factors rose significantly after **two or more hours a day** of time online.

— Twenge, 2017

The risk of depression **increased by 13%** for each additional hour adolescents spent on social media.

— Haidt, 2025

Smartphone and social media use has been implicated in increasing mental distress, self-harm, and suicidality in youth.

— Abi-Jaoude, 2020

Scan for full kit and more resources on each topic's tab



Online Harms Prevention Action Kit
fairplayforkids.org/onlineharmskit



▶ Protect Your Child

Delay giving your child a smartphone/social media as long as possible.

You can opt *not* to give your child an internet-connected device or social media. Some families find this easier than policing time and content on devices. Text-and-call-only phones are an alternative.

If you have already given your child/teen a smartphone, you can still transition back to a basic phone or no phone (see tips [here](#)). If your child exhibits significant phone dependency, seek support

from a mental health professional. [Reset Your Child's Brain](#) outlines a detailed plan.

Learn how to help your child with emotional regulation skills, problem-solving skills, and healthy coping strategies (see resources below).

Compare your social media feed (algorithms) with your child's.

Get clinical mental health counseling for your child and yourself if necessary.

▶ Start a Conversation

Example conversation if you believe your child is suicidal or self-harming:

Start the Conversation: I remember being your age and the struggle was real. I remember <social challenge you faced> and I could not see a solution. I can only imagine what that is like now with more technology. What pressures do you and your friends experience, and what is that like?

It's Important to Be Direct: Has it ever gotten so bad that you have thought about self-harm or wishing you weren't alive or thought about suicide?

Validate: Wow — thank you for sharing with me. I remember how much I struggled when I was your age. I really admire your strength and your courage to open up about something so scary or painful.

Collaborate: Can I share with you some things I do when I am feeling (anxious, depressed, lonely, etc.). I want you to know that as your parent, I can handle you talking to me about these scary and painful experiences, thoughts, or feelings. I also know it can be easier to speak to someone else, like a counselor or a therapist. Let's figure out how to get you the support you need. (Listen, repeat back and ask if you got it right)

By assuming solutions, parents are replacing hopelessness with confidence in a happier tomorrow.

▶ Take Action if you suspect your child is committing self-harm, dealing with depression, or suicidal ideation

- **Assess your environment.** Store anything that could be used to commit self-harm/suicide in a secure place.
- **Enlist professional help.** If you are worried your child may be suicidal, do not leave them alone. Call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800- 273-TALK. Take them to the ER if necessary.