

Online Harms Prevention TIP SHEETS FOR YOUTH

Know What's Up

Help spotting stuff that
seems off online

Spot the Warning Signs

What to watch for when
something feels wrong

Talk to Someone

How to bring it up
with an adult you trust

Get Help

Places to go
if you need support



TOPICS

- AI Chatbots
- Am I Cyberbullying Someone?
- Body Image, Appearance, and Digital Media
- Cyberbullying
- Drug Use and Fentanyl
- Gaming/Gambling
- Influencer Culture
- Online Challenges
- Sextortion
- Suicide Prevention



I WAS 13 YEARS OLD WHEN INSTAGRAM SPREAD THROUGH MY PHONE AND EVERY ONE OF MY FRIENDS' PHONES LIKE WILDFIRE...

Around that same time, Meta's own internal documents referred to preteens as "herd animals" who "want to find communities where they can fit in." That's not how a company describes people it's protecting. That's how a company describes a market.

Meta's own researchers knew what their product was doing to us. A 2019 internal slide stated plainly that Instagram makes "body image issues worse for one in three teen girls." Another company slide found that teens blamed Instagram for their rising anxiety and depression. Meta's own safety researchers later told Congress that Instagram hosted some of the largest scale sexual harassment of teenagers ever documented on a platform, and that senior executives knew about it and didn't act.

I lived through what those documents describe. I watched myself and my peers get pulled into feeds designed to keep us scrolling, comparing, and doubting ourselves. This resource is what I wished someone had put in my hands back then.

This project took a village to build, and I want to thank the people who helped make it:

Aarya Sivakumar
Cheryl Brown
Confidence Osein
Dawn Wible
Debby Jones
Jen Doty
Joann Bogard
Judy Rogg
Liana Vincent
Meg Stuhmer
Nicole Ooms
Randi Spiker
Tamara Sobel

I hope you give this to the person who needs it most. That might be you. It might be someone you love.

In community,

Vinaya



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IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Report hazardous content

like pro-eating-disorder content or appearance-based cyberbullying.

If it can't be removed, talk to a trusted adult at home or bring it to a teacher. Ask if it can become a class discussion on digital wellness and reporting.

Choose not to support companies, influencers, or platforms that make you feel bad about yourself.



REMEMBER

**You can change at least some of what you see,
how you react, and what you support.**

**Everyone has a right to feel good about
themselves, no matter what!**



National Alliance for Eating Disorders Call 1-866-662-1235

1. National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA): eating disorders prevention and treatment. <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/find-treatment/>

2. The Beautywell Project: education materials with focus on media, appearance, racism, skin colorism. <https://thebeautywell.org/education-materials/>

3. American Academy of Pediatrics: Social Media, Body Image & Self Esteem: What's the Connection? (2025). <https://tinyurl.com/3z5ten8s>

4. Children and Screens: Social Media and Youth Body Image: What to Know and What to Do (2026). <https://www.childrenandscreens.org/learn-explore/research/why-some-social-media-use-affects-body-image/>

5. NEDA: Media and Your Body Image: What You Need to Know. <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/media-body-image-what-you-need-to-know/>

6. Children and Screens: Digital Media and Youth Body Image (2025). <https://www.childrenandscreens.org/learn-explore/research/digital-media-and-youth-body-image/>



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AI CHATBOTS



Apps like ChatGPT, Snapchat, and Character.AI offer AI chatbots that act like friends having a conversation. Students may use them to get advice about relationships, mental health support, or help with homework, but unfortunately chatbots don't always tell the truth or have our best interests at heart.



SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

YOU SPEND MORE TIME talking to chatbots than you spend with friends and family.

THE CHATBOT makes you feel bad or guilty for not responding or for spending time with others.

THE CHATBOT is always agreeing with you, even when you might not be right.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Establish boundaries: Set a timer for when you use a chatbot and disable notifications so it doesn't disturb you at other times.

Disconnect: Set aside time each week to hang out with your friends and family with no technology and do something you enjoy together.

Verify what you're told: We can't believe everything chatbots say, so consider whether it would be better to ask a trusted adult or friend or look it up on the internet and verify it yourself.

Don't overshare: Don't share private or personal information about yourself or others with the chatbot. Behind every chatbot is a company eager to track and sell your information.





IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Delete your profile from the app and remove the app from your devices.

Tell a trusted adult, like a parent, caregiver, teacher, coach, or school counselor if you are having a hard time getting away.



REMEMBER

Technology is supposed to help, not hurt. If an AI chatbot is hurting you or someone else, it is always the right thing to ask a trusted adult for help.



NAMI Teen & Young Adult Helpline Call 1-800-950-NAMI (1-800-950-6264) or text Friend to 62640 (Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm ET)

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Call or text 988 for immediate mental health or substance use crisis support (free, confidential, 24/7)



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AM I CYBERBULLYING SOMEONE?



Cyberbullying is causing harm to a peer online, especially someone with less power. It's often on purpose and repeated. Sometimes it starts as a joke or "just messing around," but if it's hurting someone, it's still bullying.



SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

YOU POST OR SEND something mean, then feel a rush of excitement checking to see how people reacted.

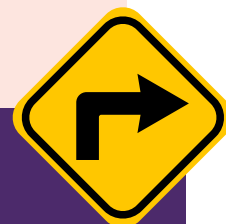
YOU KEEP GOING after someone even after they've asked you to stop.

YOU TELL YOURSELF "it's just a joke" when you know it actually hurt the other person.

YOU ACT DIFFERENTLY ONLINE than you would in person, like saying things you'd never say to someone's face.

YOU FEEL PRESSURE to keep it going because your friends are laughing along or expecting it.

YOU'VE MADE A FAKE ACCOUNT, spread a rumor, or shared something private about someone else.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Pause before you post: If you're angry, upset, or just want a reaction, wait before sending. A message you can't take back can do more damage than you meant.

Ask yourself how it would feel: Would you want this said or done to you? Would you say it to their face?

Notice the pull of the group: If friends are egging you on, it's still your choice whether to join in. You can be the one who says "that's not cool."

Talk to someone you trust: A parent, caregiver, teacher, counselor, or coach can help you figure out what's really going on, especially if you're angry or hurting about something else.

Understand the consequences: Decide whether you are prepared for the trouble that might come if a post you wrote is shared with your school or law enforcement.





IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Stop. Delete the post or message if you can, and don't send anything more.

Apologize sincerely. Not "sorry you're upset," but actually owning what you did and how it affected them.

Don't make excuses. "I was joking" or "everyone does it" doesn't undo the harm.

Talk to a trusted adult, especially if you're not sure how to fix things or if it's already gotten out of hand. They can help you make it right.

Think about what's underneath it. Sometimes people bully because they're dealing with their own stuff, like stress, insecurity, or things happening at home. Getting support for that can help you stop the cycle.



REMEMBER

Making a mistake doesn't mean you're a bad person—it means you have a chance to make things right. Owning it and changing your behavior is a strong and mature thing to do.



StopBullying.gov

Crisis Text Line Text HOME or HOLA to 741741

1. Crisis Text Line — Free 24/7 mental health support. In the U.S. and Canada, text HOME to 741741. <https://www.crisistextline.org>

2. 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — Immediate emotional support for anyone in crisis or feeling overwhelmed. <https://988lifeline.org>



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BODY IMAGE, APPEARANCE, AND DIGITAL MEDIA



Body image is how you see and feel about your body and physical appearance.



Negative body image is feeling bad, unhappy, or dissatisfied with how you look.



Healthy body image means accepting and valuing your body for what it is and what it can do, and feeling good about yourself!

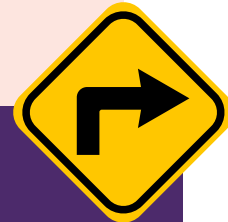


SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

FEELING WORSE about your body after scrolling social media. Comparing yourself to images that are digitally altered, filtered, or even changed with plastic surgery.

APPEARANCE OBSESSION, or feeling like you constantly need to check how you look.

FEELING "OFF" like having low self-esteem, anxiety, or feeling like you "need" plastic surgery or supplements to be okay.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Reflect: Think about how you and your friends talk about looks. Do you judge or compare yourselves or others? If so, it may be time to change the way you think.

Talk it out: Talk to friends and trusted adults about how media images make you feel and how you'd like to feel instead.

Remember what's real: Ads and influencers often use filters and edits to sell products. You don't have to look like them to be confident or enough.

Curate your feed: What you click on and how long you spend on it changes what shows up next. Follow people who help you feel good about yourself and unfollow those who don't. Try searching up fun hobby videos to bring new content into your feed.





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CYBERBULLYING



Cyberbullying is causing harm to a peer online, especially someone with less power. It's often on purpose and repeated.



SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

MEAN OR THREATENING MESSAGES keep happening.

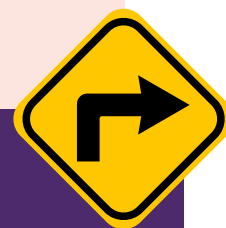
RUMORS OR EMBARRASSING POSTS are shared online.

SOMEONE PRETENDS to be another person online.

YOU FEEL SCARED, pressured, or unsafe after reading messages or posts.

A PERSON WON'T STOP contacting or targeting someone online.

SOMETHING FEELS OFF. Trust your gut and tell a trusted adult.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Keep personal info private: Limiting what you share (like your location, school, or phone number) reduces the risk of being targeted.

Use privacy settings: Adjust settings on apps so only people you trust can contact you or view your content.

Think before you respond: Pausing helps you avoid escalating the situation or sharing something you might regret.

Build a support circle: Staying connected with trusted friends and adults makes it easier to get help early.





IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Don't respond or engage.

Bullies often want a reaction and ignoring them can reduce their motivation.

Block and report

the account on the platform.

Tell a trusted adult,

like a parent, caregiver, teacher, school counselor, or coach.

If there are threats or ongoing harassment, report it to your school or local authorities.



REMEMBER

You deserve to feel safe online and offline. Speaking up and getting help is a strong and smart choice.



StopBullying.gov

Crisis Text Line Text HOME or HOLA to 741741

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ONLINE CHALLENGES

▶ **An online challenge** is a dare or activity you follow, record, and upload (usually inspired by online influencers) so your online friends can view and like your post. Risks range from getting in trouble at school or at home to bodily injury or death to yourself or someone else. Some challenges can also take a toll on your mental health, since they can involve humiliation, bullying, or self-harm. Someone might try a challenge out of curiosity, peer pressure, competition, boredom, or to get clicks and likes.



SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

FEELING LIKE you “should take your turn” on a challenge.

NOT FULLY UNDERSTANDING the risks of a challenge before trying it.

FEELING LIKE you can’t talk about it with your most trusted adult.

NOT FEELING COMFORTABLE saying “not for me!”

FEELING FOMO, or the fear of missing out, from not taking part in a viral challenge.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Self-check: Ask yourself how you feel about the activity and whether you’re being asked or pressured into it.

Peer-check: Share what you’re considering with people who truly care about you, not just people who want to see the video.

Have a safety plan: Know who can help you if you need it and how they can help.

Take 30 seconds: Pause and consider the possible consequences before you act.

Investigate: Before you take the same risk, find out what happened to other people who tried the activity.





IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Self-check again.

Ask yourself how you're really feeling about what you're doing.

Talk to a trusted adult and listen to their advice. They may see risks you don't.

Take a break from screens. Step away and see if you feel better without them.

Don't use screens behind closed doors, like bedrooms, bathrooms, etc.

Report dangerous challenges in the app when you see them. It helps protect others too.



REMEMBER

You are smart and strong, and remember that there are people who care about your safety and are always there to listen, like a trusted adult, parent, caregiver, older sibling, school counselor, friend's parent, or youth leader.



YouthLine Call 1-877-968-8491 or text "teen2teen" to 839863 (free, confidential peer-to-peer support from trained teen volunteers)

Learn more about the risks at erikscause.org



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DRUG USE & FENTANYL



Drugs, vaping, alcohol, and fentanyl are topics that many young people hear about every day—online, at school, or through friends. If you or a friend are in danger from drugs or fentanyl overdoses, understanding the truth will help you get back on track for a healthy life.



SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

One sign alone doesn't necessarily mean someone is using drugs. Many of these behaviors can also be related to stress, mental health challenges, or normal changes during adolescence. The key is noticing multiple changes that are unusual for you or a friend:

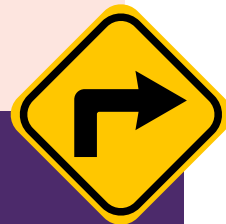
SUDDENLY becoming secretive or dishonest.

SPENDING TIME with a new group of friends while distancing from longtime friends.

A DROP IN GRADES or school attendance.

TROUBLE CONCENTRATING or remembering things.

UNUSUAL SLEEP PATTERNS (sleeping much more or less than normal).



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

If you're concerned about yourself:

Be honest with yourself about how often and why you're using. Noticing the pattern is the first step to changing it.

Talk to a trusted adult, counselor, coach, parent, or caregiver, even if it feels hard. They're there to help, not to punish you.

Remember that asking for help early is easier than waiting until things get worse.

If you're concerned about a friend or family member:

Check in privately and without judgment.

Focus on what you've noticed rather than making accusations.

Encourage them to connect with a trusted adult, counselor, coach, parent, or caregiver.

If you think they may be in immediate danger, seek help from an adult right away.





IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Talk with them when they're sober and in a private place.

Offer to go with them for help.

Let them share their perspective—avoid arguing, threatening, or lecturing.

Getting help is not “snitching”—it’s looking out for someone’s well-being.

Remember that you don’t have to agree with their choices to show you care.

Know the signs of an overdose. If someone is unconscious, difficult to wake up, or having trouble breathing, call 9-1-1 immediately.



REMEMBER

You can’t make someone stop using drugs, but you can let them know they matter, encourage them to get help, and connect them with trusted adults who can support them. Sometimes caring enough to speak up is the most important thing you can do.



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Call or text 988 for immediate mental health or substance use crisis support (free, confidential, 24/7)

YouthLine Call 1-877-968-8491 or text “teen2teen” to 839863 (free, confidential peer-to-peer support from trained teen volunteers)



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GAMING/ GAMBLING



Learning about the risks of online gaming and gambling can help you stay in control and make smart choices. These games and apps are often designed to keep you playing, and they can conceal key facts like the real costs and odds involved.



SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

SPENDING MORE AND MORE TIME on gambling apps, betting sites, or games with gambling features (such as loot boxes or skin betting).

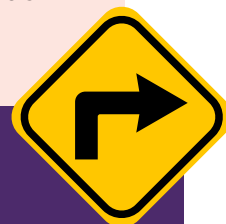
BEING SECRETIVE about your (or a friend's) online activity, spending, or gaming accounts.

FREQUENTLY TALKING about winning money or trying to make money through gambling.

BORROWING OR ASKING FOR MONEY without a clear reason.

BECOMING UPSET, ANXIOUS, OR IRRITABLE when unable to gamble or access gaming platforms.

NEGLECTING school, sports, hobbies, family time, or friendships.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Set limits for yourself: Decide in advance how much time or money you're comfortable spending, and stick to it. It's easier to stay in control before you start than once you're in the middle of a game.

Learn how these features are designed: Loot boxes, betting apps, and "just one more try" mechanics are built to keep you engaged. Understanding how they work can make it easier to make informed choices.

Question the odds: If a game or app makes winning seem easy or guaranteed, that's a red flag. The odds are almost always in favor of the app, not you.

Check in and listen without judgment if a friend seems to be struggling: A caring conversation can help them feel supported and less alone.

Share your concerns using specific examples if you're worried about a friend: This can help them recognize behaviors they may not have noticed themselves.

Encourage healthy activities you can do together: Spending time on sports, hobbies, or other interests can reduce the time spent gaming/gambling, for you and your friends.

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IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, teacher, or counselor, about what you're experiencing. You don't have to figure this out alone.

Take a break from the app or platform. Stepping away, even temporarily, can help you regain a sense of control.

If it's a friend, talk to them privately and let them know you care. People are more likely to seek help when they feel supported, not judged.

Be honest about what you've noticed. Sharing specific concerns can help a friend see the impact their behavior is having.

Avoid lending money. This can help prevent the problem from getting worse and encourages a real solution instead.



REMEMBER

Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. If gaming or gambling is causing stress or affecting school, friendships, sleep, or money, talking to someone today can be the first step toward feeling more in control and getting back to the things that matter most.



National Problem Gambling Helpline Call or text 1-800-MY-RESET (1-800-697-3738) for free, confidential, 24/7 help for anyone concerned about their own gambling or someone else's



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INFLUENCER CULTURE

▶ **Social media creators** with many followers on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube can use their popularity to persuade their audience that this is the right way to think, the right thing to buy, and the right way to live.

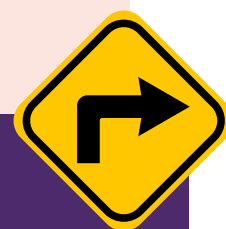


SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

EVERYTHING LOOKS TOO PERFECT. The video will be perfectly set up. A skincare influencer will always be in a super bright, clean room. An art influencer might have colored pencils spread out to look messy, but on purpose.

THE CREATOR OVERSHARES PERSONAL STORIES. They talk about times they were bullied or made mistakes. You can't prove these stories are true, but you feel special because they trusted you enough to share.

THE CREATOR USES CERTAIN PHRASES. Phrases like "A lot of you have been asking about my routine..." or "This isn't sponsored, I just love it!" are usually part of the act.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Turn off autoplay and stay off the "For You" page: Apps push videos that get people mad or excited because it keeps you scrolling, which makes the creators more money.

Remember they aren't real friends: Creators only show you the parts of their lives that match their online persona. You only see this character, and they don't see you at all.

Ask yourself questions: Why are they telling me to buy this? Are they getting paid? Do they have real expertise about what they're recommending, or is it just an opinion?





IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Do a reality check. Look at your purchases and your opinions. Do you really like and believe these things, or are they the beliefs and interests of your favorite creator?

Hit unfollow or take a break. If a creator is living in your brain, unfollow or mute them for a month, and take time to figure out what you actually care about.

Wait before you buy. If you really want a product you see being promoted, don't buy it right away. Wait two days. If you still want it and believe it's worth your own money, then consider making the purchase but always confirm the return policy before you do.



REMEMBER

Influencers design a character that creates a sense of trust with their followers, making it easier to convince their audience to believe something, buy something, or do something.



CaNAMLE (National Association for Media Literacy Education)
News Literacy Project

1. The Rise of Influencer Culture and and Its Psychological, Social, and Behavioral Impact on Youth. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391168118_The_Rise_of_Influencer_Culture_and_Its_Psychological_Social_and_Behavioral_Impact_on_Youth

2. Effective influencer marketing: A social identity perspective. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0969698922001199?via%3Dihub>

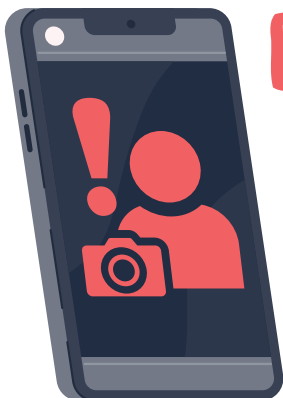
3. Social media influencers and followers' conspicuous consumption: The mediation of fear <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11385768/>

4. Cross-Cultural Analysis of Influencer Marketing: Meta-Analysis and Meta-Regression of Factors and Effects. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10641734.2025.2529006>



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SEXTORTION

▶ **Sextortion** happens when someone is tricked into sending naked or sexual pictures or videos of themselves. Once the photos are sent, the perpetrator threatens to share them unless the victim does something for them, like sending money or more pictures. Sextortion is a form of sexual exploitation, and it's a crime. Teen boys aged 14-17 are especially targeted in money scams, but anyone can become a victim.



SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

THESE CYBERCRIMINALS may pretend to be your age. Scammers often try to gain trust quickly. They may act friendly, flirt, or pretend to like you.

IT CAN FEEL GOOD AT FIRST. Someone might make you feel really special, understood, or “seen” in a way that feels flattering. That feeling itself can be part of how trust gets built quickly, so it's worth staying alert even when it feels nice.

SOMEONE MIGHT push the relationship or conversation forward fast, or make you feel like what you have is uniquely close or secret.

SOMEONE MIGHT ask for personal or private info, like your phone number or address.

THEY MAY WANT to move chats to a private app or ask for secret conversations.

A MESSAGE makes you feel uncomfortable, scared, or pressured.

SOMETHING JUST FEELS OFF. Trust your gut, even if you can't explain why.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Keep social media accounts private.

Only talk to people you know in real life: If you don't know someone, don't share private information with them.

Protect your image: AI and “nudify” apps can create fake images, even if you never sent a real picture.

Be cautious online: Someone might be using a fake profile picture or sharing fake pictures. Don't believe everything you see.





IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Don't respond or engage.

Screenshot or save any messages as evidence.

Don't pay them money or gift cards. Many times the criminal keeps threatening even after payment.

Tell someone, even if you're embarrassed. Talk to a trusted adult (a parent, caregiver, teacher, coach, or school counselor).

Report it on the platform, to the Cyber Tipline at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children ([report.cybertip.org](https://www.fbi.gov/cybertip)), and to your local law enforcement.



REMEMBER

Sextortion is a crime, and it's never your fault. Asking for help is always the right move. You are not in trouble. You are not alone.



CyberTipline (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children)

Take It Down — helps get content removed from circulation

FBI Sextortion Help

Sextortion Education (NetSmartz)

1. <https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/topics/sextortion>
2. <https://www.missingkids.org/blog/2025/spike-in-online-crimes-against-children-a-wake-up-call>



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screen time
action network
at fairplay

SUICIDE PREVENTION



Spending time online can sometimes mean seeing content about self-harm or suicide, and this kind of content can be harder to shake off if you or a friend are already struggling with sadness. Knowing the signs—in yourself or someone else—and knowing what to do can genuinely save a life, including your own.



SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

ACTING DIFFERENTLY ONLINE, like posting a lot less than usual, posting repeated messages about being upset, or getting into more arguments than normal.

PULLING AWAY from friends, family, or activities you used to enjoy.

SAYING THINGS like “I can’t take it anymore,” “I’m a burden to everyone,” or “Nothing will help now.”

BIG CHANGES in sleep, appetite, or how much someone cares about their appearance.

FEELING HOPELESS, worthless, or like a burden, or noticing a friend seems to feel that way.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Talk to a trusted adult: If this is you, talk to a parent, caregiver, teacher, school counselor, or coach. You don’t have to explain everything at once, just start with “I’m not okay.”

Reach out to a crisis line if talking to someone you know feels too hard: Call or text 988, or text HOME to 741741. Both are free, confidential, and available right now.

Say something if this is a friend: Asking “are you okay?” or “I’ve noticed you seem really down lately” doesn’t make things worse. Staying silent is what makes someone feel more alone.

Listen without judging, arguing, or trying to fix it right away: Sometimes people just need to know someone’s paying attention.

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IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if you or someone you're with is in immediate danger. Don't wait.

Don't leave the person alone if you're worried they're in danger right now.

Call or text 988. They can help you figure out the next step, whether it's you or a friend who's struggling.

Tell a trusted adult, even if a friend asks you to keep it a secret. This isn't betraying them, it's protecting them.



REMEMBER

You don't have to have the right words, and you don't have to fix everything. Just showing you care and getting a trusted adult involved is often the most important thing you can do—for a friend or for yourself.



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Call or text 988 for immediate mental health or substance use crisis support (free, confidential, 24/7)

Crisis Text Line Text HOME or HOLA to 741741

The Trevor Project Call 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678-678 (for LGBTQ+ young people)

YouthLine Call 1-877-968-8491 or text "teen2teen" to 839863 (free, confidential peer-to-peer support from trained teen volunteers)

CONTROLLING WHAT YOU SEE ONLINE

<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/online-safety-resources/controlling-what-you-see-online/>

IF YOU SEE WORRYING CONTENT ONLINE

<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/online-safety-resources/if-you-see-worrying-content-online/>

SUPPORTING SOMEONE WHO MIGHT BE AT RISK

<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/online-safety-resources/supporting-someone-online-who-might-be-risk-self-harm-or-suicide/>



Online Harms
Prevention Work Group
fairplayforkids.org

