

Virtually supporting students

Here are some tips for teachers engaged in virtual distance learning to support students that may have suicidal thoughts.

Start your session

When you start the virtual interaction, consider asking the following questions and document them.

- **Where are you today (address/location)? If we get disconnected what number should I use to reach you at?**
- **Who is with you today in the room or house?**
- **Where are your parents/guardians? (how could they be reached if needed)**

When you feel concerned about suicide thoughts:

Listen to the student and be aware of any suicide warning signs. (see list below)

Take any threats seriously and ask directly about suicide.

- **“Sometimes when people are this overwhelmed (list any observed invitations/warning signs) they are thinking about suicide, are you thinking about suicide?”**

Wait for an answer and continue listening.

- **“I am listening, this is important. I want to help.”**

Conduct screening (if in place in your school protocols)

Follow any current school protocols using approved screening tools such as the Columbia Suicide Severity Scale [Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale \(http://cssrs.columbia.edu/\)](http://cssrs.columbia.edu/).

If trained in use of the tool, complete the screening tool with student and parent, following recommendations

Ask about any access the student has to lethal means (firearms, medications, Tylenol)

Intervention steps

Your role is to **link** the student to a resource to keep them safe and further assess their suicide risk. (Refer back to your specific school protocols for approved resources)

1. Make contact with parent/guardian to talk through your concern.
2. Contact the designated staff person in your school district and follow any protocols in place.
3. Contact your mobile crisis team. Find them at [Children's mental health crisis response phone numbers \(https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/people-with-disabilities/health-care/childrens-mental-health/resources/crisis-contacts.jsp\)](https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/people-with-disabilities/health-care/childrens-mental-health/resources/crisis-contacts.jsp).

4. Call social services or law enforcement and request a well check.
5. If you believe the student to be in imminent danger, stay connected with them and call 911.
6. Other tips to remember:
 - Be aware of any existing school or district protocols for supporting students with thoughts of suicide. Have crisis numbers available.
 - **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255**
 - **Crisis Text Line Text “MN” to 741 741**
 - Note the student’s location/address and emergency contact information in case you need to contact emergency services.
 - Prior to contact, develop a plan for how to stay on the phone with the student while arranging emergency response, if needed.
 - Suicide involves the complex interplay of multiple factors.
 - Sometimes stressful life circumstances can serve as tipping points and trigger suicidal behavior in adolescents especially students who might already be at increased risk.
 - In your virtual interaction, be aware of what you see and hear going on in the environment. Listen to the students feelings and notice any underlying messages.

Youth suicide warning signs:

The presence of more than one of the following warning signs may increase a youth’s risk for engaging in suicidal behaviors in the near future:

1. Talking about or making plans for suicide
2. Expressing hopelessness about the future
3. Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
4. Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, particularly in the presence of the warning signs above. Specifically, this includes significant:
 - Withdrawal from or changing in social connections/situation
 - Changes in sleep (increased or decreased)
 - Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
 - Recent increased agitation or irritability

Source: [SAVE \(www.save.org\)](http://www.save.org)