



# Quick Facts: ADHD and Risk of Suicide

Children and teens who have ADHD are at a **higher risk for thinking about or attempting suicide** than their peers without ADHD. The presence of a co-occurring mental health condition can increase this risk.

## Understanding the relationship between ADHD and thinking about suicide

When children and teens are at risk for harming themselves, the term “suicidal ideation” is used. This includes thoughts of taking one’s own life but also wishing for one’s own death or thinking that the world or loved ones would be better off without them. When those thoughts happen momentarily or in passing, they may be upsetting but could be an expression of frustration. However, frequently occurring thoughts of taking one’s own life, particularly in connection with depression or other co-occurring conditions, increase the risk for death by suicide.

The **symptoms of ADHD**—being inattentive or hyperactive-impulsive or a combination of these—often lead to failures and frustrations in academics and social life. A child or teen with ADHD may receive multiple negative messages from others because of their behavior or lack of success.

When a child or teen feels they have continually let others down, that they have disappointed themselves, or that they are reprimanded for things difficult to control due to ADHD symptoms, they may react with anxiety, constantly worrying about what might happen next that is beyond their control. They may also react with anger and frustration, become defiant, or stop feeling motivated to do what is expected. Depression may develop following repeated failures, frequent negative feedback, or feeling nothing can be done to improve the situation.

A diagnosis of ADHD and depression does not necessarily place a child or teen at risk of death from suicide, but it can increase the risk based on the circumstances. Having ADHD and other **mental, emotional, or behavioral**



## Get Help Now

### 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

(formerly the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)  
Call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline by dialing or texting 988 or call 1-800-273-8255. You can chat online at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

### Crisis Text Line

**Crisis Text Line** is a texting service for emotional crisis support. To speak or text with a trained listener, text HELLO to 741741. It is free, available 24/7, and confidential.

### Veterans Crisis Line and Military Crisis Line

These are for all veterans, active military members, and their families and loved ones. Call 988 or 1-800-273-8255 and press 1. You can text the crisis line at 838255.

disorders together is common. These disorders can have independent causes, but they can also be caused or made worse by having ADHD, particularly if the child or teen does not receive treatment or the right support.

### Treatment of ADHD with suicidal ideation

Someone expressing symptoms of hopelessness or suicidal thoughts needs to be taken seriously and receive proper treatment that fits their individual needs. Effective therapy for ADHD can help decrease the risk for other mental, behavioral, and emotional concerns, particularly if combined with accommodations in school and support at home.

Getting the right [accommodations in school](#) is an important piece of the puzzle to prevent and manage stress, to make sure that children are getting an appropriate level of academic challenge and the right level of support so they can stay motivated to learn and make progress.

[Behavior therapy](#), particularly [parent training in behavior management](#), has been shown to be effective, when combined with medication. Therapy and [medication management](#) can play an important role in decreasing the symptoms of anxiety, anger, and depression related to ADHD.

Having ADHD and another condition is described as “complex ADHD” and can affect the type of treatment that works best. Medication may need to be fine-tuned if there are other diagnoses, since ADHD medications can affect mood either positively or negatively, depending on the child or teen. Behavior therapy, including parent training, is effective for ADHD and can also help with anger and anxiety symptoms. Specific approaches like [cognitive behavior therapy](#) or dialectic behavior therapy may be needed to help older children and teens with emotional and behavioral dysregulation.

### What to do if someone is considering suicide

If someone you know—a child, teen, or another adult—is at immediate risk of taking their own life, take them to the emergency room or contact their healthcare provider. Call 911 if necessary. You can also contact the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) by dialing or texting 988 or by calling 1-800-273-8255 for advice or to connect them with a trained crisis worker who will listen, provide support, and



### Resources to Develop a Safety Plan

#### [Brown-Stanley Safety Plan Template \(PDF\)](#)

*A worksheet for an individual in distress or someone who cares for a person in distress and wants to help.*

#### [A Guide for Taking Care of Your Family Member After Treatment in the Emergency Department](#) SAMHSA Publications and Digital Products

*This brochure was developed by and for family members whose loved one attempted suicide. It provides information about what to expect in the emergency room, and how to take care of yourself and your family member following the attempt.*

share local resources for assistance in a crisis. You can also chat online at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat).

Often, but not always, a person who is considering suicide may express a wish to die before they make an attempt. Ask your child or teen about suicide and talk with them about warning signs, triggers, and what to do and where to turn if they have thoughts of ending their life. They may report details of a specific plan for how they would die by suicide. This can be an opportunity to guide the teen or child toward important and life-saving resources.

### If someone says they are considering taking their own life:

**Listen.** Let them know you hear what they are saying and take them seriously. Agree with them that what they are feeling or experiencing is difficult for them. Encourage them to keep talking.

**Offer support.** In whatever way that is appropriate, let the person know you are there for them, that you care about them and their well-being, and that you are ready



to help them find the assistance they need. Be cautious in what you agree to do, and do not promise more than you can do. Your goal is to connect the person with professionals who are trained to help.

**Stay calm and help them connect with professional support.** Whether the person has shared a vague “I don’t want to be here, it might be better if I wasn’t” or has said “I want to/I plan to take my life,” remain calm and accepting. Ask questions about what they mean in saying these things and assure them that they are wanted and needed, even if it does not feel that way. If possible, help the person connect with professional help, either through the [Lifeline](#), their own medical provider, visiting the emergency room, or contacting 911 if necessary.

If the person has stated they have a plan to end their own life or you think there could be a plan, stay with them until you can connect them to professional or emergency medical care or until help arrives. If possible, remove anything they could use to harm themselves from the location.

**Create open lines of communication.** Develop a [safety plan](#). Remove firearms and other means of harm from the home or other living situation.

The risk of suicide can be significantly reduced when the warning signs are recognized and action is taken. Proper treatment for ADHD and other mental health conditions includes careful listening from friends and family members. The support of professionals can help a person begin to feel better and to find positive solutions to the difficulties they are facing at this time.

