

Practical Prompts

To Talk to Youth About Suicide

63% of teens report being comfortable talking to parents/guardians about mental health needs, but fewer than half report actually doing it ([NAMI 2022](#)).
These prompts help close the gap.

More than 20% of teens have seriously considered suicide. [APA 2023](#)



Understand the Intensity of Their Emotions

"When you're feeling the most sad or awful about your life, how bad does it feel? Pretty awful? OK, pretty awful or very awful?"

"When you're feeling very awful, how alone do you feel with it? Pretty alone? Or all alone?"



Recall Specific Moments

"Take me to the last time you felt like that. **Was it 3:00 am on Thursday, we kinda heard you playing music and walking back and forth in your room? We've noticed you just haven't been yourself lately...**When was the last time you felt that?"

Note: Talking about something you've noticed can help take them back to that moment and shows them that they're seen.



Remain Calm and Curious

Mention any warning signs you may have seen. Listen attentively and without judgment. Use open-ended questions to encourage deeper conversation, avoiding quick solutions that may shut down communication. Validate and support their emotions by following their lead by saying, "**I promise not to judge, and my support for you will never waver, regardless of the challenges.**"



Provide Safety

"When you're feeling that way, or close to that way, I want you to do whatever it takes to get my undivided attention."

"We might have a million things on our minds, and we can get distracted unintentionally, but **there's nothing more important to either of us than helping you feel less alone**, especially when you feel that awful. Will you do that, please?"

HELPFUL TIPS

- Positively reinforce when they share, whether or not it's positive or not.
- Engage with your teenager when they appear relaxed and receptive.
- Don't take what they say personally
- Take a timeout if needed and revisit the conversation later


Mental Health. For Life.

 www.giveanhour.org

*credit to psychiatrist Dr. Mark Goulston