

RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO SUICIDE RISK IN TEENS

A Quick Toolkit

PACIFIC CLINICS

WHY IT MATTERS

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10 to 24 in the U.S. Black adolescents have seen a more than 60% increase in suicide rates over the past two decades, outpacing all other racial or ethnic groups. Yet, they are far less likely to receive mental health care.

This guide is designed to equip caring adults with the tools to recognize when teens, particularly Black youth, may be struggling with suicidal thoughts and to know how to respond effectively and compassionately.



RECOGNIZING CHARACTERISTICS OF A STRUGGLING TEEN

Identifying warning signs early can save a life. Teens often express emotional distress in ways that are subtle or misunderstood. Cultural stigma, fear, or distrust may keep them from asking for help directly.

Common Risk Factors:

- History of trauma, abuse or loss
- Depression, anxiety or hopelessness
- Bullying, racism or identity-based harassment
- Family conflict or rejection
- Isolation or lack of trusted support

Warning Signs to Watch For:

- Talking or writing about death or wanting to disappear
- Withdrawing from friends, school or activities
- Sudden mood swings or prolonged sadness
- Giving away possessions or saying goodbye
- Risk-taking, self-harm or reckless behavior

Cultural Consideration

Black youth may not always verbalize emotional pain. They may report physical symptoms like headaches or stomachaches, or express distress through irritability or silence. Cultural stigma and systemic racism can compound feelings of isolation.



WHAT TO DO RIGHT AWAY: THE QPR METHOD

QPR

stands for Question, Persuade and Refer

—a proven, simple method to help someone in crisis.

Question

Ask directly and calmly: “Are you thinking about suicide?” It’s okay to ask. It shows you care.

Persuade

Listen without judgment. Offer reassurance: “You’re not alone. Let’s find someone who can help.”

Refer

Listen without judgment. Offer reassurance: “You’re not alone. Let’s find someone who can help.”



Do

- Stay calm and present
- Be direct, kind and nonjudgmental
- Involve a trusted adult if you're a peer

Don't

- Promise secrecy
- Minimize their feelings
- Leave them by themselves

WHAT TO DO NEXT: FOLLOW-UP AND RECOVERY

The first conversation is just the beginning. Ongoing support is critical to keeping teens safe and helping them heal.



WITHIN 72 HOURS:

Check in with the youth. Ask how they're doing and if they've connected to support.



WITHIN 30 DAYS:

Confirm they're linked to services like therapy, school support or crisis care. Address barriers such as transportation or family support.

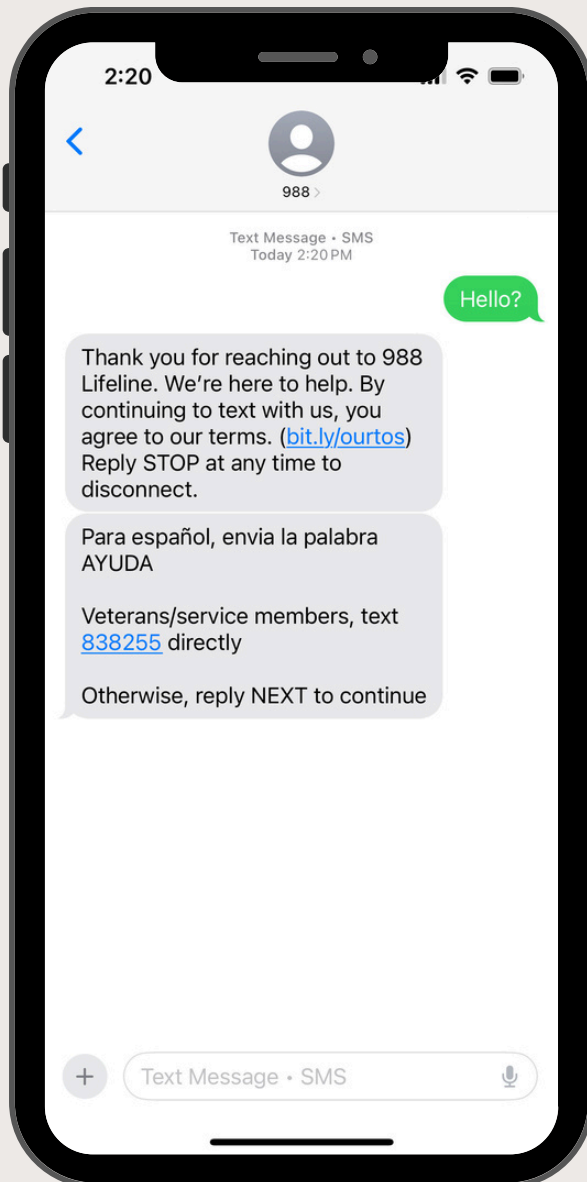


ONGOING

Celebrate small wins. Support attendance in therapy or peer groups. Reinforce hope, connection and cultural pride. Recovery is not linear, but connection makes it possible.

WHERE TO GET HELP

If you are concerned about a young person, act.
Your presence, your words and your support can save a life.



- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call or text)**
- **Pacific Clinics: Mental health services across California**
- **School counselors, faith leaders or mentors**
- **Local mental health urgent care centers**

