

| CALIFORNIA PREGNANCY-ASSOCIATED MORTALITY REVIEW

Is your loved one showing signs of suicidal thinking during or after pregnancy?

What the loved ones of parents-to-be need to know



At MCAH we believe all parents, babies, and families deserve to live their best lives. Yet one in three pregnant people experience clinically significant anxiety or depression symptoms during or after pregnancy. In the United States, between 5% and 14% of pregnant and postpartum people have thoughts or intentions of self-harm, or suicidal ideation – a strong risk factor for suicide. This fact sheet is created to bring awareness to this important topic and to provide information about the risk factors for suicide during and after pregnancy.

Suicide among pregnant or recently pregnant people can sometimes be prevented when someone intervenes.¹ Use this information to help assess whether your loved one needs help.



Understand what to look for:

Positive Signs:^{1 & 3}

- ▶ Access to effective behavioral health care
- ▶ Connectedness to individuals, family, community, peer support
- ▶ A sense of purpose or meaning in life
- ▶ Cultural, religious or personal beliefs that discourage suicide

Warning Signs:^{2 & 3}

- ▶ History of mental health conditions or suicide attempt(s)
- ▶ Extreme mood swings
- ▶ Misuse and abuse of alcohol, illegal drugs or prescription opioids before pregnancy
- ▶ New onset of mental health condition during or after pregnancy
- ▶ Exposure to violence/trauma (physical, sexual or emotional), intimate partner violence or incarceration
- ▶ Recent pregnancy loss, loss of a child or a loved one

How you can help:

- ▶ Use these tips to ask how they are feeling:⁴
 - Choose a good time, and somewhere without distractions
 - Acknowledge their emotions
 - Show care and concern without judgement
 - Avoid giving your view of what's wrong, or what they should do
- ▶ Work with them to develop a [safety plan](#)
- ▶ If you think they may need help, support them in getting the care they need
 - "I understand if it feels awkward or uncomfortable to go see a counselor. But there is a phone number we can call to talk to somebody. Maybe they can help?"
 - Stay connected by following up with your loved one to see how they are doing. Give them a call or send a text.

Use open questions that need more than a yes/no answer:

- ▶ "How are you feeling?"⁵
- ▶ "I am here for you whenever you want to talk."⁴
- ▶ "I care about you and am here to listen. Do you want to talk about what's been going on?"⁵
- ▶ "I've been worried about you. Can we talk? If not, who are you comfortable talking to?"⁵
- ▶ "What have you been doing to take care of yourself?"
- ▶ "What are your plans in the near or far future?"



Resources:

- ▶ [Local Mental Health Assistance](#)
- ▶ [988 lifeline to text or call for yourself](#)
- ▶ [988 lifeline to help someone else](#)
- ▶ [Know the Signs](#)
- ▶ [Maternal Mental Health](#)
- ▶ Postpartum Support International: Helpline 1-800-944-4773
- ▶ [Helpful Tips for Partners & Families](#)



References

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Suicide Prevention Risk and Protective Factors. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/factors/index.html>
2. CA-Pregnancy Associated Mortality Review Report: Pregnancy Associated Suicide 2002-2012. 2019. Available at <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CFH/DMCAH/CDPH%20Document%20Library/PAMR/CA-PAMR-Report-2.pdf>
3. 988 Lifeline. How we can all prevent suicide. Available at <https://988lifeline.org/how-we-can-all-prevent-suicide/>
4. SAMHSA: Helping Your Loved One Who Is Suicidal: A Guide for Family and Friends. Available at https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Digital_Download/PEP20-01-03-001.pdf
5. SAMHSA: Families Conversation Guide. Available at <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/starting-the-conversation-guide.pdf>