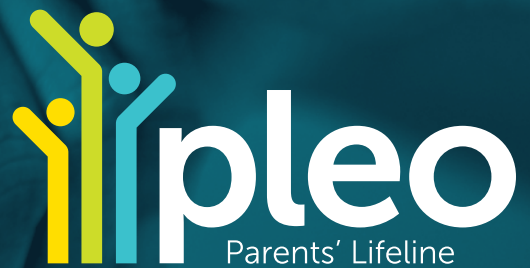


Supporting Parents of Suicidal Youth: Accessing Services



The information offered here is the product of a parent-led project that brought together parents and youth with lived experience, clinicians, and experts in suicide prevention to offer tips for help and hope based on their front-line experience.

PART A - What can help parents based on experience

Learn about the availability of different services and put supports in place for your child as soon as you realize they are struggling

(i.e. family doctor, counsellor, Employee Assistance Program, walk-in clinics, Kids' Help Phone, referral to a local children's hospital). If appropriate, get a psycho-educational assessment to explore if a learning exceptionality is driving the behaviour. It often takes a long time to get a psycho-educational assessment through the school but benefit plans may cover a portion of the cost to have it done privately. Find treatment specific to your child's needs/diagnosis/experience (i.e. trauma, eating disorders, self-harm). Remember the importance of psychological support to build long term stability, particularly in cases of severe mental illness.

Seek out sustainable services for at least the medium term. There are many short-term options but it's difficult to access sustainable services so relapse may be likely. Be proactive and ask questions so that you can figure out how the professional(s) will play a role in your family's plan to manage the situation. Build on services such as

regular contact with a social worker or intervention worker in the system who can ensure proper follow-up.

Get agreement from your child to seek support. Compile a list of services in the area that your child can try contacting (i.e. emmentalhealth.ca, crisis lines/mobile crisis, counselling, mental health professionals, support groups, mental health facilities, info disseminated through the school system). Give your child some control and/or input into the process of lining up services. (i.e. knowing what waitlists they've been placed on, length of waitlists, what they could do/need to do in the meantime, changes.) Allow your child to choose their therapist and provide financial support if possible.

We've been there, we get it and
we can help. Call PLEO now
1.855.775.7005

Know the signs to distinguish when a youth needs immediate crisis help vs. other supports, so they get the right services at the right time (i.e. hospital vs. crisis/helplines vs. support groups vs. counselling).

Remember your child will need to do much of the “hard work” for themselves – it is likely unrealistic to expect a quick fix. It is a matter of them learning coping skills, self-awareness, grounding techniques, and gradually maturing. Learn how to guide your child through their coping strategies – especially helpful when they are in the thick of it, and need help to regulate and think rationally. You can offer resources, but if your child does not want to participate, you have to step back. They may change their mind if given time to consider options.

Remember there is no one answer and no one right way, every child is unique.

Realize some children are highly sensitive and they are not resilient. They need to be trained to be resilient.

Involvement of a child’s friends can be very helpful, depending on their relationships.

Fully engaging is the most valuable investment of your time; your child needs you.

You may need to help them find purpose and a reason to live while you’re on waiting lists for services.

Education is the key as parents we don’t always realize what is going in our child’s life, bullying, sexual identity, divorce, abuse and the list goes on. Use observation tools/skills to deal more effectively with children

Know what works for your child and stick with that, adjusting as necessary. Sometimes you need to go back to the basics with youth – i.e. teaching crafts, skills/things to do to keep their hands busy.

Be persistent. Use all and any connections possible in order to access the services you need. Going to the emergency department doesn’t always result in on-going services. Persistence is a skill! If you have a very positive or negative experience, make a complaint or register praise.

Be patient – it can take a long time to find the right professionals to help your child and family. Remember, time changes everything. There are no quick fixes, especially with severe mental illness.

Sit down with your child when not in crisis to make a “when in crisis” plan with the services and strategies that have worked in the past.

- Note tools/coping **strategies that worked at different levels of crisis**, (i.e. number scale 1-10, add tool/coping strategy to every level of intensity so that you know how to assist your child in each coping strategy).
- Create a tool/coping **strategy box** full of activities, distractions (i.e. focus on five senses, comforting sights, sounds, tastes, touch, smells, great grounding techniques to de-escalate the intensity of feelings), and cue cards for your child to help start a difficult conversation on how they’re feeling.
- Set up a **communication system** between child and parent so you can team up to work together, such as code words or checking in periodically to see which intensity number they’re at on the scale.
- **Emergency** should be the last step to take when there is imminent danger to your child or others, or they express need to go to emergency.

**Putting your foot forward
and just getting in the door
is the first step**

PART B - What can give parents hope

Understanding that both you and your child learn more and are better equipped as each crisis passes.

Trusting that in time your child will understand enough about their condition and will have matured to the point where they will recognize their own triggers, and will have developed good strong coping skills that allow them to self-analyze, make a plan and follow through.

Recognizing a growing public awareness that mental wellness really shouldn't be different than the way we look after ourselves on a regular basis (hygiene, eating nutritious meals, sleeping well, going to the dentist, an annual checkup with a doctor). This includes promoting the importance of checking in with ourselves regarding how we are feeling, and checking in with someone regularly that we trust to talk to about our mental wellness.

Appreciating that your child has survived this long, and is trying.

There is no guarantee how long they can keep faking it until they make it, but it's one day at a time for us all.

Knowing there are programs that help your child develop the skills and methods to relieve anguish in a healthy way, such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, and peer to peer help.

Knowing that most people who are suicidal don't necessarily want to die, they just want the pain to stop.

Recognizing that service providers care about your child and family, and are reaching out more to listen and value their experience and wisdom.

Believing that this experience can tighten the family bond in the long term.

Acknowledging the incredible determination, persistence, and strength that your child and family possesses and is demonstrating as you weather this storm, and also all of the times and ways this has paid off.

It's our hope that you find this information practical, helpful, and hopeful. The collective wisdom here is not a substitute for guidance or medical advice specific to your family's needs. It is a piece of the puzzle you are navigating, from those who have been there, and get it, and want you to know that you are not alone.

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● **pleo.on.ca**

● **613.321.3211** (Ottawa)

● **1.855.775.7005** (toll free)

