



CARE BEFORE CRISIS™ RESOURCE HUB

GUIDE

The 5 Early Signs Conversation Starter

A printable pocket card for parents, mentors, and managers — with the words to start the conversation that matters most.

Most mental health struggles don't start with a crisis. They start with small changes — a kid who goes quiet, a coworker who loses their spark, a friend whose temper is suddenly short. If we notice early and say something kind, we can help *before* things get dangerous. This guide gives you a **pocket card to carry** and the deeper know-how behind it: what the five early signs look like, how to start a caring conversation, and what to do with what you hear.

If you or someone else is in crisis

You don't have to handle it alone. Call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), 24/7, free and confidential. If there is immediate danger to life, call **911**. To connect with ongoing support, reach **Care Connections™** at **214-506-0691** or **Dominique@amindfulresource.org**.

Noticing signs and starting a conversation is something anyone can do. You are not diagnosing or treating — you are caring and connecting. If what you notice points to danger, skip straight to the crisis steps above.



PRINT, CUT, CARRY

Your pocket card

Print this page (cardstock recommended), cut along the borders, and fold or keep the two panels together. Front lists the five signs; back gives you the words to start. Keep it in your wallet, on the fridge, or at your desk.

The 5 Early Signs

Notice the change.

1. Pulling away — from people & things they loved
2. Mood shifts — more angry, sad, or flat than usual
3. Sleep, appetite, or energy changes
4. Slipping — school, work, hygiene, basics
5. Worrying words — hopeless, “what’s the point,” a burden

One sign for two weeks, or a few at once? Reach out.

Start the Conversation

“ I’ve noticed you don’t seem like yourself lately. How are you, really? ”

“ I’m not here to fix it — I just want to listen. ”

“ That sounds heavy. You don’t have to carry it alone. ”

“ Are you thinking about hurting yourself? ” (Ask directly. It helps.)

Help, anytime:

988 — call or text · 911 emergency

Care Connections™ 214-506-0691

Front and back of one pocket card. Customize with your school, workplace, or ministry name before printing a batch. Laminate for durability.



The five early signs — in depth

Everyone has off days. What you're watching for is **change that lasts** (about two weeks or more), or **several signs together**, especially when it's a clear shift from how the person usually is. Here's what each sign can look like — and a way to gently name it.

1. Pulling away (withdrawal)

In a young person: Skipping practice or hangouts, staying in their room, dropping friends or hobbies, going quiet online.

In an adult or coworker: Declining invitations, isolating, fewer check-ins, opting out of things they used to enjoy.

Try saying: *"I've noticed you've been keeping to yourself more than usual. I miss having you around — how are you doing?"*

2. Mood and temper shifts

In a young person: Quicker to anger or tears, irritable over small things, or unusually flat and 'checked out.'

In an adult or coworker: Short-tempered, withdrawn, tearful, or numb in a way that's not like them.

Try saying: *"You've seemed more frustrated (or down) lately, and that's okay. What's been going on for you?"*

3. Changes in sleep, appetite, or energy

In a young person: Up all night, exhausted all day, eating much more or less, complaining of being tired or 'over it.'

In an adult or coworker: Sleeping too much or too little, skipping meals or overeating, dragging through the day.

Try saying: *"How have you been sleeping and eating? You seem worn down — I want to make sure you're okay."*

4. Slipping in daily life

In a young person: Grades dropping, missing assignments, skipping school, letting hygiene or appearance go.

In an adult or coworker: Missing deadlines, calling out, quality slipping, neglecting basics they normally handle.

Try saying: *"I've noticed some things have been harder to keep up with lately. No judgment — what's that about?"*



5. Words that worry you

In a young person: “What’s the point,” “nobody would care,” “I’m just a burden,” talk of not being around.

In an adult or coworker: Hopelessness, talk of being a burden, ‘everyone would be better off,’ or hints about not being here.

Try saying: *“It sounds like things feel really heavy. Are you thinking about hurting yourself? — ask it plainly.”*

Don't be afraid to ask the hard question

About sign #5: Asking someone directly about suicide does **not** put the idea in their head. It often brings relief and opens the door to help. If the answer is yes — or you're unsure — stay with them and use the crisis steps: 988 or 911.



How to start the conversation

You don't need the perfect words. Caring and showing up matter more than getting it right. This simple flow helps:

1. Pick the moment

Choose a private, low-pressure time — a car ride, a walk, washing dishes, a coffee. Side-by-side often feels safer than face-to-face, especially for young people and men.

2. Lead with what you've noticed, and with care

Name the change gently and without blame: "I've noticed... and I care about you." Avoid "What's wrong with you?"

3. Listen more than you talk

Let silence do its work. Don't rush to fix, minimize, or compare ("others have it worse"). Reflect back what you hear: "That sounds really hard." Being heard is the help.

4. Ask directly if you're worried

If anything concerns you, ask plainly about suicide or self-harm. Clear, calm, caring. It opens the door rather than closing it.

5. Connect to support — together

You are the bridge, not the destination. Offer a concrete next step: "Can we look into talking to someone together?" Hand them the card. Offer to help call Care Connections™ (214-506-0691). For any danger, 988 or 911 now.

6. Follow up

Circle back in a few days: "I've been thinking about you — how are you?" Follow-up tells them the first conversation wasn't a one-time thing.

Quick do's and don'ts

Do

- Stay calm and patient
- Take every worry seriously
- Keep it private (unless there's danger)
- Offer presence, not solutions

Avoid

- Lecturing, blaming, or panicking
- "Snap out of it" / "you'll be fine"
- Promising to keep a dangerous secret
- Trying to be their therapist



Starters by relationship

Same heart, tuned to your role. Pick a line that fits and make it your own.

For parents & caregivers

"You've seemed off lately and I love you no matter what — talk to me?"

"You don't have to have it all figured out. I'm on your team."

"Is there anything you've been scared or embarrassed to tell me?"

"If something ever felt too heavy, who could you talk to? Can we find someone together?"

For mentors, coaches & youth workers

"I've noticed you haven't been yourself — everything good at home and with you?"

"Whatever you tell me stays between us, unless you're in danger — then we get help together."

"You matter to me beyond the [team/program]. How are you, really?"

"A lot of people your age carry heavy stuff. There's no shame in getting support."

For managers & coworkers

"You don't seem like yourself lately — I'm checking in as a person, not about work."

"How's your bandwidth, honestly? What can I take off your plate?"

"If you're going through something, you don't have to share details — but support is here."

"Our EAP / these resources are confidential. Want me to share how to reach them?"

A note for the workplace

Managers: keep it human and avoid diagnosing or prying into private medical details. Point to confidential support (EAP, 988, Care Connections™) and your organization's resources.



What to do with what you hear

After the conversation, match your response to what you learned.

If there's no immediate danger

- **They're having a hard time, but safe:** keep checking in, encourage healthy supports, and suggest talking to a counselor. Share the card and Care Connections™.
- **They're really struggling / it's not lifting:** help them take a concrete step toward professional help this week — offer to help find someone or make the call together.

If there is danger (talk of suicide, self-harm, or harm to others)

- Stay with them — don't leave them alone.
- Call or text **988** together; call **911** if life is in immediate danger.
- Don't promise secrecy when someone's safety is at stake.
- Remove access to means of harm if you safely can, and keep them company until help is in place.

After it's over

Caring for someone in pain can stir up your own feelings. Debrief with someone you trust, and take care of yourself too. You did something brave and kind by reaching out — that matters more than you know.

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