

Teen Suicide

According to the Centers for Disease Control, suicide is the third leading cause of death for children 10-14 years of age and the second for individuals 15 – 34 years of age. Among students in grades 9-12 in the U.S. during 2013, 17.0% of students seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous 12 months (22.4% of females and 11.6% of males), 13.6% of students made a plan about how they would attempt suicide in the previous 12 months (16.9% of females and 10.3% of males), 8.0% of students attempted suicide one or more times in the previous 12 months (10.6% of females and 5.4% of males) and 2.7% of students made a suicide attempt that resulted in an injury, poisoning, or an overdose that required medical attention (3.6% of females and 1.8% of males).

Suicide is preventable and treatable if you know the warning signs. Generally boys commit suicide at a higher rate than girls. By looking at the warning signs of suicide, learning how to respond to someone who is potentially suicidal, and accessing good treatment resources, a parent or friend can help lower the risk of suicide for a teenager.

The Risk Factors:

Specific risk factors often increase the chances that a young person will become suicidal. The more factors present the greater the likelihood of suicidal behavior. Here are some common factors to observe:

- **Recent Loss:** Loved one, good friend or family member, divorce, and family break-up.
- **Recent Trauma:** Life altering medical problem, accident or crisis.
- **Prior history of suicide attempt:** In 30-50% of successful suicide attempts, there is evidence of a prior attempt. Family history of suicide also increases the likelihood.
- **Alcohol or substance abuse:** This disinhibitor can lead to self-destructive behavior and compulsivity. Anger, rage, hopelessness, and depression are increased by such abuse.
- **Access to lethal weapons:** Pills, weapons
- **Lack of peer support:** Rejected or being misunderstood, limited time spent with working parents or a single parent, absence of a close “buddy”.

Warning Signs:

Suicide warning signs usually lead to an actual suicide attempt. By familiarizing yourself with these warning signs, you may save a teenager’s life. Here is what to look for:

- **Talk of suicide and death** (“I can’t take it anymore” or “I would be better off dead”). Threatening to harm oneself precedes 4 out of 5 suicidal deaths.
- **Loss of interest** in school, peers and/or family.
- **Making final arrangements** or giving away precious possessions.
- **Running away from home** or withdrawing from family and friends.
- **Increased high risk behaviors**, i.e., driving too fast or an increase in drug or alcohol use.
- **Suddenly marked changes** in eating, sleeping behavior or physical appearance.

How to Help:

If someone is showing warning signs of suicidal behavior or in fact has a plan to harm themselves, consider the following:

- **Remove all lethal weapons** from your home including pills, guns, kitchen utensils or rope.
- **Be direct:** Do not be afraid to use the word suicide and probe further.
- **Reassure that you love this person.** Offer hope and alternatives, and ready resources.
- **Do not be sworn to secrecy.** You need to get help as soon as possible.

You also can connect to local resources through The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) or local mental health centers.