

Suicide Prevention, Children Ages 10 to 19 Years

As a parent or caregiver, you can play a major role in identifying if a young person is considering suicide.

What are suicidal behaviors?

Suicide occurs when someone purposely takes his or her own life.

A **suicide attempt** occurs when someone tries to take their own life but does not succeed. The person who survives may have serious injuries such as brain damage, broken bones, and organ failure. The survivor may also have depression or other mental health issues.

Suicidal ideation occurs when someone is thinking about taking their life.

Why do teens become suicidal?

There are many reasons why teens become suicidal. A suicide rarely has just one cause. The teen years are an extremely stressful time for many children. Untreated mental illness, especially depression, is the leading cause for suicide. Many people who die by suicide suffer from untreated or poorly treated depression resulting from difficult life experiences. These life experiences might include family changes or illness, loss of family or friends, and feeling lonely, helpless, hopeless or depressed.

How do I know if my teen is at risk for suicide?

The following factors may increase the risk of suicide or attempted suicide. However, these risk factors do not always lead to a suicide.

- ✓ Depression and other mental disorders, or a substance-abuse disorder (often combined with other mental disorders)
- ✓ Feeling hopeless and worthless
- ✓ Previous suicide attempt(s)
- ✓ Physical illness
- ✓ Feeling detached and isolated from friends, peers and family
- ✓ Family history of suicide, mental illness, or depression
- ✓ Family violence, including physical or sexual abuse
- ✓ Access to a weapon in the home
- ✓ Knowing someone with suicidal behavior, such as a family member, friend, or celebrity
- ✓ Coping with being gay (homosexuality) in an unsupportive family, community, or hostile school environment
- ✓ Incarceration (time in prison)

What factors can help protect my teen from becoming suicidal?

- ✓ Effective medical treatment for mental and physical health problems and substance abuse
- ✓ Strong support network of friends, family, peer groups or outside activities
- ✓ Skills in solving problems, resolving conflicts and handling disputes without violence
- ✓ Cultural and/or religious beliefs that discourage suicide

What are warning signs or behaviors that my teen may be thinking about suicide?

Teen suicide often occurs after a recent stressful life event in the family, with a friend, or at school. It is important for you to know the warning signs for suicide so you can get your teen the help she/he needs. A teen who is considering suicide might have one or more of these behaviors:

1. Suicidal ideation (thinking, writing, drawing or talking about suicide, death, dying or the afterlife)
2. Dependence on alcohol or drugs
3. Lack of a sense of purpose in life

4. Trouble focusing or thinking clearly
5. Increased withdrawal from family, friends, school, jobs and society. Poor grades may be a sign that the child is withdrawing at school.
6. Lack of interest in favorite activities
7. Reckless or risk-taking behaviors
8. Rash, bizarre or violent behavior
9. Changed eating or sleeping patterns (such as being unable to sleep or sleeping all the time)
10. Deep feelings of grief, uncontrolled anger, anxiety, shame, hopelessness, guilt or anxiety

What are signs that my teen may have a suicide plan?

- ✓ Threatening to or talking about wanting to hurt or kill him/herself
- ✓ Creating suicide notes
- ✓ Expressing odd or troubling thoughts
- ✓ Showing a dramatic change in personality or appearance
- ✓ Throwing or giving away or promising to give away valued possessions to family members or friends
- ✓ Talking about not being around in the future or "going away"
- ✓ Searching for and trying to obtain weapons, pills, or other means ways to take their own life

How can I help a teen who is thinking or talking about suicide?

1. Do not ignore these warning signs.
2. Talk openly with your child and express concern, support, and love. If your child does not feel comfortable talking to you, suggest that s/he talk to another trusted adult such as a family member, a pastor, minister, rabbi or priest, a coach, a school counselor, or a family doctor.
3. Do not leave your teen alone.
4. Remove the objects your child might use to harm him/herself. Make sure your teen does not have access to guns, other possible weapons or medications.
5. Seek help immediately from:
6. Your child's doctor;
7. Mental health services (Ask your doctor for a referral.);
8. The nearest emergency room;
9. Emergency services (911); and/or
10. A suicide hotline.

ASK QUESTIONS

Take every "I would be better off dead", "Life is just not worth living", "Life sucks", etc., serious. Don't brush these comments off! Ask questions like "Do you really feel that way?" Are you having thoughts of taking your life? If yes, follow up with "Do you have a plan to do that?" Kids will often tell you exactly what they are thinking/planning when asked direct questions. What they don't respond to and what we do most often is say "You don't mean that!"; "You have too much to live for". "That's crazy talk.". In that hopeless moment, they can hear that as you not taking them serious/don't care and brushing them off giving them one more reason to follow through with their thoughts. Their feelings are REAL – take them serious and get them help!

How can I find a suicide hotline?

[Crisis Text Line](#): Text "start" to 741-741

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

[The Trevor Helpline](#): 1-800-850-8078, (specializes in gay and lesbian suicide prevention)

Parts of this taken from the NY State Department of Health Website