



SUICIDE PREVENTION

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Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for teens and young adults, ages 10-34 [CDC, 2022]. The rate of suicides for 13 to 30 year olds has steadily increased from 2010 to 2018. Approximately 20% of high school students reported having seriously considered suicide in the past year. Youth most at risk are females and lesbian, gay, or bisexual teens (46.8%).

Many things can increase the risk of suicide in teenagers. One major risk factor is experiencing a mental health issue like depression, anxiety, or trauma. Most people who die by suicide have struggled with a mental health condition. Other risk factors include a family history of suicide, violence, or substance abuse. Teens also experience many stressful life events for the first time. These can include a breakup with a romantic partner, trouble at school, violence, or conflicts with friends.

Often, individuals who can seem 'okay'

from the outside are actually suffering on the inside. They don't have to be alone. Each suicide is composed of highly unique, dynamic and complex interplay of genetic, biological, psychological and social factors [Bilsen, 2018]. Biological factors may make teens' brains vulnerable to mood disorders, substance abuse, and suicide. For teens, suicide can be an attempt to solve a problem of intense pain with impaired problem-solving skills. Even though no single cause can be identified, suicide can be preventable. Coaches, caregivers, and fellow athletes can help.

Research shows that sports participation can be a protective factor against depression and suicidal ideation in adolescents [Babiss & Gangwisch, 2009]. Athletics provides an opportunity for exercise, competition and social support. For adolescents, sports participation can help youth in developing a positive sense of identity.

WARNING SIGNS OF TEEN SUICIDE MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Talking or writing about suicide — for example, making statements such as “I’m going to kill myself,” or “I won’t be a problem for you much longer”
- Withdrawing from social contact
- Having mood swings
- Increasing use of substances such as alcohol or drugs
- Feeling trapped, hopeless or helpless about a situation
- Changing normal routine, including eating or sleeping patterns
- Doing risky or self-destructive things
- Giving away belongings when there is no other logical explanation for why this is being done
- Developing personality changes or being severely anxious or agitated when experiencing some of the warning signs listed above

SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS



TALK

Being a burden to others
Experiencing unbearable pain
Killing themselves
Having no reason to live
Feeling trapped



MOOD

Loss of interest
Irritability
Anxiety
Depression
Rage
Humiliation



BEHAVIOR

Increased use of alcohol or drugs
Acting recklessly
Sleeping too much or too little
Giving away prized possessions
Aggression
Withdrawing from activities
Looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching online for materials or means
Isolating from family and friends
Visiting or calling people to say goodbye



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Make mental health a part of the game. It is important to teach and model healthy habits for mental health, similar to the importance of prioritizing physical health (ie sleep, nutrition, exercise). Including mental health as part of the conversation can help reduce the stigma of discussing mental health concerns for youth. For example, discussing stressors for teens and ways to cope with such challenges.

Practice Support. Asking youth how they are doing emotionally is essential, especially if they appear stressed or upset. Do ask about suicide! It's not an easy question but studies show that asking at-risk individuals if they are suicidal does not increase suicides or suicidal thoughts. It is important for adults to listen intently and without judgment. Resist the urge to offer quick fixes or solutions to their challenges that can shut down further dialog. It is better to listen, validate, and support their feelings. This will help teens feel less alone.

Examples for conversations starters:

- *"I've noticed that you have missed practices. Are you okay?"*
- *"I haven't seen you smile in a while. Is there anything you would like to talk about?"*
- *"Hey, you seem frustrated today, do you want to chat?"*
- *"I feel like something is up with you, can you share what's going on?"*
- *"Whenever you're ready to talk, I'm ready to listen."*

Expand the team. If a youth shares that they are suffering and have been thinking about suicide, there are several important steps to take. First, let their caregivers know what is happening. When it comes to safety, it is important to expand the team. Reducing access to highly lethal items or places is an important part of suicide prevention. Talk to the youth and caregiver about a plan to remove the lethal means to create a safe environment. Discuss reasons for living. Help the youth connect to a mental health professional for ongoing support and ways to learn ways to cope with distress.

National Institute of Mental Health Action Steps <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/5-action-steps-for-helping-someone-in-emotional-pain>

1. **ASK:** "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" It's not an easy question but studies show that asking at-risk individuals if they are suicidal does not increase suicides or suicidal thoughts.
2. **KEEP THEM SAFE:** Reducing a suicidal person's access to highly lethal items or places is an important part of suicide prevention. While this is not always easy, asking if the at-risk person has a plan and removing or disabling the lethal means can make a difference.
3. **BE THERE:** Listen carefully and learn what the individual is thinking and feeling. Research suggests acknowledging and talking about suicide may in fact reduce rather than increase suicidal thoughts.
4. **HELP THEM CONNECT:** Save the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline number (**call or text 988**) and the Crisis Text Line number (**741741**) in your phone so they're there if you need them. You can also help make a connection with a trusted individual like a family member, friend, spiritual advisor, or mental health professional.
5. **STAY CONNECTED:** Staying in touch after a crisis or after being discharged from care can make a difference. Studies have shown the number of suicide deaths goes down when someone follows up with the at-risk person.

References

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National Institute of Mental Health <https://go.usa.gov/xVCyZ> #shareNIMH