

Name _____

Help Stop Teen Suicide

Teen Suicide in America

Suicide is one of three leading causes of death for 13- to 19-year-olds. Many teenagers who attempt suicide have serious problems:

- Depression or other mood disorder
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Being overly anxious

Often, these teens have had problems for some time and can be very good at hiding them. This is why family and friends are shocked when suicide occurs.

How Does It Happen?

Suicide is often triggered by some small, everyday event, such as:

- Getting in trouble
- Arguing with a parent, boyfriend, or girlfriend
- Receiving a bad grade
- Not making the team

Though many suicidal teens think about suicide on and off, most teens do not spend much time planning how to kill themselves. Teenagers often attempt suicide within a few hours after deciding to do so. Suicide is thought of as the only way out. Teenagers who try to kill themselves see it as the only way to escape their emotional pain. They want the pain and suffering to stop.

Myths and Facts

MYTH: "You would think one of her friends would have known about her problems. At the very least, someone in her family should have noticed that she was depressed before she killed herself."

FACT: Teens are often very good at hiding their problems. People around them may not know they are depressed. Adults usually seem depressed and stay depressed for a while. Depressed teens may seem happy for much of the time. Parents are sometimes the last to know. Friends may have a sense that things are not right but not know how to help.

MYTH: "I heard him talk about killing himself. But people who talk about suicide do not do it."

FACT: Talk of suicide or wanting to die should never be ignored. Teens who talk about suicide or wanting to die are much more likely to kill themselves than those who do not.

MYTH: "If she really wanted to kill herself, she would have done something more deadly."

FACT: A suicide attempt that does not end in death the first time may be followed by one that does. Sometimes teens don't know how many pills are enough to be fatal. What is considered a "gesture" may be a miscalculation. All suicide attempts need to be taken seriously.



MYTH: “He’s just doing it to get attention.”

FACT: This is true at times, but the attempt can still be deadly. If the suicide attempt is a call for attention, it needs to be answered.

Warning Signs for Suicide

In addition to talking or writing about suicide or death, some other warning signs to watch out for are:

Change in activities

A drop in grades, neglect of personal appearance or responsibilities, or losing interest in things that used to be fun.

Change in emotions

Appearing sad, hopeless, bored, overwhelmed, anxious, worried, irritable, or very angry. While this may sound like many teenagers, changes that make you worried could be very serious.

Getting in trouble

Acting rebellious, aggressive, or overly impulsive; running away or withdrawing from friends or family.

Confusion about sexual feelings and identity

Teenagers who think they may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender are at an especially high risk for suicide.

Changes in behaviors or patterns

Some teens may become very depressed, withdraw from old friends, hang out with a different group, or want to be alone all the time. Some others may withdraw and listen to music or write. Others may stay up until the early morning and then stay in bed much of the day.

Use of drugs or alcohol

For depressed teens, drugs or alcohol can be fatal.

Preventing Teen Suicide

In an emergency

If you are concerned about an immediate risk of harm, take the teen to a hospital emergency department. Even if you are not sure, the hospital staff is trained to figure out if someone is serious about suicide. Talk with a doctor about treatment and an evaluation by a mental health professional.

If you think suicide is possible

If you notice that someone is “in trouble” or feels very negative, listen to the whole story and try not to judge. Show that you care and are always ready to listen.

Talk with them. This is harder than it sounds. It is important to just listen and not offer suggestions on how to “fix” problems or seem like you are judging in some way. Ask them what is bothering them and whether they have been feeling sad or down. Ask whether they have ever thought of suicide or not wanting to live anymore. Asking will not make someone attempt suicide; it may actually stop it.

Try to be understanding if someone is in trouble or feeling very badly about themselves. Let them know that whatever trouble they are in at the moment, you have faith in who they are and their future.



Gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender teens

Teenagers questioning their sexual identity are at an especially high risk for suicide. Listen, be supportive, and get them help. Every teenager needs to know that life is better than death.

If you know of a teen struggling with this and fear there is a risk for suicide, there are local, state, and national resources that can provide information and advice. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), at 202/467-8180 or www.pflag.org, can help connect teens with resources.

How other teens can help

If any friend talks about suicide, they need to get help from an adult right away! This may be a matter of life and death and is too much for even a close friend to handle alone. Even if you have been “sworn to secrecy” by a friend, telling—no matter how wrong it feels—is better than having to live with a friend’s death.

When you’re concerned about mental health issues

Depression or other mental health problems can come on suddenly or be present on and off for most of a teen’s life. If you are worried, talk with someone, like your pediatrician, a school counselor, a mental health professional, or a suicide prevention hotline.

The good news is that treatments—medications and therapy—are available. They make a difference.

Homes with Guns

Remove all guns from the home

The risk of teen suicide is 4 to 10 times higher in homes with guns than in homes without. Studies have shown that even in homes where the guns are locked up, teens are much more likely to kill themselves than in homes without guns.

Guns can turn a moment of despair into a tragedy

Teenagers who attempt suicide with a gun are more likely to succeed in killing themselves than those who attempt suicide in many other ways.

When teenagers attempt suicide without using a gun, many can recover with therapy. If a gun is used, they will never get that chance.

(The text on this handout is taken from the AAP Pediatric Patient Education [PPE] brochure “Help Stop Teenage Suicide” (<https://patiented.solutions.aap.org/handout.aspx?gbosid=166253>). Copyright © 2018 American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Used with permission of the AAP. All rights reserved.)

