

Addressing the Risk of Adolescent Suicide

Suicide. There it is. I wrote it and you just read it. Suicide is one of the greatest dangers of teen depression. Ignoring it won't make it go away. Talking about it won't increase the risk of someone doing it. Actually, it's just the opposite. When suicide is addressed in a clear and honest way, prevention becomes much more likely. So, let's address it.

In the United States, suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 10 and 24. Each year, nearly 5000 people in this age group successfully end their own lives. The top methods used among young people are as follows: firearm (45%); suffocation (40%); poisoning (8%).

In addition to these deaths, there are many suicide attempts that do not result in death. Each year over 150,000 youth between the ages of 10 and 24 receive emergency medical care for self-inflicted injuries where the intention was determined to be suicide. A recent nationwide survey of U.S. teens, grades 9-12 found that 16 out of every 100 students had at some point during the previous year seriously considered suicide. 13 out of these 16 had actually formed a plan to end their life. 8 of these students had actually made a failed attempt.

According to this same research, boys are more likely than girls to die from a suicide attempt. Boys made up 81% of annual suicide deaths and while girls occupied only 19% of the deaths. While that may sound favorable for girls, you should understand that girls are more likely to attempt suicide than boys. They are just not as effective in taking their own lives.

Culturally speaking, Native American and Alaskan Native youths have the highest suicide rates. Hispanic youths were also more likely to report suicidal thinking than their black and white, non-Hispanic peers. ¹

Suicide often becomes an option in the mind of a depressed teen when they view their situation as completely hopeless. A deep sense of shame or humiliation can also push a young person to consider *calling it quits*. It is important to recognize signs that you or someone you know might be at risk for suicide. These signs include:

- Previous suicide attempt
- Suicidal threat(s)
- Preoccupation with death (Song lyrics, stories, poems, and drawings that focus on death)
- Dramatic change in appearance
- Giving away special possessions
- Increase in risky behavior
- Withdrawal from others
- Increase in intensity of the signs of depression

If you are suicidal—

Don't give up! No situation is ever hopeless! This book is written to provide you with hope and to give you what you need to get your life on track and moving forward with courage.

Tell someone who can help. Talk to a trusted adult who can help. Specifically, you can talk to a guidance counselor, a teacher, a pastor, or a parent. Take a minute

¹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention; Injury Prevention & Control : Division of Violence Prevention; Suicide Prevention. www.cdc.gov

and think about one safe adult who would be able to listen to you. Tell them immediately.

You may prefer to talk to someone your age rather than turning to an adult. While it is important to realize the power of positive peer support, teens are not fully equipped to help you carry the burden of depression or suicidal thinking. By all means, if you have a trustworthy friend who is a source of encouragement, tell them about your struggle. Just don't let it end there. Tell a trusted adult.

If you are in crisis and you are thinking about ending your life stop reading, get to a phone or a computer and use any or all of the following resources:

If someone you know may be suicidal—

Look for the warning signs. Say something! Bringing up the subject of suicide will not increase the chance of your friend committing suicide. It's actually the opposite. Say something like, "Hey—I've had you on my mind a lot lately and I feel like I need to ask you a personal question. I ask only because I really care about you. Are you thinking about hurting yourself?"

Get involved. It is not your job to fix anyone, but you can save a life by leading a suicidal friend to the right kind of help. Notify a trusted adult. Take your friend to the emergency room at your local hospital. Contact a counselor. Connect your friend with a pastor or youth worker. Call the helpline listed previously in this chapter with your friend—immediately.

Print and Sign a No-Suicide Contract. Get the at-risk teen and his parent(s)/guardians to sign it.

Keep in touch with your friend. Your friend will need encouragement and your prayers. Remember, no one is asking you to fix your friend's depression. Just make it a point to check in and encourage him or her.