

Suicide

What is suicide?

Suicide is the taking of one's own life. Often, the media shows suicide as "honorable" and "noble." In reality, however, it is a national crisis. Suicide is the 8th leading cause of death in America.

Facts

- More than 30,000 deaths per year are attributed to suicide.
- Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for 14 - 19 year olds.
- Some studies indicate that 18-year old college-bound students have the highest rate of suicide in the 14 - 19 year-old category.
- It is estimated that there are 100 suicide attempts per completed suicide.
- Females attempt suicide 3 times more often than males.
- Males succeed 4 times more often than females.
- Only 12% are mentally ill
- 8 of 10 suicides give warnings prior to killing themselves.
- Many suicides occur within 3 months following an "improvement" in life--after an individual regains the emotional energy to put a plan in action.
- Suicide tends to peak in the spring (March, April, May) but July has the highest incidence.
- Firearms account for 61% of total suicides.
- Firearms remain in the most commonly used suicide method among youth regardless of race or gender.v
- Every 1 hour and 57 minutes a person under the age of 25 committed suicide.
- Suicides accounts for 1.3% of all death in the U.S.
- Every year, there are approximately 12 suicide for every 100,000 adolescents

Warning Signs

No suicide attempt should be dismissed or treated lightly!

Nearly every individual who attempts suicide will show some warning signs in the days weeks or months beforehand. By identifying these risk factors, you can help prevent suicide in the future. Studies have found that more than 75% of all completed suicides did things in the few weeks or months prior to their deaths to indicate to other that they were in deep despair. Average of one person commits suicide every 18 minutes suicide ranks eight cause of death among young Americans (15-24).

- The most common factor in suicidal consideration is depression.
- Expressions of hopelessness and/or helplessness.
- Direct threats to commit suicide or harm oneself.
- Verbal threats such as "You'd be better off without me" or "Maybe I won't be around anymore..."
- Changes in personality, moods, social groups
- Loss of friends/family due to death, divorce, relocation
- Final arrangements/giving away prized possessions.
- Broken relationships, due to loneliness and sense of failure.
- Family problems and breakdowns (substance abuse, physical/sexual abuse, family/illness, occupational/financial changes)

- Preoccupation with death themes--romantic (Romeo & Juliet), religious (afterlife, angels, eternal rest), revenge (funeral fantasy, anger)
- Increased risk-taking (substance abuse, reckless driving, self-endangerment)
- Physical symptoms of depression (fatigue, eating/sleeping patterns, apathy, social withdrawal)
- Mental illness, chronic physical illness, terminal illness
- Failure to communicate--research indicates that people who have attempted suicide report that their efforts to express feelings of unhappiness, frustration, failure, and loneliness were unacceptable to family and friends.
- Lack of interest in the future.
- Previous suicide attempts

Risk Factors

The reasons behind suicide are difficult to define. Among the immediate motives are despair, hopelessness, illness, humiliation, loss of employment, loss of a relationship, death in the family, guilt, and psychotic delusions.

Many different high risk groups and/or factors can lead a person to commit suicide:

- **Depression.** Between 30 and 70 percent of suicide victims suffered from major depression or bipolar disorder.
- **Substance Abuse.** It is estimated that 50% of suicides involve substance abuse. The rate of suicide in alcoholics is 3 to 4 times the average, and for narcotics users it is 5 times the average. Often, depression is also a factor in these cases and it is difficult to tell whether the addiction caused the depression or visa versa.
- **Elderly.** Elderly people, particularly those with chronic illnesses, have the highest suicide rate of any other age group. An estimated 40% of all suicide victims are people over 60, and the majority are white males. After age 75, the rate is 3 times the average, and after age 80 the risk is 6 times the average.
- **Adolescents/Young Adults.** Young people, age 15 to 24 account for 20% of male suicides, and 14% of female suicides. Suicide attempts are among the leading causes of hospital admissions in people under 35.
- **Schizophrenia.** One third of people with schizophrenia attempt suicide, and 5 to 10 percent eventually do so. The majority of these are young, unemployed males with no families. They are usually isolated and may also have substance abuse problems.

Preventing Suicide

The only way to prevent suicide is to address emotional issues or feelings which lead to suicidal tendencies. Though most suicidal people usually do not call suicide and crisis hotlines, they do try to seek help.

Many, for example, visit a doctor 1 to 4 months prior to their death. The majority of people will reveal suicidal thoughts when asked. Mental health professionals need to react quickly and act decisively in a crisis situation. The therapist should be available at all times, and others, such as family, friends, doctors, and clergy may need to be alerted as well.

Treating suicidal patients requires much skill, empathy, patience and understanding. There is no single therapy or treatment which is appropriate and successful in all circumstances. Therapists dealing with suicide crises should have a great deal of experience and be capable of tolerating heavy demands and intrusions on their personal lives.

What to do if someone you know is suicidal

Listen to the person and give the person every opportunity to unburden their troubles and express their feelings. You do not need to say much, and there are no magic words.

- Trust your instincts and believe that the person may attempt suicide.
- Talk with the person about your concerns and show that you care and want to help.
- Ask the person direct questions. The more detailed their plan, the greater the immediate risk.
- Remember that the most important thing is to listen.
- Get professional help - even if the person resists.
- Do not leave the person alone.
- Do not swear to secrecy.
- Do not act shocked or judge the person.
- Do not counsel the person.

Resources

National Mental Health Association
1021 Prince St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
www.nmha.org
800-969-NMHA

1-800-SUICIDE.

This will connect you with a crisis center in your area.

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
www.aacap.org
202-966-7300

American Association of Suicidology
4201 Connecticut Ave, Ste. 310
Washington, DC 20008
www.suicidology.org
202-237-2280

Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network
www.spanusa.com
888-649-1366

Sources

- <http://www.afspaa.org/aboutSuicide.htm>

- www.suicideology.org

-*The National Mental Health Association, www.nmha.org/infoctr/factsheets/81.cfm, March 2001*

-*Statistics from the National Center for Health Statistics, 1994*

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