

SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

Suicide is a serious problem among our young people. It is the third leading cause of death for 15- to 19-year-olds in the United States.¹ Young women attempt suicide more often than young men,² but young men³ use more lethal methods. Four times more young men die from suicide than young women.

Even though these are shocking numbers, many more youth attempt suicide each year than are recorded. Suicide attempts are not easy to count because they may not be treated in a hospital or may not be recorded as self-inflicted injuries.

An adolescent's experiences and history also can increase the chance that he* will attempt suicide. For instance, a youth is at an increased risk of attempting suicide if his family has a history of suicide, if he has previously harmed himself or attempted suicide, or if he has run away. A young person also may attempt suicide in response to an extremely stressful event or loss. See the "Depression Hurts" article for more information.

In addition, watch your child's behavior if she is exposed to the suicide of a schoolmate, friend, or even a celebrity receiving media coverage. Suicides can sometimes occur in clusters, in which one suicide influences other people already at risk for suicide.

Remember: It is a myth that people who talk about or attempt (but don't complete) suicide are just trying to get attention. In fact, those people are at high risk for a future suicide.

If you are concerned about suicide, call [the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK](tel:1-800-273-TALK) or visit [Getting Treatment](#).

Most youth who commit suicide show some signs beforehand. Most important, we know that most of these young people have a mental or substance abuse disorder⁴, or both. Be aware of some other possible warning signs:

- Talking about suicide, death, dying, or the afterlife.
- Feeling sad, bored, hopeless, or depressed.
- Making verbal threats such as, "You'd be better off without me," "I won't be a problem for you much longer," or "Maybe I won't be around."
- Changing his personality, such as becoming suddenly cheerful after a period of depression.
- Showing little interest in the future.
- Making major changes in the way he looks or not taking care of himself like he used to (if he's usually neat, he might look sloppy).
- Acting in rash, hostile ways; often expressing rage.
- Giving or throwing away favorite belongings.

Research shows that access to and availability of firearms is a major factor in youth suicide. Some parents keep guns in their homes for self-defense or protection, but firearms account for 60 percent of all suicides.⁵

What To Do

Ask your child if she is depressed or thinking about suicide. Doing so does not put dangerous thoughts into her head, but shows her that you care and that she is not alone.⁶ If you think she

Source: www.family.samhsa.gov/get/suicidewarn.aspx

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might hurt herself, don't leave her alone. Get her the help that she needs immediately, even if she resists. If you are worried that your child or someone else you know is thinking about suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK to talk to a crisis center in your area. * We refer to a child as "him" in some places and "her" in others. We do this for easier reading. All information applies to both boys and girls unless otherwise specified.

Sources:

¹ National Center for Health Statistics, 3/7/2005. National Vital Statistics Reports: Deaths: Leading Causes for 2002, last referenced 4/24/2006.

^{2,3} National Institute on Mental Health, 1999. Frequently Asked Questions About Suicide, last referenced 4/24/2006.

⁴ American Psychiatric Association. Let's Talk Facts About Teen Suicide, last referenced 4/24/2006.

⁵ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Facts and Figures: National Statistics, last referenced 4/24/2006.

⁶ National Mental Health Association, 1997. Teen Suicide, last referenced 4/24/2006.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 6/28/2002. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2001, last referenced 4/24/2006.

⁸ American Association for Suicidology. Suicide in the USA, last referenced 4/24/2006.

^{9,10} Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 7/12/2002. The NHSDA Report. Substance Use and the Risk of Suicide Among Youths, last referenced 4/24/2006.