



Teen Suicide

Suicides among young people continue to be a serious problem. Studies show that suicide attempts among adolescents may be based on long standing problems triggered by a specific event. Suicidal teens may view a temporary situation as a permanent condition. They experience strong feelings of stress, confusion, self-doubt, pressure to succeed, financial uncertainty, and other fears while growing up. These feelings can lead to impulsive, self-destructive acts.

For some teenagers, breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, family violence, family instability or moving to a new community can be very unsettling and can intensify self-doubts. Suicide may appear to be a solution to their problems and stress.

Depression and suicidal feelings are treatable mental disorders. The adolescent needs to have his or her illness recognized and diagnosed, and appropriate treatment plans developed. When parents are in doubt whether their child has a serious problem, a psychiatric consultation can be very helpful. Many of the symptoms of suicidal feelings co-occur with those of depression.

Warning Signs

Four out of five teens who attempt suicide have given some warnings. Parents should be aware of the following signs:

- Suicide threats, direct and indirect
- Change in eating and sleeping habits
- Violent actions, rebellious behavior, or running away
- Drug and alcohol use
- Dramatic change in personality or appearance
- Severe drop in school performance
- Recent suicide of a family member or peer
- Loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- Give away favorite belongings
- Frequent complaints about physical symptoms, such as stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, etc.
- Give verbal hints with statements such as: I won't be a problem for you much longer; Nothing matters; It's no use, and I won't see you again
- Suddenly cheerful after period of depression
- Irritability; irrational, bizarre behavior

Helping Suicidal Teens

Lock up and remove all firearms and lethal medications.

Offer help and listen. Encourage depressed teens to talk about their feelings. Listen, don't lecture.

Trust your instincts. If it seems that the situation may be serious, seek prompt help. Break a confidence if necessary, in order to save a life.

Pay attention to discussions about suicide. Ask direct questions and don't be afraid of frank talks. Silence is deadly.

Seek professional help. It is essential to seek expert advice from a mental health professional who has experience helping depressed teens. Also alert key adults in the teen's life - family, friends and teachers.

• *Each year in the U.S., nearly 5,000 teenagers commit suicide*

• *Suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15-to-24-year-olds*

• *Girls are two times more likely to attempt suicide. Boys are four times more likely to complete suicide.*

• *Stigma and media controversy discourage getting help.*

Encourage teens to tell an adult about a suicidal friend. Friends can be number one deterrant by informing an adult about the situation. If a teen says, "I want to kill myself," or "I'm going to commit suicide," **always** take the statement seriously. Immediately seek assistance from a qualified mental health professional, or take your teen to the emergency room. Acting quickly may save a life. Asking about suicide thoughts and plans does not put thoughts into a teen's head. Rather, it assures that someone cares and will give the young person the chance to talk about problems. With professional treatment and family support, teenagers who are suicidal can return to a healthy path of development.



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