

# SUICIDE PREVENTION

Davis Behavioral Health Crisis  
801.773.7061

Suicide Hotline  
1.800.273.TALK (8255)  
[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)



## **Signs that a Young Person May Be at Risk for Suicide:**

- A sudden change in grades or school attendance.
- Self-mutilation.
- A fixation with death or violence. Teens may express this fixation through:
  - Poetry, essays, doodling, or other artwork
  - An obsession with violent movies, video games, and music
  - A fascination with weapons
- Unhealthy peer relationships or a sudden change in peer relationships.
- Volatile mood swings or a sudden change in personality.
- Indications that the youth is in an unhealthy, destructive, or abusive relationship.
- Risk-taking behaviors. Such behaviors include:
  - Unprotected or promiscuous sex
  - Alcohol or other drug use
  - Reckless driving, with or without a license
  - Petty theft or vandalism
- Signs of an eating disorder.
- Difficulty in adjusting to gender identity.
- Bullying.
- Depression. Although most people who are clinically depressed do not attempt suicide, depression significantly increases the risk of suicide or suicide attempts. Symptoms of depression include the following:
  - Sudden worsening in academic performance
  - Withdrawal from friends and extracurricular activities
  - Expressions of sadness and hopelessness, or anger and rage
  - Sudden decline in enthusiasm and energy
  - Overreaction to criticism
  - Lowered self-esteem or feelings of guilt
  - Indecision, lack of concentration, and forgetfulness
  - Restlessness and agitation
  - Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
  - Unprovoked episodes of crying
  - Sudden neglect of appearance and hygiene
  - Fatigue
  - The abuse of alcohol or other drugs as young people try to “self-medicate” their emotional pain

## **Signs that a Young Person May Be at Risk for Suicide**

The risk for suicide is greater if a behavior is new or has increased and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

These signs are especially critical if the individual has attempted suicide in the past or has a history of or a current problem with depression, alcohol, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

## **Responding to the Warning Signs**

There are a number of steps you can take when you have a concern that a youth may be at risk of suicide.

- **Ask the Tough Questions:** Do not be afraid to ask a youth if he or she has considered suicide or other self-destructive acts. Research has shown that asking someone if he or she has contemplated self-harm or suicide will not increase that person's risk. Rather, studies have shown that a person in mental distress is often relieved that someone cares enough to inquire about the person's well-being. Your concern can counter the person's sense of hopelessness and helplessness. However, you need to be prepared to ask specific and difficult questions in a manner that doesn't judge or threaten the young person you are attempting to help. For example:
  - I've noticed that you are going through some rough times. Do you ever wish you could go to sleep and never wake up?
  - Sometimes when people feel sad, they have thoughts of harming or killing themselves. Have you had such thoughts?
  - Are you thinking about killing yourself?
- **Be Persistent:** A youth may feel threatened by your concern. The youth may become upset or deny that he or she is having problems. Be consistent and firm, and make sure that the youth gets the help that he or she may need.
- **Be Prepared to Act:** You need to know what to do if you believe that a youth is in danger of harming himself or herself.
- **Do Not Leave a Youth at Imminent Risk of Suicide Alone:** If you have any reason to suspect that a youth may attempt suicide or otherwise engage in self-harm, you need to remain with the youth (or see that the youth is in a secure environment, supervised by caring adults) until professional help can be obtained. Let the youth know that you care, that he or she is not alone, and that you are there to help.
- **Get Help When Needed:** If you believe that the youth is in imminent danger, you should call **911** or **1-800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)**. Tell the dispatcher that you are concerned that the person with you "is a danger to [himself or herself]" or "cannot take care of [himself or herself]." These key phrases will alert the dispatcher to locate immediate care for this person with the help of police. Do not hesitate to make this call if you suspect that a youth may be a danger to himself or herself. You could save a life.