

Get help for a friend. Get help for yourself.

Help Prevent Suicide.

Save a Friend: Tips for Teens to Prevent Suicide

Although teens thinking about suicide are not likely to seek help, they do show warning signs to their friends, classmates, parents or trusted school personnel. Never ignore these signs. You can help! Situations that might cause some teens to think about suicide include breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, failing in school, problems with parents, rejection or bullying by peers, etc. Children and youth who have experienced a personal loss, abuse, or an earlier tragic or frightening event, or who suffer from depression or other emotional problems, have a higher risk of suicide. Warning signs may not appear right away. Parents, teachers and friends must be good listeners and observers and should report any concerns to a trusted adult.

Introduction

Growing up is not easy. Children and teenagers face many tough decisions and difficult life experiences that can seem overwhelming. For some kids, a difficult situation can cause so much distress that they start to think about killing themselves. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death for kids in middle school and high school, but it can be prevented if adults and friends are aware of the warning signs and know what to do.

- In Kentucky, suicide is the second leading cause of death among teens...but it is the most preventable.
- Depression and/or anxiety are often present for those who feel suicidal.
- Depression and anxiety are TREATABLE...ask for help.
- NEVER keep thoughts of suicide a secret—people want help and support with their pain, not to end their lives.

Help Prevent Suicide

Facts about Suicide and Depression

- Suicide is preventable. Most people who are suicidal don't really want their lives to end – they are just unable to see other ways to solve their problems.
- Most of the people who attempt suicide give clues or warnings. No matter how casually or jokingly said, don't ignore statements like, "You'll be sorry when I'm dead," or "I can't see any way out."
- Depression is a serious health disorder and people who are depressed need professional treatment.
- Although many suicidal people suffer extreme distress and emotional pain, these are not necessarily signs of mental illness.
- People who attempt suicide frequently do so under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. It is very important to NOT use drugs or alcohol if you are sad or depressed because it will impair your judgment.
- Asking about suicide does NOT cause someone to become suicidal. Actually, the opposite is true. Asking someone directly will often lower the anxiety and allow an individual to share concerns openly. Asking is one of the most helpful things you can do.

Suicide Warning Signs

Suicide Comments: Comments may be direct statements ("I want to die," "I am going to kill myself") or indirect comments ("The world would be better without me," "Nobody will miss me anyway"). Suicide thoughts may also be expressed through joking or comments about death or suicide in school assignments, particularly creative writing or artwork.

Suicide Notes: All writings (notes, poems, text messages, etc.) about suicide thoughts or plans should be taken seriously and reported to a trusted adult.

Previous Suicide Attempts: If someone has attempted suicide in the past, there is a greater likelihood that they may attempt it again.

Depression (feeling hopeless or helpless): When someone feels hopeless, they believe their current feelings of sadness will not get better in the future. When someone feels helpless, they believe they do not have the ability to make their own situation better. When an individual has strong thoughts of helplessness or hopelessness, they may be at greater risk for suicide.

Dangerous, Careless Behavior or Self Injury Behaviors: Self-destructive behaviors may include running into traffic, jumping from heights, and scratching, cutting or marking the body. Risk-taking behaviors such as aggression, playing with guns, and alcohol or substance abuse may suggest that an individual is not concerned about his/her own life or safety.

Saying "Goodbyes": Some individuals thinking about suicide will say "goodbye" to close friends or family and may give away prized possessions such as jewelry, clothing, journals or pictures. If you know of a friend who is feeling sad or depressed and says "goodbyes" to others, report it to a trusted adult.

Inability to Concentrate or Think Clearly: If a friend starts forgetting things or talking in a way that suggests they are having trouble concentrating or thinking clearly, these might be signs of stress, anxiety or depression.

Changes in Physical Habits and Appearance: Changes include inability to sleep or sleeping all the time, eating a lot more or a lot less, not being interested in appearance or hygiene.

Sudden Changes in Personality, Friends, and Behaviors: Parents, teachers and friends are often the best observers of important warning signs or sudden changes in students. Changes can include skipping school, withdrawing from friends and family, loss of involvement in activities that were once important, and avoiding friends.

Having a Suicide Plan: A suicidal child or adolescent may talk about or hint at a suicide plan and may show an increased interest in and access to guns, weapons, or pills, that could be used for self harm. The greater the planning, the greater the potential for suicide.

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What Can You Do to Help a Friend?

1. **Know the warning signs!** Read over the information in this handout and keep it in a safe place.
2. **Do not be afraid to talk to your friends.** Listen to your friend's feelings. Make sure they know how important they are to you, but if you hear ANY thoughts or plans of suicide report it to a trusted adult immediately. Preventing suicide will require adult help.
3. **Make no deals to keep secrets.** Never keep secret a friend's suicidal plans or thoughts. You cannot promise that you will not tell—you have to tell to save your friend!
4. **Tell an adult.** Don't wait! Talk to your school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, a parent, your friend's parent, etc.—a trusted adult. Don't be afraid that the adults will not believe you or take you seriously—keep talking until they listen! Even if you are not sure your friend is suicidal, talk to someone. This is definitely the time to be safe and not sorry!



Are You in Crisis? Getting Help for Yourself:

Asking for help can be difficult, especially when it's you who is feeling down, anxious, overwhelmed, or irritable. People tend to hope these feelings will just go away, or may start to believe the negative messages that run through their heads, like, "Maybe I'm just no good."

Some people begin to have suicidal thoughts. These suicidal thoughts do not mean that you truly want to die, rather, that you want the pain and sadness to stop. The pain of deep depression is intense, and it is too much to bear for long periods of time.

Even if you are in a lot of pain, make a promise to yourself, "I will not do anything to harm myself. I will find someone to talk to about my thoughts and feelings."

Thoughts and actions are two different things—your suicidal thoughts do not have to become a reality. Talk to someone who has experience helping people in your situation:

- school counselor
- school social worker
- school psychologist
- family member
- family doctor
- crisis or suicide hotline
- private therapist, counselor, or psychologist
- community mental health agency

You should always avoid using drugs and alcohol, but especially when you are feeling desperate or are in a crisis. Although it may be tempting to try to use them to try to numb painful feelings, they can make your emotions more intense, and harm your judgment. Using drugs or alcohol while you are in crisis will greatly increase your risk of hurting or killing yourself impulsively, even though you may not have really decided to do that.

The Impact of Bullying

Bullying is doing something harmful to another person, doing it intentionally (on purpose), and doing it repeatedly over time. Often the target of bullying is someone who has difficulty defending or sticking up for themselves. Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. Online bullying can be easier to commit because the bully doesn't see the target in person, but it is just as serious as face-to-face bullying.

Sometimes being the target of repeated bullying can cause someone to feel anxious, sad, or depressed, and can lead to problems with mood, energy level, sleep and appetite. If you are being bullied, teased, or harassed in a hurtful way, or know someone who is, do not suffer in silence:

- Tell someone. Bullying can escalate, so speak up until you find someone who helps.
- You can talk to your school counselor, social worker, trusted teacher or a family member. If bullying feels like it is getting you down, counseling may help.

For More Information or Help...

Bluegrass East Comprehensive Care
(859)233-0444

Kentucky Suicide Prevention Group
www.kentuckysuicideprevention.org

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Ridge Behavioral Health System
(859)269-2325

St. Joseph Behavioral Network
(859)224-2022

Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide
<http://www.sptsnj.org/>

Stop Youth Suicide
24 Hour Crisis Hotline 1-800-928-8000
Teen Hotline 1-800-999-999
www.stopyouthsuicide.com

Suicide Hotline
1-800-SUICIDE
1-800-784-2433

UK Adolescent Medicine
(859)323-5643

UK Department of Psychiatry
(859)323-6021

*Right now, if you are struggling with suicidal thoughts, talk to someone... Know that real help is available!
If you are concerned for yourself, talk to a trusted adult at home or at school.*