
Understanding and Supporting Youth Who Struggle with Suicidal Thoughts

What is suicide?

Suicide is deliberately taking one's own life. Suicide itself is not a mental disorder, but one of the most important causes of suicide is mental illness – most often Depression, Bipolar Disorder (Manic Depression), Schizophrenia, and Substance Use Disorders. Suicide is found in every culture and may be the result of complex social, cultural, religious and socio-economic factors, in addition to mental disorders.

What does suicide look like?

Not all self-harm behaviours are attempts to commit suicide. There may be many reasons for self-harm behaviours besides suicide, including a cry for help (e.g. a person may self-harm if they are stuck in a harmful situation from which they cannot escape, such as ongoing sexual abuse.)

Why do people attempt suicide?

Individuals who attempt suicide may be suffering from a mental disorder which will respond to appropriate and effective treatment. Appropriate treatment of a mental disorder significantly reduces the risk of suicide. For example, suicidal thinking associated with Depression usually resolves with effective treatment of the Depressive Disorder.

What are the warning signs?

The following may be warning signs for suicide and should be accessed further by a professional:

- Rage/anger
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities
- Feeling trapped (like there is no way out)
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from family/friends/family/society
- Agitation or intense anxiety
- Dramatic mood changes
- No reasons for living / no sense of purpose in life

Will talking about suicide make the problem worse?

Asking someone if they have thoughts of suicide will not put the idea in their head if they are not suicidal. If they are having suicidal thoughts, knowing that you are concerned enough about them to ask may give them the courage to ask for help.

What questions can I ask?

Ask about ideation: Have you been thinking about dying, harming yourself or suicide?

Ask about intent: Have you decided that you would be better off dead or that you should kill yourself?

Ask about plans: What plans have you made to kill yourself?

Source: <http://teenmentalhealth.org/learn/suicide/>

Disclaimer: This information is designed for educational purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instructions and/or treatment. If you have any specific questions, please contact your doctor or healthcare professional.

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What helps teens who are struggling?

What helps is having meaningful engagement with youth individually, including listening to their thoughts on what supports they need.

What does not help?

Providing information to groups of youth about suicide without any access to support or follow-up can be harmful. Without supports in place, this can trigger suicidal thoughts in vulnerable people. This is why large school based interventions, like school assemblies or commemorative actions, can be harmful in promoting suicide contagion/clusters within a group.

Tips for reducing the risk of suicide contagion in a school or community:

- Provide clear and accurate information immediately. Do not provide unnecessary detail and ensure information is age and culturally appropriate.
- Provide information individually or in appropriate friendship groups to close friends and family. After they have been notified, information should be provided to naturally occurring groups such as homeroom or first period classes.
- Identify and monitor people at increased risk.
- Provide appropriate support and treatment for people at risk, including initial one to one support for distressed students.
- Provide permission and a safe place for young people to talk about their feelings, understand their reactions and discuss helpful coping strategies to help to reduce distress. Talking to young people about suicide will not put the idea into their minds – if a suicide has occurred amongst their friends or peers, young people will probably already be thinking about it.
- Advise students that there is professional help available for mental health problems and suicidal thoughts in the school and in the community.

Source: headspace.org/au

Helpful Resources:

www.cmha.ca
www.teenmentalhealth.org
www.suicideprevention.ca
www.suicideinfo.ca

Crisis lines:

Kids Help Phone 24 hrs: 1-800-668-6868
AHS Mental Health Crisis (MRT): 780-427-4491
Support Network Distress Line: 780-482-4357
Suicide Distress Line: 780-482-4357

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