



The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds

Shining light on mental health through education.

Suicide Prevention: What Families Should Know

Suicide can be a scary topic to think and talk about. Yet, suicide is often preventable if we know what to look for, when to worry, and what to do. This handout shares information to support you in this process.

Suicide is when someone dies as a result of injuring themselves with the intent to die.
A **suicide attempt** is when someone harms themselves with an intent to end their life, but they do not die as a result of their actions.

Suicidal Thinking: What to Know

Suicidal thinking is not a disease or psychiatric disorder – it is a symptom. Just like with a cough, we try to make it better, but we also need to find the underlying cause to prevent it from getting worse. In addition, we need to understand how serious it is. Vague suicidal thinking after a major disappointment can be fairly common in teens. But having an intent and plan for suicide is *much more* serious than just thinking about it.

Underlying Causes of Suicide

- In around 9 out of 10 people, there is a psychiatric disorder present. Common diagnoses include mood disorders like depression, substance use disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), others.
- Around 1 in 10 people do not meet the criteria for a psychiatric disorder, and it is likely an impulsive act prompted by some life event.

Warning Signs of Suicide

- Talking a lot about death or wanting to die
- Feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Withdrawing from loved ones and friends, or becoming more isolated
- Extreme mood swings or acting agitated
- Eating or sleeping more or less than usual
- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- Feeling hopeless or in despair *followed by* sudden relief or improvement or giving away possessions to loved ones. These can be signs that a teen has a suicide plan and feels relief knowing they will no longer be in pain.

Some Risk Factors for Suicide

- Previous suicide attempt
- Mood disorder or substance use disorder
- Having an intent and plan for suicide
- Guns or firearms kept in the house
- Bullying or other high conflict relationships
- Painful events like romantic breakups or not making a school team
- High stress environments such as poverty, community violence, intense academic pressure

What to Do If You're Concerned

- **If you're worried about your child, ask.** It is a myth that asking about suicide increases the risk. It can be a relief to them to know you care. Ask if they have ever thought about self-harm, and what they are thinking, intending, or planning.
- **Talk with family, friends, or teachers** who know your child to learn more about what's going on.
- **Look for support groups/community resources.**
- **If your child is being bullied** online or in person, take their concerns seriously.
- **Call your child's pediatrician** to talk through any concerns.

If your child tells you they are having suicidal thoughts: take them seriously, make sure they are safe, stay with them, and Call 988 or 800-273-TALK (8255); or Text TALK to **741741**.

Thanks for all you do to support a young person in your life. It really makes a difference.

For more resources on suicide and other topics, visit us online: mghclaycenter.org

