

Teens and Suicide: Risk Factors and Prevention

The alarming increase in suicide rates during the past decade has forced us to deal differently with an issue that not very long ago, was rarely talked about. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) more than 34,000 suicides took place in the US in 2007. This amounts to 94 self-inflicted deaths per day or one every 15 minutes. Males are 4 times more likely to end their own lives than females although females attempt it two to three times more often.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth between the ages of 15 - 24. The top three methods that are most commonly used include firearm (46%), suffocation (37%), and poisoning (8%). The teenage and early adult years are often filled with stress and pressure from various sources including parents, school, society and peers. It's also a time when self-identity is beginning to form and sexual development is at its peak. Teens and young adults with a strong support system that includes family, friends, involvement in the community, religious connections and social interaction, stand a better chance of coping with tumultuous emotions. Unfortunately, many find themselves alone, frustrated and disconnected. Some factors that increase the risk of suicide include the following.

- Psychological problems are by far the leading cause of suicide and include bipolar disorder, depression, as well as disorders associated with alcohol and drug use
- Overwhelming emotions that create a sense of hopelessness
- Feelings of worthlessness that are compounded by failing grades at school, violence at home and isolation from friends, family and society
- Previous suicide attempt and/or a family history of suicide and depression.
- Experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse
- Coming to terms with homosexuality compounded by an unsupportive family, and/or bullying by peers
- Ongoing preoccupation with death (talking or writing about it, including methods)

Suicide prevention begins by recognizing and paying attention to the warning signs. If someone you know is exhibiting several of the risk factors above set time aside to talk to them. One way to open the conversation is by expressing concern and encouraging them to seek professional help. It's important that you stay in touch and check to make sure they follow through with their commitment, encourage them to make positive lifestyle changes, ask them to commit to calling you or their counselor if they feel like harming themselves and remove any possible means of suicide (weapons, prescriptions, etc) from easy access. For additional support consider contacting the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or you can visit their website <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>. They have trained and experienced staff available to help.

Oftentimes people hesitate to bring up the subject of suicide for fear that they may make the situation worse. However talking openly about thoughts and feelings and listening without judgment can be the difference between life and death.