

SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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Setting the Stage

- What are the common myths about suicide in children and adolescents?
- If I suspect my child is feeling suicidal, what should I do?
- How can schools and communities work together to prevent suicide?



Continuum of Suicidal Behavior



Suicide - Death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior

Note: Terms “committed” suicide, “completed suicide” and “successful suicide” are not considered unacceptable; preferred terms are “death by suicide” or “died by suicide”

Suicide attempt: A non-fatal self-directed potentially injurious behavior (may or may not result in injury) with any intent to die as result of the behavior

Suicidal ideation: Thoughts of suicide that can range in severity from a vague wish to be dead to active suicidal ideation with a specific plan and intent

Suicide is a Serious Problem

- Myth – Suicide in youth is not a problem
- Truth - Suicide in young people is a serious and prevalent problem:
 - 3rd leading cause of death for young people ages 10-24 and accounts for 20% of all deaths annually
 - Top methods used - firearms, suffocation, poisoning



Suicidal Behavior: A Serious Problem



- Boys are more likely than girls to die from suicide
 - Of the reported suicides in the 10-24 age group, 81% were males
- Girls attempt suicide more than boys, a particular problem for girls from Latina backgrounds

Suicidal Behavior: A Serious Problem

- Rates of other suicidal behavior are high according to a nationally-representative sample of high school students
 - ▣ 15.8% seriously considered attempting suicide
 - ▣ 12.8% made a plan about how they would attempt suicide
 - ▣ 7.8% attempted suicide one or more times
 - ▣ 2.4% made a suicide attempt that resulted in an injury, poisoning, or an overdose that required medical attention

Risk and Protective Factors

- Risk factors – Increase likelihood that a young person will engage in suicidal behavior
 - ▣ Intrapersonal, Social/situational, Cultural/environmental
- Protective factors – Mitigate or eliminate risk
 - ▣ Intrapersonal, Social/situational, Cultural/environmental
- Consider the balance between the two



Risk Factors: Intrapersonal

- ❑ Recent or serious loss
- ❑ Mental disorders (particularly mood disorders)
- ❑ Hopelessness, helplessness, guilt, worthlessness
- ❑ Previous suicide attempt
- ❑ Alcohol and other substance use disorders
- ❑ Disciplinary problems
- ❑ High risk behaviors
- ❑ Sexual orientation confusion



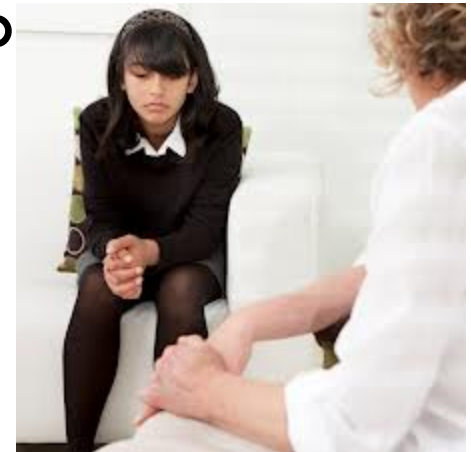
Risk Factors: Social/Situational

- Recent or serious loss (e.g., death, divorce, separation, broken relationship; self-esteem; loss of interest in friends, hobbies, or activities previously enjoyed)
- Family history of suicide
- Witnessing family violence
- Child abuse or neglect
- Lack of social support
- Sense of isolation
- Victim of bullying or being a bully



Risk Factors: Cultural/Environmental

- Access to lethal means (i.e. firearms, pills)
- Stigma associated with asking for help
- Barriers to accessing services
 - Lack of bilingual service providers
 - Unreliable transportation
 - Financial costs of services
- Cultural and religious beliefs (e.g., belief that suicide is noble resolution of a personal dilemma)



Protective Factors

- ❑ Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution and handling problems in a non-violent way
- ❑ Strong connections to family, friends, and community support
- ❑ Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide
- ❑ Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation



Protective Factors

- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions
- Effective clinical care for mental, physical, and substance use disorders
- Support through ongoing medical and mental health care relationships



Warning Signs

- A warning sign does not mean automatically that a person is going to attempt suicide, but it should be responded to in a serious & thoughtful manner
- Do not dismiss a threat as a cry for attention!



What kinds of warning signs are cause for concern?

Specific Warning Signs



- ❑ **Talking About Dying** - Any mention of dying, disappearing, jumping, shooting oneself, or other types of self harm
- ❑ **Change in Personality** - Sad, withdrawn, irritable, anxious, tired, indecisive, or apathetic
- ❑ **Change in Behavior** - Difficulty concentrating on school, work, or routine tasks
- ❑ **Change in Sleep Patterns** - Insomnia, often with early waking or oversleeping, nightmares
- ❑ **Change in Eating Habits** - Loss of appetite and weight, overeating
- ❑ **Fear of losing control** - Acting erratically, harming self or others

How To Talk With Your Child



- ▣ Talk in a calm, non-accusatory manner
- ▣ Let them know you love and care
- ▣ Convey how important they are to you
- ▣ Focus on concern for their well-being
- ▣ Make statements that convey you have empathy for their stress
- ▣ Encourage seeking professional help
- ▣ Reassure them that they will not feel like this forever by utilizing appropriate help

Prevent Your Child's Suicidal Behavior

- Prioritize interacting with them in positive ways
- Increase their involvement in positive experiences



- Monitor appropriately your child's whereabouts and communications (i.e., texting, Facebook, Twitter) with the goal of keeping them safe

Prevent Your Child's Suicidal Behavior



- Get involved and be aware your child's friends
- Communicate regularly with other parents in your community
- Limit your child's access to guns, knives, alcohol, prescription pills, and illegal drugs
- Communicate regularly with your child's school to ensure optimal safety and care for your child in the school setting

Help Your Suicidal Child

- ▣ Talk with your child about your concerns and ask directly about suicidal thoughts
- ▣ Explain value of therapy and potential for medication management of symptoms
- ▣ Address your concerns with other important adults in your child's life
- ▣ Discuss concerns with your child's doctor to get appropriate mental health referrals
- ▣ Talk with people in the school who can provide support and guidance



Seek Professional Help

- Be safe, not sorry!
- Take appropriate action when needed to protect your child
 - ▣ Feel that something is not right
 - ▣ Notice warning signs in your child (including worsening signs)
- Recognize if your child has a lot of risk factors for suicide and few protective factors



Seek Professional Help

- Find a mental health provider that has experience with suicidal youth
- Choose a mental health provider with whom you and your child feel comfortable
- Participate actively in therapy with your child
- Call 911 or take your child to a hospital in case of an emergency
 - Suicidal thoughts or behaviors are a mental health emergency

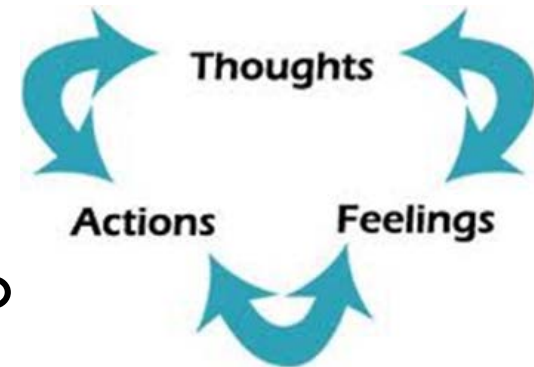


Intervention Programs

- Psychotherapy is an important component in the management of suicidal ideation and behaviors

- There are two documented effective psychotherapies for treating those who attempt suicide:

- ▣ Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT)
- ▣ Dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) for youth diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and recurrent suicidal ideation



Intervention Programs

- There are other promising interventions!
 - Family therapy
 - Medications



Partner with Schools & Community

- To prevent suicide:
 - Work with schools to ensure that educational suicide prevention programs are offered
 - Collaborate with schools on the development of peer gatekeeper programs related to identifying at-risk peers and encouraging them to seek help
 - Work with local sections of national suicide prevention organizations to have optimal suicide prevention programming available in your community



If Your Child Has a Suicidal Friend

- Have a plan for helping your child:



- Tell your teenagers that if a friend says that they are going to kill themselves, they should inform a trusted adult (i.e. parent, school nurse, or guidance counselor) to get professional help for their friend
- Assure your child that it is not their responsibility to decide if their friend's threat is credible

Remind them not to keep it a secret!

Immediate Prevention Help

□ Available 24/7:

■ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

1-800-273-TALK (8255)



■ The Trevor Project, a national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth:

www.thetrevorproject.org/

1-866-488-7386



Online Prevention Resources

- National Association of School Psychologists: www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/suicideprevention.aspx
- American Association of Suicidology: www.suicidology.org/
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: www.afsp.org
- Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide: www.sptsusa.org/
- Youth Suicide Prevention Program (YSPP): www.yspp.org



If You Lose A Child To Suicide

□ **Get support!**

- Remember in your time of sorrow and sadness, you are not alone
- Reach out to family, friends, and other community members
- Engage with support groups, locally and nationally (including on-line communities)
- Honor your loved one and remember how they lived
- Volunteer to help other survivors
- Participate in community activities to prevent suicide



Take Action!

- For more information on suicide in children and adolescents,
 - ▣ American Psychological Association:
www.apa.org/topics/suicide
 - ▣ American Association of Suicidology: www.suicidology.org/
 - ▣ Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about Teen Suicide Prevention:
<http://marinschools.org/SafeSchools/Documents/SMH/SuicidePreventionFAQs.pdf>

Questions?



References

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