

**YOUTH SUICIDE: HELPING YOUR CHILDREN**

Suicide is preventable and parents and caregivers make a difference. Parents are often not in a good position to see the warning signs for suicide in their own children. Initially, youth are far more likely to disclose their intent to harm or kill themselves to their friends. However, they then naturally look to adults for help.

**LEARN THE WARNING SIGNS.** Simply knowing the warning signals for suicide can save a life. Be aware of the risk factors for youth suicide as well. (Below)

**TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN.** As parents, this is the most important thing we can do. Be persistent if necessary. Be willing to talk about suicide. Talking about suicide or suicidal thoughts will not push someone to kill him- or herself. Let them know that suicide is not the answer to whatever they are going through. Get professional help if needed or call the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

**RISK FACTORS**

**Pressures** such as unrealistic academic, social or family expectations can create a strong sense of rejection and can lead to deep disappointment. Teens and young adults are especially prone to feelings of loneliness, hopelessness and rejection as a result of these pressures.

**Depression** in young people is increasing at an alarming rate. Recent surveys indicate that as many as one in five teens suffers from clinical depression, and it can be difficult to detect in young people. But it is extremely important that depressed youth receive prompt, professional treatment. Keep in mind that depression in young men often appears as anger, rage, frustration and getting into fights.

**Abuse of Alcohol, Drugs or Sex** is a way that some young people cope with feelings of depression or loneliness. However, such behaviors only lead to new problems and a deeper level of depression.

**Isolation or Withdrawal** can also be a coping strategy for the suicidal youth making them even more susceptible to loneliness, depression and substance abuse.

**OTHER GENERAL RISK FACTORS**

- Mental disorders or substance use disorders
- Hopelessness
- History of trauma or abuse
- Family history of suicide
- Easy access to lethal means
- Local clusters of suicide that have a contagious influence
- Lack of social support

**MEANS MATTER**

Suicide prevention experts argue that if deadly methods are not readily available when a person decides to attempt suicide, he or she may delay the attempt. If delayed, it may allow for the possibility of later deciding not to attempt suicide, or using less deadly methods, allowing for greater possibility of medical rescue.

**Preventing suicide by firearms**

*Safe storage of guns is one preventive action that could result in a decrease in the number of youth suicides.*

- Most children older than the age of 7 have the strength to pull the trigger of a firearm, especially a handgun. Keep guns unloaded and locked up.
- Lock and store bullets in a separate location.
- Make sure kids don't have access to the keys for storage/gun cabinets.

- Ask police for advice on safe storage and gun locks.
- Remove all firearms from homes with children and others judged by a physician to be at risk for a suicide attempt.

**Preventing suicide by use of medications or household toxins**

- Keep medications and household toxins locked up.
- Make sure kids don't have access to keys where those products are stored.
- Parents should communicate with physicians so that medications prescribed to youth are effective but not deadly when treating patients who are potentially suicidal.

**MOST IMPORTANTLY, LEARN TO RECOGNIZE THE WARNING SIGNS.****WARNING SIGNS**

Most suicidal people give some of the clues and warning signs listed here. By learning the warning signs, paying attention and trusting your own judgment, you can make the difference between life and death.

- Previous suicide attempts
- Talking about, making a plan or threatening to complete suicide
- Withdrawal or isolation from friends, family or school activities
- Changed eating habits or sleeping patterns
- Agitation, especially when combined with sleeplessness
- Giving away prized possessions, making final arrangements, putting affairs in order
- Themes of death or depression in conversation, writing, reading or art
- Recent loss of a friend or family member through death, suicide or divorce
- Sudden dramatic decline or improvement in schoolwork
- Major mood swings or abrupt personality changes
- Feeling hopeless or trapped
- Use or increased use of drugs and/or alcohol
- Chronic headaches and stomach aches, fatigue
- Neglect of personal appearance
- Taking unnecessary risks or acting reckless
- No longer interested in favorite activities or hobbies

**REMEMBER**

Any one of these signs alone doesn't necessarily indicate a person is suicidal. However, all signs are reason for concern and several signals may be cause for concern of suicide. Warning signs are especially important if the person has attempted suicide in the past.

**IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN CRISIS, TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION**

**Call the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline at  
1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

**Ask. Listen. Get professional help.  
Your actions may save a life!**

Much of the information here is courtesy of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. Visit their website for more information on youth suicide at [www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org), or visit SPAN Idaho at [www.spanidaho.org](http://www.spanidaho.org).

