



Youth Suicide Prevention

Youth Suicide in the U.S.

Recent statistics show that youth suicide is still a major problem in the United States. Suicide is currently the third leading cause of death for people 15-24 years old in the U.S. and the second leading cause of death for this age group in Texas. Over 4000 individuals aged 10-24 die by suicide every year across the country. Female youths attempt suicide more frequently than males, but males die from suicide at a rate about four times higher than females.

The 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 15.8% of U.S. high school students had seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year and 12.8% had made a suicide plan.

FAQ

Q: What are the common warning signs that a young person might be considering suicide?

A: Common warning signs include:

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person
- Talking about feeling hopeless
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger, or seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities—seemingly without thinking
- Dramatic mood changes
- Talking about feeling trapped—like there’s no way out
- Signs of anxiousness and agitation
- Not sleeping or sleeping all the time
- Expressing that there is no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life

If one or more of these warning signs are new or if they have recently increased, risk of suicide may be greater. A young person acting differently seemingly in connection to a painful event also increases the risk. The warning signs may be especially critical if the person displaying them has a history of or current problem with depression, alcohol, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or if he or she has made a suicide attempt in the past.

Q: Will bringing up the subject of suicide with a young person increase the likelihood that he or she will attempt?

A: No. All collected evidence shows that bringing up the topic is an important way to *prevent* suicide. Introducing the topic and showing an openness to discussion allows the other person to feel heard.

Q: Is it easy for parents and caregivers to tell when a youth is displaying suicidal behavior?

A: Many parents and caregivers assume that it will be easy for them to tell when something is troubling their child or children. Unfortunately, research shows that this is not the case in a surprisingly large percentage of families. This shows the importance of a parent or guardian paying attention to warning signs. Even more than that, this shows the importance of asking questions and being open to conversation. See the “What Should I Do If I’m Concerned” section for more information on the asking process.

Q: Do youth who express suicidal thoughts or behaviors ever do so just to get attention?

A: Not every single youth who expresses suicidal thoughts or behaviors actually plans on attempting. However, it is important that these expressions are taken seriously every single time they occur and never ignored. Suicide is a process, not a random or isolated occurrence. Individuals who attempt suicide usually express their intention to do so and display one or more of the common warning signs prior to the event.

Q: Is suicide preventable?

A: Yes. Many people believe that individuals displaying suicidal behaviors have already made up their minds and will attempt regardless of any help or outreach offered. This belief is entirely wrong. Reaching out to someone displaying warning signs or otherwise indicating that he or she is thinking about suicide is the most important thing a friend, parent, or any other observer can do.

Q: If I suspect that someone I know is thinking about suicide, should I ask them? If so, how?

A: Yes. Asking is the first step in saving a life and is an important way to show that you are hearing them and that you will listen. For more information on this process, see below.

What Should I Do If I'm Concerned?

If you suspect that someone you know is thinking about suicide, the best way to approach the situation is to ask.

Asking is the first step in saving a life and is an important way to show that you are hearing them and that you will listen. You can ask the question directly (examples: "Have you thought about suicide?" "Do you want to kill yourself?" "Are you thinking about suicide?") or indirectly (examples: "Sometimes when people are sad as you are, they think about suicide. Have you ever thought about it?" "Do you ever want to go to bed and never wake up?"). Once you've asked, follow the steps in the blue box.

Find a private area to talk and seek to establish a relationship (if it is someone you don't already know well). Comment on what you see and observe non-judgmentally and be curious about the perceived problem (how long they've thought about suicide, if they've attempted in the past). Seek to find out if they are at immediate high risk of suicide (**see below**). Find out to who and where they normally go for help and if they have a regular doctor, mental health provider or counselor (if you don't already know this information). Always be sure to be aware of your own non-verbal reactions and tone of voice.

If you feel that someone is at risk for suicide, take all signs seriously and refer him or her to a mental health professional or one of the additional resources below.

If you feel that someone is at a high risk for suicide (he or she has a plan and/ or access to means such as pills or a gun), do not leave the person alone. Call 911, seek immediate help from a mental health provider at school or in the community, call a mobile crisis outreach team, or take him or her to the nearest hospital emergency room.

Mental Health Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org • 1-800-273-Talk (8255)

**School Counselors, Doctors, Nurses,
Mental Health Professionals,
Religious Leaders**

Mental Health America of Texas
www.mhatexas.org

Texas Suicide Prevention Council
www.TexasSuicidePrevention.org

Texas Youth Hotline
1-800-210-2278

Texas Underage Drinking Hotline
1-888-843-8222

Help Lines

Pick up phone and dial 211
Or 1-800-833-5948

**National Alliance for the
Mentally Ill of Texas (NAMI Texas)**
1-800-633-3760
www.namitx.nami.org

**Texas Department of State Health
Services
Community Centers**
www.dshs.state.tx.us/mentalhealth.shtm

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov
**American Foundation for Suicide
Prevention**
www.afsp.org

National Youth Crisis Hotline
1-800-HIT-HOME

**American Association of Child and
Adolescent Psychiatry**
www.aacap.org
1-800-333-7636

Mental Health America
www.MentalHealthAmerica.net
1-800-969-NMHA

**Boys Town 24/7 Hotline (for all
teens, parents, and families)**
1-800-448-3000