

Child and Adolescent Suicide

Left untreated, depression can lead some youth to take their own lives. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds and the sixth leading cause of death for 5- to 14-year-olds. Attempted suicides are even more common.

Warning signs of suicide

Four out of five teens that attempt suicide give clear warnings. If you suspect that a child or adolescent is suicidal, look for these warning signs:

- Threats of suicide- either direct or indirect.
- Verbal hints such as “I won’t be around much longer” or “It’s hopeless.”
- Putting affairs in order (for example, giving or throwing away favorite possessions).
- Sudden cheerfulness after a period of depression.
- Hallucinations or bizarre thoughts.

What Should Parents and Other Adults Do if They Think a Child Is Suicidal?

- Ask the child or teen if he or she feels depressed or thinks about suicide or death. Speaking openly and honestly allows the child to confide in you and gives you a chance to express your concern. Listen to his or her thoughts and feelings in a caring and respectful manner.
- Let the child or teen know that you care and want to help.
- Supply the child or teen with local resources, such as a crisis hotline or the location of a mental health clinic. If the child or teen is a student, find out if there are any available mental health professionals at the school and let the child know about them.
- Seek professional help. It is essential to seek expert advice from a mental health professional that has experience helping depressed children and teens.
- Alert key adults in the child’s life—family, friends, teachers. Inform the child’s parents or primary caregiver, and recommend that they seek professional assistance for their child or teen.
- Trust your instincts. If you think the situation may be serious, seek immediate help. If necessary, break a confidence in order to save a life.

Other Resources

Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

This will connect you with a crisis center in your area.

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