

National Association of School Psychologists

4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814
P: 301-657-0270 | Toll Free: 866-331-NASP | F: 301-657-0275

Preventing Youth Suicide: Brief Facts and Tips

1. Youth suicide is a serious problem. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among school age youth. In 2013, 17% of our nation's high school students seriously considered suicide and 8% made an attempt.

2. Suicide is preventable. Youth who are contemplating suicide typically give warning signs of their distress. Most important is to never take these warning signs lightly or promise to keep them secret.

3. Suicide Risk Factors. Certain characteristics are associated with increased suicide risk include:

- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- Isolation and aloneness
- Non-suicidal self-injury (e.g., cutting)
- Mental illness including depression, conduct disorders, and substance abuse
- Family stress/dysfunction
- Family history of suicide
- Environmental risks, including presence of a firearm in the home
- Situational crises (e.g., the presence of a gun in the home, bullying and harassment, serious disciplinary action, death of a loved one, physical or sexual abuse, breakup of a relationship/friendship, family violence, suicide of a peer)

4. Suicide Warning Signs. Most suicidal youth demonstrate observable behaviors signaling suicidal thinking:

- Suicidal threats in the form of direct (e.g., "I am going to kill myself") and indirect (e.g., "I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up again") statements
- Suicide notes and plans (including online postings)
- Making final arrangements (e.g., giving away prized possessions)
- Preoccupation with death
- Changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts, and/or feelings.

5. There are protective factors that can lessen the effects of risk factors. These can include family and peer support, school and community connectedness, healthy problem-solving skills, and easy access to effective medical and mental health services.

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6. Schools have an important role in preventing youth suicide. Children and youth spend the majority of their day in school where caring and trained adults are available to help them. Schools need trained mental health staff and clear procedures for identifying and intervening with students at risk for suicidal behavior.

7. The entire school staff should work to create an environment where students feel safe. School mental health and crisis team members are responsible for conducting suicide risk assessment, warn/inform parents, provide recommendations and referrals to community services, and often provide follow up counseling and support at school.

8. Collaboration between schools and community providers is critical. Establishing partnerships with local community mental health agencies helps connect students to needed services in a timely manner and helps smooth re-entry to school.

9. Never ignore or keep information a secret. Peers should not agree to keep the suicidal thoughts of a friend a secret and instead should tell an adult, such as a parent, teacher, or school psychologist. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources as soon as possible. School staff should take the student to the designated school mental health professional or administrator.

10. Get immediate help if a suicide threat seems serious. Call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Suggested Resources:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- [Trevor Project for Youth and LGBTQ](#)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#)