

**GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF**

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth aged 10-24 in the United States. \*
- In recent years more young people have died from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, congenital birth defects and diabetes combined. \*
- For every young person who dies by suicide, between 100-200 attempt suicide
- Males are four times as likely to die by suicide as females – although females attempt suicide three times as often as males. \*

**SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE Here's what you can do:**

- Talk to your student about suicide, don't be afraid, you will not be "putting ideas into their heads". Asking for help is the single skill that will protect your student. Help your student to identify and connect to caring adults to talk to when they need guidance and support
- Know the risk factors and warning signs of suicide.
- Remain calm. Becoming too excited or distressed will communicate that you are not able to talk about suicide.
- Listen without judging. Allow for the discussion of experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Be prepared for expression of intense feelings. Try to understand the reasons for considering suicide without taking a position about whether or not such behavior is justified.
- Supervise constantly. Do not leave the individual alone until a caregiver (often a parent) or school crisis team member has been contacted and agrees to provide appropriate supervision.
- Ask if there is a plan. If so remove means. As long as it does not put the caregiver in danger, attempt to remove the suicide means.
- Respond Immediately. Escort the student to a member of your school's crisis team. If you are unsure of who is on your school crisis team, find the Principal, Assistant Principal or school social worker, psychologist, counselor or school nurse.
- Join the crisis team. You know your students the best. Provide essential background information that will help with assessing the student's risk for suicide. When a teacher says, "this behavior is not like this student", this is critical information indicating a sudden change in behavior.

\*M. Heron, D.L. Hoyert, S.L. Murphy, J.Xu, K.D.Kochanek, & B. Tejada-Vera. (2009, April) Deaths: Final Data for 2006. National Vital Statistics Reports 57(14)

\*\*Lieberman, R., Poland, S. & Cassel, R. (2008) Suicide Intervention. In Thomas, A. & Grimes, J., Best practices in school psychology V. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists  
Source: Los Angeles County Youth Suicide Prevention Project

**GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF****Youth Suicide Risk Factors**

While the path that leads to suicidal behavior is long and complex and there is no "profile" that predicts suicidal behavior with certainty, there are certain risk factors associated with increased suicide risk. In isolation, these factors are not signs of suicidal thinking. However, when present they signal the need to be vigilant for the warning signs of suicide. In addition, they are also appropriate targets for suicide prevention programs. Specifically, these risk factors include the following:

- History of depression, mental illness or substance/alcohol abuse disorders
- Presence of a firearm or rope
- Isolation or lack of social support
- Situational crises
- Family History of suicide or suicide in the community
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Incarceration

**Suicide Warning Signs**

Warning signs are observable behaviors that may signal the presence of suicidal thinking. They might be considered "cries for help" or "invitations to intervene." These warning signs signal the need to inquire directly about whether the individual has thoughts of suicide. If such thinking is acknowledged, then suicide interventions will be required. Warning signs include the following:

- ***Suicide threats.*** It has been estimated that up to 80% of all suicide victims have given some clues regarding their intentions. Both direct ("I want to kill myself") and indirect ("I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up") threats need to be taken seriously.
- ***Suicide notes and plans.*** The presence of a suicide note is a very significant sign of danger. The greater the planning revealed by the youth, the greater the risk of suicidal behavior.
- ***Prior suicidal behavior.*** Prior behavior is a powerful predictor of future behavior. Thus anyone with a history of suicidal behavior should be carefully observed for future suicidal behavior.
- ***Making final arrangements.*** Making funeral arrangements, writing a will, and/or giving away prized possessions may be warning signs of impending suicidal behavior.
- ***Preoccupation with death.*** Excessive talking, drawing, reading, and/or writing about death may suggest suicidal thinking.
- ***Changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts, and/or feelings.*** Depression (especially when combined with hopelessness), sudden happiness (especially when preceded by significant depressions), a move toward social isolation, giving away personal possessions, and reduced interest in previously important activities are among the changes considered to be suicide warning signs.

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