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Facts for Teens: Teen Suicide

Introduction

Teen suicide is a serious problem in the United States. It is the third leading cause of death among teenagers — almost 2,000 teens kill themselves each year.¹

Many more teens attempt suicide. A recent survey of high-school students found that:

- Almost 1 in 5 had seriously considered attempting suicide;
- More than 1 in 6 had made plans to attempt suicide; and
- More than 1 in 12 had made a suicide attempt in the past year.²

If you look around a class of 25 students, at least five are likely to have seriously considered suicide, and at least two are likely to have tried to kill themselves in the past year.

Female teens are much more likely to attempt suicide than males³, but male teens are four times more likely to actually kill themselves.⁴

Over sixty-percent of teens who kill themselves use guns.⁵

Who Is At Risk?

Some teens, because of their biochemical makeup or life experiences, are at greater risk for suicide. Risk factors for suicide include:

- **Previous suicide attempts** - Teens that have attempted suicide in the past are much more likely than other teens to attempt suicide again in the future. Approximately a third of teen suicide victims have made a previous suicide attempt.⁶
- **Depression and/or alcohol or substance abuse** - Over 90% of teen suicide victims have a mental disorder, such as depression, and/or a history of alcohol or drug abuse.⁷
- **Family history of mental disorders, substance abuse, or suicide** - Teens who kill themselves have often had a close family member who attempted or committed suicide. Many of the mental illnesses, such as depression, that contribute to suicide risk appear to have a genetic component.⁸

Stop youth violence before it starts

- **Stressful situation or loss** - Teens who kill themselves almost always have serious problems, such as depression or substance abuse. When they experience losses or certain stressful situations, it can trigger a suicide attempt. Such stressful situations include: getting into trouble at school or with the police; fighting or breaking up with a boyfriend or a girlfriend; and fighting with friends.^{9, 10}
- **Easy access to guns** - Teens are much more likely to kill themselves when they have access to guns. When teens shoot themselves, they most often do so in their own homes. Teens are at a far greater risk for suicide when there are loaded and accessible guns in their homes.^{11, 12}
- **Exposure to other teenagers who have committed suicide** - Teens are more likely to kill themselves if they have recently read, seen, or heard about other suicide attempts.¹³

Other risk factors include a history of physical and/or sexual abuse, poor communication with parents, incarceration, and lack of access or an unwillingness to seek mental health treatment.¹⁴⁻¹⁷

What You Can Do

If you are worried about a friend...

Ask directly if he or she is considering suicide. Ask whether he or she has made a specific plan and has done anything to carry it out. Listen openly to your friend, tell your friend that you care deeply, and that no matter how overwhelming his or her problems seem, help is available.

Then, help your friend to find someone trained to help, such as a doctor, community health center, counselor, psychologist, social worker, youth worker, or minister. Numbers for suicide hotlines and crisis centers should be available in your local phone book or call 1-800-SUICIDE.

If your friend has a detailed plan or appears acutely suicidal and will not talk, he or she could be in immediate danger and it is important to get help right away. Do not leave your friend alone, and seek help immediately, taking your friend to a hospital emergency room if necessary.

Even if it will anger your friend, talk with an adult you trust about your friend's situation so that you aren't carrying the burden by yourself. Do not try to "rescue" your friend or be a hero and try to handle the situation on your own. You can be the most help by referring your friend to someone with the professional skills to provide the help that he or she needs, while you continue to offer support.

If you are thinking about suicide...

Talk with a trusted adult or call your local crisis intervention center immediately. You may be feeling tired, alone, depressed, scared, angry, hopeless, or unloved, and it may seem that things will never get better. However, no matter how overwhelming your problems seem, confidential help is available.

Trained, caring adults can help you to find alternatives you may not have considered and solutions to problems or situations that may seem hopeless. If you are depressed, effective treatments are available that will help to relieve your sadness, anger, and pain.

Numbers for suicide hotlines and crisis centers should be available in your local phone book or call 1-800-SUICIDE.

Helpful Links

[Center for Mental Health Services \(CMHS\)](#)

www.mentalhealth.org

CMHS leads federal efforts to treat mental illnesses by promoting mental health and by preventing the development or worsening of mental illness when possible. Available at its Web site are a number of fact sheets and other information, including:

- [Major Depression in Children and Adolescents](#)
www.mentalhealth.org/publications/allpubs/CA-0011/default.asp

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

www.cdc.gov

CDC is the lead federal agency for protecting the health and safety of people in the United States. Its Web site contains a number of fact sheets and publications on relevant issues, such as:

- [TIPS 4 Youth](#)
www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tips4youth.htm
Teens who smoke are more likely to suffer from depression. Learn more about cigarettes and smoking.
- [Suicide in the United States](#)
www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/suifacts.htm
This fact sheet provides statistics on suicide among young people, describes federal suicide prevention efforts, and provides links to suicide prevention materials published by CDC.

[Depression and Suicide Virtual Library](#)

<http://ericcass.uncg.edu/virtuallib/depress/depressbook.html>

This collection of information on suicide and depression was compiled by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Department of Education.

[National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)](#)

www.nimh.nih.gov

A component of the National Institutes of Health, NIMH works to diminish the burden of mental illness through research by better understanding, developing treatment, and eventually, by preventing mental illness. Available at its Web site are a number of fact sheets and other information, including:

- [Lets Talk About Depression](#)
www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/letstalk.cfm
- [Depression](#)
www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depression.cfm
- [What to Do When A Friend is Depressed](#)
www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/friend.cfm

- [In Harm's Way: Suicide in America](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/harmaway.cfm)
www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/harmaway.cfm
- [Frequently Asked Questions About Suicide](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/research/suicidefaq.cfm)
www.nimh.nih.gov/research/suicidefaq.cfm

[National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](http://www.mentalhealth.org/suicideprevention/strategy.asp)

www.mentalhealth.org/suicideprevention/strategy.asp

The National Strategy for Suicide Prevention is a collaborative effort of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Its Web site provides information about suicide and suicide prevention efforts, and links users to other valuable resources. The site includes phone numbers to call if you, or someone you know, are considering suicide.

[A Teenager's Guide to... Fitting in, Getting involved, Finding yourself](http://www.ncfy.com/expreng.pdf)

www.ncfy.com/expreng.pdf

The ideas in this booklet, produced by the Family and Youth Services Bureau, Department of Health and Human Services, can help teens learn to deal with tough times and enjoy the good times by finding people and places that are right for them.

[Youth Mental Health Issues](http://twosocks.ces.ncsu.edu/cyfdb/browse_2.php?search=Teens)

http://twosocks.ces.ncsu.edu/cyfdb/browse_2.php?search=Teens

This site, sponsored by the Children, Youth, and Families Education and Research Network (CYFERNET), U.S. Department of Agriculture, contains links to a number of publications and resources on depression and other teen mental health issues, for youth and their families.

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