



Suicide Prevention at School: Warning Signs

The Facts

- ➔ Suicide is the third leading cause of death among teenagers.
- ➔ 1 out of 6 high school students seriously consider attempting suicide; 1 out of 13 attempt one or more times.
- ➔ School connectedness—students' belief that school staff and peers care about them as individuals as well as about their learning—is related to reductions in suicidal thoughts and attempts.

Warning Signs and What to Do

The following three signs indicate an individual is at immediate risk of suicide:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

If you notice any of these three signs in a student, take the following steps right away:

1. Supervise the student constantly, or make sure the student is in a secure environment supervised by caring adults, until he or she can be seen by the school mental health provider.
2. Escort the student to the mental health provider.
3. Provide any additional information to the mental health provider that will assist with the evaluation of the student. The mental health provider will notify the student's parents.

Keep in mind that the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a 24-hour toll-free phone line for people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Other behaviors may indicate a serious risk—especially if the behavior is new, has increased, and/or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change:

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage; talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

If you see any of these behaviors in a student, take one or both of the following steps:

- Talk with the school's mental health provider about your concerns. He or she may decide to obtain information about the student from other school staff to determine how best to help the student.
- Reach out to the student and ask how he or she is doing. Listen without judging. Mention the changes you have noticed in his or her behavior and that you are concerned. If the student is open to talking further with someone, suggest that he or she see the school mental health provider.

Schools with established suicide prevention procedures, that all staff know about, are better prepared to identify warning signs, respond when a student is at risk, and prevent a suicide from occurring.

Source: Adapted from Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (September 2012). *The role of high school teachers in preventing suicide*. Waltham, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.



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