

Youth Suicide

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What does suicide mean
to you?

How would you know if a student was at-risk for suicide?

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the warning signs for youth suicide.
2. Increase confidence in engaging students who may be at-risk for suicide.
3. Begin thinking about school-wide approaches to supporting students who may be at-risk for suicide.

"Darkness silenced the wary depths of despair I dwelt in. I sat upon a cloud of loneliness, secluded from my family and friends. I was in my room, devoid of light. I huddled in a little corner with my head hung. How I wanted to reach out to others—this emptiness in my soul craved another human being."

-Jenny Joseph, 17

excerpt from "Ophelia Speaks" by Sara Shandler



Act 71 of 2014

► Why necessary?

- Many schools not doing anything related to suicide prevention.
- Generic crisis plan does not address specific nuances of suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention

Why does it matter?

Understanding the National Problem of Youth Suicide

- ▶ 4,874 people under age 25 died by suicide (12.7% of total).
- ▶ 1 young person dies by suicide every hour and 47 minutes.
- ▶ Suicide is the **2nd** leading cause of death for youth ages 12–18 years (CDC, 2013 data).
- ▶ In 2013, 179 children age 15 and younger died by suicide.

Pennsylvania Statistics

- ▶ **14.5%** of high school students seriously considered suicide
- ▶ **11.3%** had a suicide plan
- ▶ **6.9%** of youth attempted suicide
- ▶ **29%** sometimes thought life was not worth living

- ▶ 2nd leading cause of death in high school students in PA
- ▶ **LEADING** cause of death in 10–14 year-olds in PA (37% of all deaths in 2013)

“I am thinking about hurting myself” means:

- A. “I want to kill myself.”
- B. “I want to engage in a self-injurious behavior.”
- C. Both
- D. Neither

Myths about Suicide

Myth #1: Suicides happen without warning

- ▶ Most people who attempt or die by suicide have communicated their distress or plans to at least one other person

Myth #2: Only certain types of people die by suicide

- ▶ Suicide does not discriminate
- ▶ There are no clear, specific traits that separate suicidal people from non-suicidal people
- ▶ Individuals from all cultures, upbringings, social economic statuses kill themselves
- ▶ Pay attention to what the person says and does, not what he/she has or looks like or how you believe that person should think, feel, or act

Myth #3: Suicide is an act of aggression, anger, or revenge

- ▶ Most people who kill themselves do so because they feel they do not belong or are a burden on others
- ▶ They think that their death will free their loved ones of this burden
- ▶ Many suicides occur in ways and in places that the person hopes will ease the shock and grief of those they left behind

Myth #4: Talking about suicide makes people more likely to kill themselves

- ▶ There are no iatrogenic effects of asking about suicide (Gould et al., 2005)
- ▶ Talking about suicide gives one an opportunity to express thoughts and feelings about something they may have been keeping secret
- ▶ Discussion brings it into the open and allows an opportunity for intervention

Myth #5: People who talk about suicide are not serious about killing themselves

- ▶ Many people who are considering suicide tell others about these thoughts
- ▶ However, mention of suicide often makes people uncomfortable, and as a result they may not take the person seriously.
- ▶ This myth further complicates matters as...

Myth #6: Suicidal thoughts and behaviors are ways to get attention

- ▶ Take any mention of suicide or suicidal behavior seriously regardless of your thoughts about their true motives
- ▶ We need to help people identify more effective ways to seek having their needs met without dismissing the severity of their expressed thoughts, concerns, and/or behaviors

Myth #7: Suicidal teens overreact to life events

- ▶ Problems that may not seem like a big deal to one person, particularly adults, may be causing a great deal of distress for the suicidal teen
- ▶ We have to remember that perceived crises are just as concerning and predictive of suicidal behavior as actual crises

How long does the average suicidal crisis last?

- A. Less than 24 hours
- B. 24–72 hours
- C. 3–5 days
- D. About a week

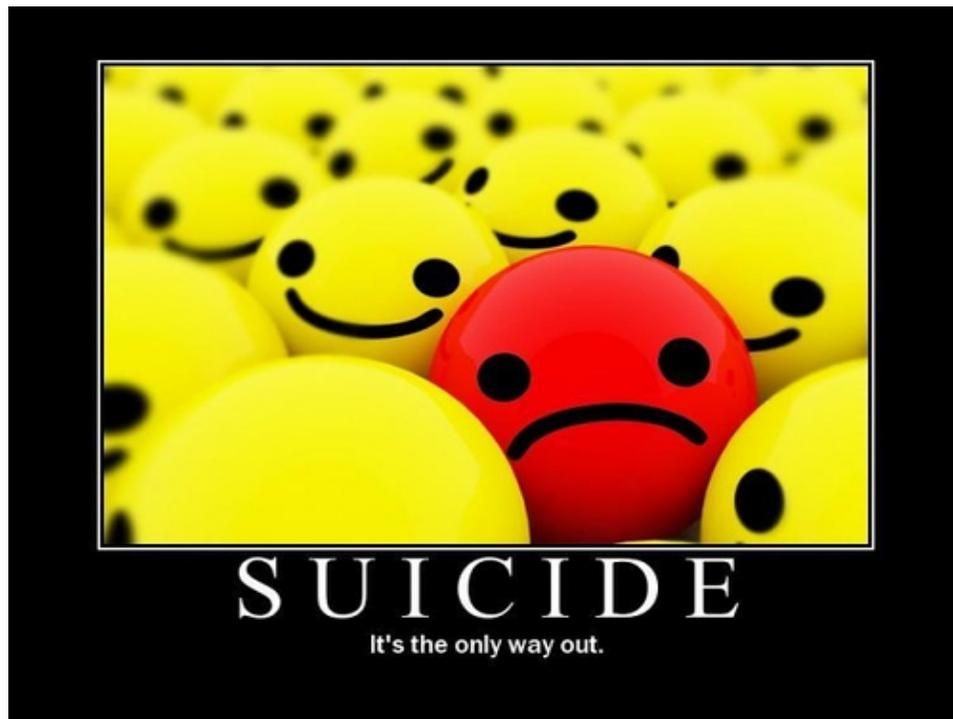
Myth #8: Suicide cannot be prevented

- ▶ Most people are acutely suicidal between 24–72 hours.
- ▶ Providing help and intervention during this time makes it less likely that they will make another attempt
- ▶ A caring, concerned individual can help someone in distress
- ▶ Taking someone's feelings seriously and listening can truly save a life.

Warning Signs for Youth Suicide

So What Happens if We Search the Internet for “Youth Suicide Warning Signs?”

- ▶ Google search found “about 241,000” sites (in 0.4 secs)
- ▶ Yahoo found 31.2 million results
- ▶ Bing found 37.2 million results
- ▶ Sites for participating members in the National Council for Suicide Prevention have more uniformity
- ▶ Among the warning signs on display for the public are:
 - Visiting or calling people one cares about
 - Accident-prone (carelessness)
 - Neglecting schoolwork
 - Confusion
 - Neurotransmitter problem



So What is the Message to the Public?

- ▶ Vague, inconsistent, non-observable, lacked empirical support
- ▶ Even the leading organizations have some level of disagreement
- ▶ Perhaps anything could be a warning sign, so
 - A) worry about everything
 - B) worry about nothing
- ▶ There is no consensus on what to do
 - Exception = call the Lifeline

Risk Factors vs. Warning Signs

- ▶ Risk Factor:
 - A measurable characteristic, variable, or hazard that increases the likelihood of the development of an adverse outcome
 - A risk factor precedes the outcome in time
 - Examples: mental illness (especially depression and other mood disorders), victimization, LGBTQ, being male?
- ▶ Warning Sign:
 - A measurable change in behavior, thoughts, feelings, or other indicators in the near future (e.g., minutes, days, up to 1 week) prior to a life-threatening suicidal behavior
 - Relates to current, episodic functioning with proximal relationship to behavior
 - This is what clinicians want to know

Risk Factors vs. Warning Signs

- ▶ Key difference = warning signs are near-term risk factors with the greatest available evidence suggesting the highest likelihood of a suicidal behavior occurring in the immediate future

Youth Suicide Warning Signs

1. Talking about or making plans for suicide
2. Expressing hopelessness about the future
3. Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
4. Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, particularly in the presence of the warning signs above. Specifically, this includes significant:
 - Withdrawal from or changing in social connections/situations
 - Recent increased agitation or irritability
 - Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
 - Changes in sleep (increased or decreased)

If you notice warning signs for suicide in anyone, you can help!

1. Ask if they are ok or if they are having thoughts of suicide
2. Express your concern about what you are observing in their behavior
3. Listen attentively and non-judgmentally
4. Reflect what they share and let them know they have been heard
5. Tell them they are not alone
6. Let them know that there are treatments available that can help
7. If you are or they are concerned, guide them to professional help

Homepage

YOUTH SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

YOUTH HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS PARENTS/CAREGIVERS GATEKEEPERS ABOUT

NO ONE WANTS TO LOSE A YOUNG PERSON TO SUICIDE

There is hope and there is help.

For more information on the warning signs of suicide and what you can do to help, click on the image that best describes you.

YOUTH



PARENTS & CAREGIVERS



HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS



GATEKEEPERS



HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS



Page for help youth

If you are concerned about someone, ask yourself the following questions. Has your friend or family member shown or shared any of the following:

- Talking about wanting to die, be dead, or about suicide, or asking others to do so for them?
- Feeling like things may never get better, seeming like they are in terrible emotional pain (like something is wrong deep inside but they can't make it go away), or they are struggling to deal with a big loss in their life?
- Or is your gut telling you to be worried because they have withdrawn from everyone and everything, have become more anxious or on edge, seem unusually angry, or just don't seem normal to you?

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP



HOW TO RESPOND



If you know someone who has any of the warning signs, there are things that you can do to help:

- Ask them if they are okay and listen to them like a true friend.
- Tell them you are worried and concerned about them and that they are not alone.
- Talk to an adult you trust about your concerns and direct the adult to [this page](#).

DON'T KEEP SOMEONE'S SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AND PLANS A SECRET

REMEMBER THAT BEING A GOOD FRIEND CAN HELP SAVE A LIFE.

THANK YOU FOR CARING ENOUGH TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org

Pages for Professionals, Parents and Caregivers, Gatekeepers

YOUTH HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS PARENTS/CAREGIVERS GATEKEEPERS ABOUT

Healthcare Professionals

The following signs may mean that a youth is at risk for suicide, particularly in youth who have attempted suicide in the past:

Risk is greater if the warning sign is:

- new and/or
- has increased and
- possibly related to an anticipated or actual painful event, loss, or change.

Finally, the presence of more than one of the following warning signs may increase a youth's risk for engaging in suicidal behaviors in the near future.

[Youth Suicide Warning Signs](#) | [How to Respond](#) | [Finding Help](#)

Parents and Caregivers

If you are concerned about your son or daughter, ask yourself the following questions. Has your son or daughter shown or shared any of the following:

- Talk about wanting to die, be dead, or about suicide, or are they cutting or burning themselves?
- Feeling like things may never get better, seeming like they are in terrible emotional pain (like something is wrong deep inside but they can't make it go away), or they are struggling to deal with a big loss in their life?
- Or is your gut telling you to be worried because they have withdrawn from everyone and everything, have become more anxious or on edge, seem unusually angry, or just don't seem normal to you?

[How to Respond](#) | [Are you Still Concerned?](#) | [Finding Help](#)

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS PARENTS/CAREGIVERS GATEKEEPERS ABOUT

Youth Suicide Warning Signs

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 - Withdrawal from or changing in social connections/situations
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 - Recent increased agitation or irritability

Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers are people who have a meaningful and important role in the lives of youth and other relatives, caregivers, teacher parents, coaches, mentors, etc. Gatekeepers generally have good relationships with the youth people in their lives, either from regular interaction with them on a routine basis such that they would receive information about their young person.

If you are concerned about someone, ask yourself the following on any of the following:

- Talk about wanting to die, be dead, or about suicide, or are they cutting or burning themselves?
- Feeling like things may never get better, seeming like they are in terrible emotional pain (like something is wrong deep inside but they can't make it go away), or they are struggling to deal with a big loss in their life?
- Or is your gut telling you to be worried because they have withdrawn from everyone and everything, have become more anxious or on edge, seem unusually angry, or just don't seem normal to you?

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www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org

Supporting Students in Schools

- ▶ Working to maintain safe schools
- ▶ Curriculum development
- ▶ Creating a climate where kids feel free to express how they feel
 - Box for students to express concerns
 - Door hangers for students to know this is a safe place to talk
 - Text feed to counseling or other resource if concerned about a student and scared to come into counseling office
- ▶ Support student efforts to promote suicide prevention

Student Efforts



www.preventyouthsuicide.org



www.payspi.org



Policies and Procedures for Schools

Policies and Procedures

1. Getting started
2. Protocol for helping students at-risk for suicide
3. Protocol for after a suicide loss
4. Staff education and training
5. Parent/guardian education and outreach
6. Student programs
7. Screening

Resource: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *Preventing suicide: A high school toolkit*. Available at www.store.samhsa.gov.

Questions and Discussion

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