

Suicide Awareness/Prevention Information

In 2002, U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher proclaimed **suicide** to be a **preventable public health problem** with opportunities to save many lives. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for persons 15 through 24 years of age.

If you have concerns about the safety of your student, please contact your school counselor at 919-387-3040 .

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT SUICIDE

MYTH: Young people who talk about suicide never attempt or complete suicide.

Talking about suicide can be a plea for help, and it can be a late sign in the progression toward a suicide attempt. Those who are most at risk will show other signs apart from talking about suicide. If you have concerns about a young person who talks about suicide, encourage him/her to talk further and help them to and appropriate counseling assistance.

MYTH: Most suicides happen without warning.

It is more likely that the intention was not recognized. Warning signs include:
Recent suicide/death of a friend or relative

- Previous suicide attempts
- Preoccupation with themes of death or expressing suicidal thoughts
- Depression, conduct disorders, and problems such as substance abuse
- Giving away prized possessions
- Major changes in sleep patterns
- Sudden and extreme changes in eating habits
- Withdrawal from friends and family or other major behavioral changes
- Dropping out of group activities
- Personality changes such as nervousness, anger, frequent irritability, or unexplained crying
- Lack of interest in the future.

MYTH: All suicidal young people are depressed.

While depression is a factor in most suicides, it need not be present for suicide to be attempted or completed. Sometimes it may be a reaction to recent events.

MYTH: Talking about suicide or asking someone if they feel suicidal will encourage suicide attempts.

Talking about suicide provides the opportunity for communication. When a young person shares his or her fears, they are more likely to diminish. The first step is to ask whether or not the teen is intending to harm him/herself. Listen non-judgmentally and, if the situation warrants, seek professional counseling. Do not take on the role of therapist yourself.

MYTH: Most suicidal young people never seek or ask for help with their problems.

Evidence shows that they often tell their school peers of their thoughts and plans. Adolescents are more likely to “ask” for help through nonverbal gestures than to express their situation verbally. Encourage your child to tell an adult if one of his or her peers expresses suicidal thoughts.

MYTH: Suicidal young people are always angry when someone intervenes, and they will resent that person afterwards.

While it is common for young people to be defensive and resist help at first, these behaviors are often used to test how much people care and are prepared to help. For most adolescents considering suicide, it is a relief to be able to share the emotional burden of their situation. When questioned some time later, the vast majority express gratitude for the interventions.

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If you notice that your student has some of the warning signs listed below, please contact your school counselor at ###-####.

Warning Signs for Suicide

- Verbal or written threats of harm to self
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- Giving away possessions
- Themes of suicide, death, or depression in essays or artwork
- Withdrawal from family, friends, or prior interests
- Changes in personality
- Sleep disturbances
- Changes in eating habits
- Drop in school performance
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Previous suicide attempts

What to do:

If you feel your teen may be in crisis:

- Listen and express concern in a nonjudgmental way.
- Take action—get them connected with professional help.
- Ask questions openly (“Do you have a plan to hurt yourself?”, “Will you talk to someone who can help?”).
- Show that you care.
- Take suicide threats seriously.
- Consult with your family physician.

What not to do:

- Do not keep threats a secret.
- Do not leave the teen alone.
- Do not think this is a joke.
- Do not try to be a therapist. Get professional help.