

Suicide Risk Factors

Although far from perfect predictors, certain characteristics are associated with increased odd of having suicidal thoughts. These include:

- Mental illness including depression, conduct disorders, and substance abuse.
- Family stress/dysfunction.
- A family history of suicide, or loss of a peer by suicide.
- Situational crises (e.g., traumatic death of a loved one, physical or sexual abuse, family violence).

Suicide Warning Signs

Most suicidal youth demonstrate observable behaviors that signal their suicidal thinking. These include:

- Suicidal threats in the form of direct ("I am going to kill myself") and indirect ("I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up again") statements.
- Suicide notes and plans (including online postings).
- Substance abuse.
- Making final arrangements (e.g., making funeral arrangements, writing a will, giving away prized possessions).
- Preoccupation with death.
- Significant changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts and/or feelings.

What to Do

Youth who feel suicidal are not likely to seek help directly; however, parents, school personnel, and peers can recognize the warning signs and take immediate action to keep the youth safe. When a youth gives signs that they may be considering suicide, the following actions should be taken:

- Listen, remain calm and do not judge.
- Ask the youth directly if he or she is thinking about suicide (e.g., "Are you thinking of suicide?").
- Ask the youth directly if they have a plan. "How would you carry it out?"
- Focus on your concern for their well-being and avoid being accusatory.
- Reassure them that there is help and they will not feel like this forever.
- Provide constant supervision. **DO NOT LEAVE THE YOUTH ALONE.**
- Remove means for self-harm.
- **Get help:** No one should ever agree to keep a youth's suicidal thoughts a secret and instead should tell an appropriate caregiving adult, such as a parent, teacher, or school counselor or mental health practitioner. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources as soon as possible. School staff should take the student to a school-employed mental health professional, school counselor or administrator.

Guidance for Families on *13 Reasons Why*

1. Ask your child if they have heard or seen the series *13 Reasons Why*. While we don't recommend that they be encouraged to view the series, if they choose to, or have already, tell them you want to watch it, with them and then discuss their thoughts because the series does trigger strong emotions. Suicide is a complicated subject
2. If they exhibit any of the warning signs above, don't be afraid to ask if they have thought about suicide or if someone is hurting them. Raising the issue of suicide does not increase the risk or plant the idea. On the contrary, it creates the opportunity to offer help.
3. Ask your child if they think any of their friends or classmates exhibit warning signs. Talk with them about how to seek help for their friend or classmate. Guide them on how to respond when they see or hear any of the warning signs.
4. Fully concentrate on listening to fully understand their perspective, respond and then remember what is being said. Refrain from arguing, minimizing or discounting their opinion. It's important to remember their brain is not fully developed and they need guidance in their problem solving. Get help from a school-employed or community-based mental health professional if you are concerned for your child's safety or the safety of one of their peers.