

SO WHAT CAN I DO??



(Adapted from www.mayoclinic.com/health/teen-suicide/MY02347).

One of the most reported feelings by parents and other caring adults is that of helplessness. It doesn't have to be that way. Knowing the signs of depression is the first step. Learning how to respond is

the second.

Here are 3 immediate steps to get you started and to help stem the feelings of helplessness:

1. If you think your teen is in immediate danger, **take him or her to the emergency room or call 911**. A highly recommended, effective suicide hot line number is the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)**.

It is better to be safe than sorry, especially if your teen seems to have a plan in place. It is better to have a teen mad at you for overreacting than a dead one.

2. If you suspect that your teen might be thinking about suicide, talk to him or her immediately. Don't be afraid to use the word "suicide." Talking about suicide won't plant ideas in your teen's head. If he/she is depressed to the point of being suicidal, that idea is already there. Ask your teen to talk about his or her feelings and listen carefully. Don't dismiss his or her problems or get angry. Instead, reassure your teen of your love. Remind your teen that he or she can work through whatever is going on — and that you're willing to help. Reassure them that feeling depressed doesn't mean they are a bad person or not strong enough to cope with life, and that everyone needs help from time to time. Share personal stories as appropriate.

3. Be sure to seek medical help for your teen. Ask your teen's doctor to guide you. Teens who are feeling suicidal usually need to see a psychiatrist or psychologist experienced in diagnosing and treating children with mental health problems. The doctor will want to get an accurate picture of what's going on from a variety of sources, such as the teen, parents or guardians, other people close to the teen, school reports, and previous medical or psychiatric evaluations.

In addition, here are some preventative action steps you can take to help prevent teen suicide:

- **Address depression or anxiety.** Don't wait for your teen to come to you with his or her problems. If your teen is sad, anxious or appears to be struggling — ask what's wrong and offer your help.
- **Pay attention.** If your teen is thinking about suicide, he or she is likely displaying some warning signs. Listen to what your child is saying and watch how he or she is acting. Never shrug off threats of suicide as teen melodrama.
- **Share your feelings.** Make sure your teen realizes that everyone feels sad sometimes — including you. Try to get him or her to see that things will get better.
- **Discourage isolation.** Encourage your teen to spend time with friends and family — rather than alone. If he or she says no, however, don't push.
- **Encourage physical activity.** Even light physical activity can help reduce depression symptoms.
- **Support the treatment plan.** If your teen is undergoing treatment for suicidal behavior, remind him or her that it might take some time to feel better. Help your teen follow his or her doctor's recommendations. Also, encourage your teen to participate in fun, low-stress activities that will help him or her rebuild confidence.
- **Safely store firearms, alcohol and medications.** Access to means can increase the risk of teen suicide.

Remember, teen suicide can be prevented. If you're worried about your teen, talk to him or her and seek help right away.



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Talking to My Teen About Depression & Suicide

A resource prepared for the
Becker School District

by

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There is something going on in our community. We don't know what it is. We aren't even sure what the best way to address it may be. Whatever it is that is driving young people throughout our Central Minnesota communities to take their own lives, we suspect that not talking to our kids about depression and suicide and factors that may lead to both is not the answer.

What is contained in this brochure, then, are

- (a) some suggested knowledge points surrounding depression and suicide that might be helpful to know;
- (b) some tools and techniques for starting and sustaining the conversation both with your young people, as well as other adults; and
- (c) some of our contact information if we can be at all helpful in supporting you in your journey with these issues.

We are by no means experts in this. But we care. And some of us have even had to walk this walk.

SOME KNOWLEDGE POINTS



What makes teens vulnerable to suicide?

The factors can be complex. However, according to mayoclinic.com, two of the most prevalent factors are mental health conditions and/or substance abuse issues. These can be related and interconnected factors, as well. “As a result, they have trouble coping with the stress of being a teen, such as dealing with rejection, failure, breakups and family turmoil. They might also be unable to see that they can turn their lives around — and that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem” (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/teen-suicide/MY02347>).

What are the risk factors for teen suicide?

Mayoclinic.com lists a number of factors that increase the risk of teen suicide including:

- Having a psychiatric disorder, such as depression
- A history of suicide attempts or a family history of suicidal behavior and/or mood disorders
- A history of physical or sexual abuse
- Exposure to violence, such as being injured or threatened with a weapon

Other factors, when combined with the above, also can increase the risk of teen suicide, including:

- Access to means, such as firearms, which is especially prevalent in young, male suicide attempts
- Loss or particularly acute conflict with close friends or family members
- Use of alcohol or drugs
- Becoming pregnant
- Social isolation
- Exposure to suicide

Some studies have also raised questions about a link between antidepressants themselves and the risk of suicide. But that link is not clear. **Withholding appropriate treatment, which might also include an antidepressant, also increases the risk.** “To be safe, anyone who starts taking an anti depressant should be watched closely for signs of suicidal thinking” (www.mayoclinic.com/health/teen-suicide).

What does depression look like? And is there something particular about teen depression?

Depression in teens can look very different from depression in adults. The following symptoms of depression are more common in teenagers than in their adult counterparts:

- **Irritable or angry mood** – As noted above, irritability, rather than sadness, is often the predominant mood in depressed teens. A depressed teenager may be grumpy, hostile, easily frustrated, or prone to angry outbursts.
- **Unexplained aches and pains** – Depressed teens frequently complain about physical ailments such as headaches or stomachaches. If a thorough physical exam does not reveal a medical cause, these aches and pains may indicate depression.
- **Extreme sensitivity to criticism** – Depressed teens are plagued by feelings of worthlessness, making them extremely vulnerable to criticism, rejection, and failure. This is a particular problem for “over-achievers.”
- **Withdrawing from some, but not all people** – While adults tend to isolate themselves when depressed, teenagers usually keep up at least some friendships. However, teens with depression may socialize less than before, pull away from their parents, or start hanging out with a different crowd.

The negative effects of teenage depression go far beyond a melancholy mood. Many rebellious and unhealthy behaviors or attitudes in teenagers are actually indications of depression. The following are some the ways in which teens “act out” or “act in” in an attempt to cope with their emotional pain:

- **Problems at school.** Depression can cause low energy and concentration difficulties. At school, this may lead to poor attendance, a drop in grades, or frustration with schoolwork in a formerly good student.
- **Running away.** Many depressed teens run away from home or talk about running away. Such attempts are usually a cry for help.
- **Drug and alcohol abuse.** Teens may use alcohol or drugs in an attempt to “self-medicate” their depression. Unfortunately, substance abuse only makes things worse.
- **Low self-esteem.** Depression can trigger and intensify feelings of ugliness, shame, failure, and unworthiness.

- **Internet addiction.** Teens may go online to escape their problems, but excessive computer use only increases their isolation, making them more depressed. Any activity that isolates and prevents live, positive, human interaction increases the effects of depression.
- **Reckless behavior.** Depressed teens may engage in dangerous or high-risk behaviors, such as reckless driving, out-of-control drinking, and unsafe sex.
- **Violence.** Some depressed teens—usually boys who are the victims of bullying—become violent.

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_teen.htm

What are the warning signs that a teen might be suicidal?

Warning signs of teen suicide might include:

- Talking about or hinting at suicide — for example, making statements such as “I’m going to kill myself,” or “I won’t be a problem for you much longer”
- Talking about or writing about death
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Feeling purposeless or hopeless
- Withdrawing from social contact
- Mood swings
- Changing normal routine, including eating or sleeping patterns
- Acting recklessly or aggressively
- Giving away belongings or getting affairs in order when there is no other logical explanation for why this is being done
- Developing personality changes or being severely anxious or agitated
- Unexplained cuts or burns caused by self-injury, which can be inflicted by a whole host of unexpected instruments (i.e., paperclips, safety pins, nails, etc.) and not just razor blades or knives.



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