



SO WHAT CAN I DO??

One of the most reported feelings by youth of friends who are depressed 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. Get positive adults involved ASAP. This is not something that ANYONE can solve all by themselves.
2. If you think your friend 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 friend seems to have a plan in place. It is better to have your friend mad at you for overreacting than dead.

3. If you suspect that your friend might be thinking about suicide, talk to him or her immediately. Don't be afraid to ask him or her, using the word "suicide." Talking about suicide won't plant ideas in your friend's head. If he/she is depressed to the point of being suicidal, that idea is already there. Ask your friend to talk about his or her feelings and listen carefully. Reassure your friend of your care and concern. Remind him/her that he/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.



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Talking to My Friends About Depression & Suicide

A resource prepared for the
Becker School District

by

South Santiago Lutheran Church
Clear Lake, MN



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 for talking about these issues with your friends.
- (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 THINGS TO KNOW:

What are the risk factors for teen suicide?

- Depression
- Having tried suicide before.
- A history of physical or sexual abuse, including bullying.
- 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 or feelings of guilt and shame associated with abortion.
- Social isolation
- Exposure to 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. Here are some symptoms of depression that are more common in teenagers than in their adult counterparts:

- Irritable or angry mood – 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.

- Feelings of worthlessness — This can be a particular problem for “over-achievers.”
- Withdrawing from some, but not all people – Teens with depression may socialize less than before, pull away from their parents, or start hanging out with a different crowd.

In addition, many rebellious and unhealthy behaviors or attitudes in teenagers can be 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, which can 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.

What are some warning signs that a friend might be suicidal?

Warning signs 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.

