**Risk Factors/Warning Signs for Suicide and How to Help**

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for young people ages 10-34.

For additional statistics see the following website: <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>

**Major Depressive Episode Criteria:**

Five (or more) of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2-week period and represent a change from previous functioning; at least one of the symptoms is either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure:

* Depressed mood or irritable
* Decreased interest or pleasure
* Significant weight change (5%) or change in appetite
* Change in sleep: insomnia or hypersomnia
* Change in activity
* Fatigue or loss of energy
* Guilt/Worthlessness
* Diminished ability to think or concentrate
* Suicidality

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| **Risk Factors for Suicide:**  **Behavioral Health:**   * Depressive Disorders * Alcohol and substance abuse * Previous suicide attempts * Non-suicidal self-injury (NNSI) Disorder * Anxiety Disorders | **Environmental:**   * Access to lethal means (guns) * Limited access to mental health care * Exposure to stigma (particularly about seeking professional help) * Lack of acceptance (LGBTQ+ issues) |
| **Personal Characteristics:**   * Low self-esteem * Social isolation * Poor problem-solving * Impulsive or aggressive tendencies | **Family Characteristics:**   * Family history of suicide and/or child abuse * Family history of mental health disorders * Parent divorce * Physical illness of a family member |
| **Adverse Life Circumstances:**   * Interpersonal difficulties (falling out with friends/romantic break-up) * Bullying/Cyber bullying * School or work problems | **Adverse Life Circumstances (cont.):**   * History of physical and/or sexual abuse * Traumatic incident (being assaulted, car accident) * Unexpected pregnancy * Exposure to peer suicide (“contagion theory”) |

**More Warning Signs to Look For…**

* Frequent sadness, crying
* Social Isolation/Withdrawal from family, friends, and regular activities
* Increased anger, irritability
* Alcohol/Drug use
* Excessive risk-taking
* Poor school performance: frequent

absences; drop in grades, unable to concentrate

* Marked personality change

**Warning Signs for Suicide:**

* Talking (or writing) about suicide or death
* Giving active verbal cues that life is meaningless:

“I wish I were dead” or

“I’m going to end it all”

* Giving passive verbal cues that life is meaningless:

“You will be better off without me” or

“What’s the point of living?”

* Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
* Neglecting personal appearance and hygiene
* Isolating from friends and family
* Exhibiting a sudden and unexplained improvement in mood after being depressed or withdrawn
* Dropping out of school or other activities
* Giving away possessions

**If you are worried about someone 🡪 ACT**

**Acknowledge**: Acknowledge that you are seeing signs of depression, self-injury or suicide. Take what they are saying seriously and listen to them.

**Care**: Take the initiative and voice your concern.

**Treatment/Tell**: Get professional help immediately.

**Things to say to a student who is struggling:**

“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

“A lot of people feel the way you do.”

“We can help you get treatment.”

“You don’t have to feel this way.”

“I’m concerned about you.”

“I hear what you are saying, and I’m so glad you are telling me.”

“You’re an important part of my class and I want to make sure you are safe.”

“Let’s go see Mrs. Jones in student services. She works with students who are feeling the way you are all the time.”

**What you can do to help:**

* Know the warnings signs for depression and suicide
* Know your school crisis protocol – to whom should you report student-based concerns? Remember that timeliness and face-to-face communication is key
* Do not leave the student alone and make sure they are personally escorted
* Do not promise confidentiality
* Monitor student written assignments for themes of death, hopelessness, loneliness
* Elyssa’s Mission website for resources: www.elyssasmission.org

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