



Risk Factors, Warning Signs, and Protective Factors for Suicide

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for young people ages 10-24.

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

Depression:

Depression is the leading risk factor for youth suicide.

Signs of depression include:

- Depressed mood or irritability
- Decreased interest or pleasure in typical activities
- 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

Risk Factors for Youth 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”)

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

Critical 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?”

- Obtaining a weapon
- 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 favored activities
- Giving away prized possessions

Even when warning signs are present, there is hope. Protective factors *reduce suicide risk*. Family connectedness—the caring and supportive relationships you have with your child—is the #1 protective factor against suicide!

Protective Factors:

- Personality Style
- Relationships at home/Family connectedness
- Relationships at school/in the community
- A caring relationship with another trusted adult

