

# Teen Suicide

## Background Information:

Some reasons why teens would feel the need to commit suicide is because they are experiencing feelings of stress, confusion, self doubt, pressure to succeed, financial insecurity and many other various things while growing up. Also, many teens also react poorly to divorce, acceptance of a new family, or moving into a new community. For many teens, they think that suicide is the only way to solve their stress and other issues.

Depression can trigger the thought of teen suicide, “Depression and suicidal feelings are treatable mental disorders. The child or adolescent needs to have his or her illness recognized and diagnosed, and appropriate treatment plans developed. When parents are in doubt whether their child has a serious problem, a psychiatric examination can be very helpful. Many of the symptoms of suicidal feelings are similar to those of depression” (AACAP). Depression and teen suicide are obviously linked, however, one does not always occur with the other. Just because a teen is depressed, does not automatically mean that they are going to commit suicide, or even think about the idea of it.

There are many signs for parents to watch their teens for, which may make it more obvious that they are thinking about committing suicide:

- change in eating and sleeping habits
- withdrawal from friends, family, and regular activities
- violent actions, rebellious behavior, or running away
- drug and alcohol use

- unusual neglect of personal appearance
- marked personality change
- persistent boredom, difficulty concentrating, or a decline in the quality of schoolwork
- frequent complaints about physical symptoms, often related to emotions, such as stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, etc.
- loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- not tolerating praise or rewards
- complain of being a bad person or feeling rotten inside
- give verbal hints with statements such as: “I won't be a problem for you much longer,” “Nothing matters,” “It's no use,” and “I won't see you again”
- put his or her affairs in order, for example, give away favorite possessions, clean his or her room, throw away important belongings, etc.
- become suddenly cheerful after a period of depression
- have signs of psychosis (hallucinations or bizarre thoughts) (AACAP)

If a teen ever says anything like “I’m going to kill myself,” it is very important to take it seriously and get help. Most people are uncomfortable talking about death, in which case, you can ask if the teen is depressed or having major doubts in themselves and about their lives. If a teen commits suicide, it doesn’t only affect them, obviously, but their family and friends as well. Many people who are affected by a suicide may feel responsibility in a sense of, “If I did something differently and talked to them, would they still have committed suicide?” This is why everyone should know the signs that teens may show when they are having thoughts of suicide.

There are many factors that increase the chances that teens will think of suicide:

- the presence of a psychological disorder, especially [depression](#), bipolar disorder, and alcohol and substance use (In fact, approximately 95% of people who die by suicide have a psychological disorder at the time of death.)
- feelings of distress, irritability, or agitation
- feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness that often accompany depression (A teen, for example, who experiences repeated failures at school, who is overwhelmed by violence at home, or who is isolated from peers is likely to experience such feelings.)
- a previous suicide attempt
- a family history of depression or suicide (Depressive illnesses may have a genetic component, so some teens may be predisposed to suffer major depression.)
- having suffered physical abuse or sexual abuse
- lack of a support network, poor relationships with parents or peers, and feelings of social isolation
- dealing with homosexuality in an unsupportive family or community or hostile school environment (Teen Health).

Some parents and friends are reluctant to ask a teen if they are thinking about suicide even if they are suspicious. It is an uncomfortable topic to bring up. However, it can save a teen from doing serious harm to themselves and their family. Sometimes, it may help that teen just to know that someone cares enough to ask, and that alone may turn their thoughts around and they may ask for help.

**Definition of the Problem:**

A huge problem among teens is teen suicide. Each year, thousands of teenagers commit suicide, which happens to be the third leading cause of death for 15 to 24 year olds and the sixth leading cause of death for 5 to 14 year olds. Also, a huge percentage of teen suicides are increased when firearms are at all accessible to the teen. “Nearly 60% of all suicides in the United States are committed with a gun. That's why it's important that any gun in your home be unloaded, locked, and kept out of the reach of children and teens. Ammunition should be stored and locked apart from the gun, and the keys for both should be kept in a different area from where you store your household keys. Always keep the keys to any firearms out of the reach of children and adolescents” (Kidshealth). Another big part of teen suicide to consider is the rate of suicide between boys and girls. Girls think about committing suicide twice as frequently as boys do. However, boys tend to die 4 times more often than girls because of the methods in which they use to commit suicide. Boys tend to use more lethal methods as compared to girls. However, in general, suicide attempts are more common than suicide deaths.

**Statement of the Issue:**

In Healthy People 2010, there is a push for youth suicide prevention programs. The many different programs that were created are designed to help prevent suicide in various ways.

**Epidemiological picture of those affected by Suicide:**

Obviously, many people are affected by suicide. However, frequency differs by gender and race.

- The average suicide rate in the U.S. is about 12 per 100,000.
- Caucasians commit suicide at a higher rate, than African-Americans, Asians and Hispanics.
- Young Native Americans have a very high suicide rate; older Native Americans commit suicide less often than do Caucasians of the same age.
- Suicide rates increase with age:

<b>Age</b>	<b>Suicide rate per 100,000</b>
10 to 14 years	1.6
15 to 19	9.5
20 to 24	13.6
Whites over 85	65

- About one in three American teenagers have contemplated suicide. An Internet poll by *About.com* indicated that 50% of teens visiting that Web site had considered it.
- Suicide has been reported as the second leading cause of death among teenagers, exceeded only by traffic accidents. However, the suicide rate among teens is actually lower than that of older persons. Teens tend to have few life-threatening illnesses; teenage deaths from disease are quite low. Thus, the relatively few suicides among teens can make suicide a leading cause of death.
- The reported U.S. suicide rate for very young people (10 to 14 years of age) increased by 183% between 1970 and 1993. However, much of this increase may

not be real. In the past, there was widespread denial that pre-teens could decide to end their lives.

- Data concerning young homosexuals is somewhat unreliable. It appears that about one in three teen aged suicides is by a gay or lesbian. Since homosexuals represent only about 5% of the population, gays and lesbians are greatly over-represented (Religious Tolerance).

### **Solutions:**

Many suicides can be prevented if proper steps taken in proper time. People just need to know the right things to do if they are caught in a situation with someone that is contemplating suicide.

- **Remain calm.** In most instances, there is no rush. Sit and listen--really listen to what the person is saying. Give understanding and active emotional support for his or her feelings.
- **Deal directly with the topic of suicide.** Most individuals have mixed feelings about death and dying and are open to help. Don't be afraid to ask or talk directly about suicide.
- **Encourage problem solving and positive actions.** Remember that the person involved in emotional crisis is not thinking clearly; encourage him or her to refrain from making any serious, irreversible decisions while in a crisis. Talk about the positive alternatives, which may establish hope for the future.
- **Get assistance.** Although you want to help, do not take full responsibility by trying to be the sole counsel. Seek out resources which can lend qualified help,

even if it means breaking a confidence. Let the troubled person know you are concerned--so concerned that you are willing to arrange help beyond that which you can offer (Counseling Center).

Another important part of teen suicide is coping with a loss, if it occurs. In that event, it is very important for parents to acknowledge their other offsprings many emotions. It won't help to ignore the fact that something horrible has happened. Some people may blame themselves, others may be mad at the person that committed suicide because they feel that it was an extremely selfish act to commit.

When a teen has tried to commit suicide and survives, their family and friends may feel awkward and uncomfortable talking to them about it. However, talking to them about it is probably the best thing you could do for them. That time is more important for them to feel more connected to others than any other time.

### **Conclusion:**

Teen Suicide is an ongoing problem in the world. However, with the proper knowledge, someone contemplating suicide can be helped, and a suicide can be prevented. It is important for everyone to know what to do in a situation if someone they know is contemplating committing suicide. With this information, many suicides can be prevented for the future.

### **Bibliography:**

Teen Suicide – American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry:

<<http://aacap.org/page.wv?section=Facts+for+Families&name=Teen+Suicide>>

Teen Health: About Teen Suicide:

<<http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/suicide.html>>

Prevention Guidelines:

<[http://www.phppo.cdc.gov/cdcRecommends/showarticle.asp?a\\_artid=P0000024&TopNum=50&CallPg=Adv#head003003000000000](http://www.phppo.cdc.gov/cdcRecommends/showarticle.asp?a_artid=P0000024&TopNum=50&CallPg=Adv#head003003000000000)>

Religious Tolerance:

<[http://www.religioustolerance.org/sui\\_fact.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/sui_fact.htm)>

Counseling Center:

<<http://www.couns.uiuc.edu/brochures/suiprev.htm>>

<b>Back to Betty C. Jung's Web site</b>	<a href="http://www.bettyjung.net/">http://www.bettyjung.net/</a>
<b>Back to Fact Sheet Directory</b>	<a href="http://www.bettyjung.net/Pch202fs.htm">http://www.bettyjung.net/Pch202fs.htm</a>