

Teen Suicide

Thousands of teenagers in this country commit suicide each year, according to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds. It is the sixth leading cause of death for 5- to 14-year-olds.

10 "Warning Signs" a Teen May Be Thinking about Suicide, from Dr. Lisa Boesky

1. Gives away possessions of value
2. Becomes withdrawn and isolated
3. Exhibits abrupt personality change
4. Drops out of usual routine
5. Neglects hygiene
6. Engages in self-destructive or risky behavior
7. Makes statements about suicide, dying, or being "gone"
8. Looks or sounds like feelings of depression are deepening
9. Is curious, fascinated, or preoccupied with death
10. Talks about feeling inadequate, hopeless, or guilty

According to psychologist Dr. Lisa Boesky, author of "When to Worry: How to Tell if Your Teen Needs Help -- and What to Do About It," moms should also be aware of signs including teen statements like:

- "I won't be a problem for you much longer."
- "I wish I were dead."
- "You'd be better off without me."
- "You probably wish I would just die."

What Moms Can Do about Teen Suicide

Certain risk factors also increase a teen's suicide risk, says Dr. Boesky. If your teen suffers from a mental health disorder, uses alcohol/drugs, recently experienced a major stressor, is disruptive or aggressive, has been arrested, or is a perfectionist, be particularly vigilant. Teens who end their lives typically have a combination of risk factors AND warning signs.

If your teen is talking about wanting to die or has made a suicide attempt, he or she must be attended to immediately. Any suicide attempt -- no matter how "harmless" it seems --

requires a comprehensive evaluation by a qualified mental health professional who is knowledgeable about teen suicide.

The evaluation should determine: your teen's level of risk, whether he or she suffers from a mental health or substance abuse disorder, what current stressors are present, and which strategies need to be in place to ensure his or her safety.

With reports of teens from the same schools or communities committing suicide, some wonder if it is "contagious." Dr. Peter Gutierrez, president of the American Association of Suicidology, shares tips for talking to your teens if or before any of their peers commit suicide.

Deglamorize it: "Kids see that people are sad and are paying a lot of attention to this event. An adolescent mind thinks, 'If I kill myself, I will get that attention too.' The vital fact they're missing is that when they're dead, they won't be enjoying that attention," Dr. Gutierrez says.

Be prepared: Moms should be ready for their kids to ask tough questions. If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Kids don't expect you to have all the answers.

Keep talking: Dr. Gutierrez stresses having many talks with your child if a suicide occurs. Ask your kids how they're feeling and if they've ever thought about killing themselves. Let them know it's OK to be sad and even angry at the person who died.

Teens' initial reaction to a death can be strong, but if they are sad and weepy for several months, your child may benefit from professional counseling. Dr. Gutierrez recommends calling the National Lifeline at 1.800.273.TALK for local resources and support groups in your area.

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Additional Resources for Teen Suicide

- [American Association of Suicidology](#)
- [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services](#)
- [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#)