

Catholic Mutual...CARES for Kids

Understanding and Preventing Teen Suicide

Teen suicide is a complex and heartbreaking issue that affects families and communities worldwide. One death is reported every eleven minutes and it is the second leading cause of death in younger people aged 10-24. The reasons behind suicidal thoughts and actions in teens are multifaceted, often involving a combination of mental health issues, interpersonal conflicts, and environmental stressors. However, with the right support and resources, many suicides can be prevented.

Who is at Risk?

There are numerous factors that can go into someone considering taking their own life. Adolescence is a period of rapid change and development, during which teens are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues. Depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders can manifest during this time, often exacerbated by academic pressure, social challenges, and hormonal changes. These mental health issues and other risk factors, if left unaddressed, can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair, increasing the risk of suicidal ideation. Any one of these problems can be difficult for someone to manage and just because an individual has one of these risk factors does not mean they are suicidal. Below is a more in-depth list of common risk factors and warning signs of identifying people at risk for suicide, however, there could be others not included on this list.

Risk Factors	Warning Signs
Mental Disorders (depression, anxiety)	Talking about wanting to die/kill oneself.
Substance abuse	Planning or looking for a way online.
Chronic pain	Buying a gun or stockpiling pills.
Exposure to suicidal behavior of others (family or peers)	Talking about being a burden to others or feeling trapped.
Family violence (physical/sexual abuse)	Withdrawing from family/friends or feeling isolated.
Prior suicide attempt	Saying good-bye to loved ones.

Prevention Strategies

Preventing teen suicide requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the underlying issues contributing to suicidal ideation. Some key strategies include:

- *Promoting Mental Health Awareness*: Educating teens about mental health and destigmatizing seeking help for mental health issues can encourage them to seek support when needed.
- *Building Resilience*: Teaching teens coping skills and resilience-building techniques can help them better navigate challenges and setbacks.
- *Creating a Supportive Environment*: Fostering a supportive and non-judgmental environment at home and in school can make teens feel more comfortable seeking help.
- *Limiting Access to Means*: Restricting access to firearms, medications, and other lethal means can reduce the risk of impulsive suicide attempts.
- *Seeking Professional Help*: Encouraging teens who are struggling to seek help from mental health professionals, such as therapists or counselors, can provide them with the support they need.

Preventing teen suicide is a collective responsibility that requires the efforts of parents, educators, healthcare professionals, and communities. By raising awareness, recognizing the signs, and implementing preventive strategies, we can help reduce the incidence of teen suicide and ensure that all young people have the opportunity to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text "HELLO" to 741741. These are both free and available 24/7, and all contact is confidential.

References

Facts about suicide. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.).

<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>

Preventing youth suicide. Youth.gov. (n.d.). <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-suicide-prevention/preventing-youth-suicide>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2024, August). *Suicide Prevention*. National Institute of Mental Health. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention>