There is no definitive checklist of either risk factors or warning signs for adolescent suicide. This handout is provided as a guideline. Please consult the Colorado School Safety Resource Center’s: Resources for Youth Suicide Prevention and Intervention for additional information.

Risk factors may predispose youth to suicide behavior while warning signs may indicate the possibility of a suicidal crisis. Be sure immediately to contact a mental health professional when concerned who will also notify parents and DO NOT leave the student unattended.

**Risk Factors**

- Mental health disorders
- Familial factors
- Personality and behavioral traits
- Biological factors
- Environmental factors
- Genetic factors
- Psychosocial life events
- Situational crises

**Most Common Situational Crises Associated With Suicide:**

- death of a significant other (especially traumatic death)
- parental divorce
- family moves
- incarceration
- trouble at school
- family violence
- parental arguments
- physical and sexual abuse
- running away from home
- exposure to suicidology in others

**Other Considerations:**

- Impulsivity
- Substance use/abuse
- Access to firearms
- Uncertainty about the future
- School, relationship, societal failures or conflicts
- Contagion
- Ethnic minority youth and LGBTQ youth
- Students with disabilities
Suicide Prevention and Intervention
Risk Factors & Warning Signs

Warning Signs

- Change in sleeping and eating habits
- Withdrawal
- Fatigue
- Sudden change in personality that persists
- Hopelessness or helplessness
- Increased risk-taking
- Drop in grades
- Neglect in appearance
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Inability to concentrate or think rationally
- Change in or lack of interests both current and future, excessive boredom
- Frequent complaints of headache, stomachache, fatigue
- Irritability, anger/lashing out at others, intolerant of praise
- Suddenly becomes cheerful after period of being unhappy (may be increased risk)
- Giving away possessions
- Talking about death
- Verbal hints

Behavioral Signs

1. Suicide threats.
2. Suicide plan, method, and means.
3. Previous attempts.
5. Suicide notes

Sample Verbal Warning Signs

1. “Everybody would be better off if I just weren’t around.”
2. “I’m not going to bug you much longer.”
4. “I’m the cause of all of my family’s/friend’s troubles.”
5. “I wish I would just go to sleep and never wake up.”
6. “I’ve tried everything but nothing seems to help.”
7. “Nobody can help me.”
8. “I want to kill myself but I don’t have the guts.”
9. “I’m no good to anyone.”
10. “If my (father, mother, teacher) doesn’t leave me alone I’m going to kill myself.”
11. “Don’t buy me anything. I won’t need any (clothes, books).”
12. “If I don’t see you again, thanks for everything.”
13. “It doesn’t matter now.”
14. “I love you, remember that.”

Common Myths about Youth Suicide:

- Asking questions or talking about suicide will increase the probability of its occurrence.
- Those who attempt suicide usually receive medical attention or treatment.
- Most young people who die by suicide usually leave a suicide note.
- Parents or caregivers are aware of their child’s suicidal behavior.

Concerns During School Discipline:

- Safety must always be considered
- All discipline should include a proactive-support plan – not just punishment
- Student is never left unsupervised
- Removing structure can make student feel more out-of-control & contribute to suicidal ideation
- Inform parents of precautions and/or concerns