

Suicide Prevention and Intervention Risk Factors & Warning Signs

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

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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

Behavioral Signs

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

Sample Verbal Warning Signs

- "Everybody would be better off if I just weren't around."
- 2. "I'm not going to bug you much longer."
- 3. "I hate my life. I hate everyone and everything."
- 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."

- 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
- 4. Making final arrangements.
- 5. Suicide notes
- 6. Symptoms of depression.
 - 8. "I want to kill myself but I don't have the guts."
 - 9. "I'm no good to anyone."
 - "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."

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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