Teen Suicide: What You Can Do

- Learn and watch out for the warning signs of possible suicide.
- Get help for teens who need it. Many teens who attempt suicide do not know how to reach out for help.
- Keep guns out of young people’s homes.
- If you are unsure about what to do, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (273-8255). It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, from anywhere in the United States.

Teenagers are passionate and emotional. For most teens, intense feelings—of either joy or pain—usually pass quickly.

While many teens have these emotional ups and downs, for some, the downs can be fatal. Sadly, every year in the United States, thousands of teenagers are unable to deal with these feelings and commit suicide.

Teen Suicide in America

Suicide is one of the 3 leading causes of death for 13- to 19-year-olds.

Many teenagers who attempt suicide have serious problems.

- Depression or other mood disorder
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Being overly anxious

Often, these teens have had problems for some time and can be very good at hiding them. This is why family and friends are shocked when suicide occurs.

HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

Suicide is often triggered by some small, everyday event, such as

- Getting in trouble
- Arguing with a parent, boyfriend, or girlfriend
- Receiving a bad grade
- Not making the team

Though many suicidal teens think about suicide on and off, most teens do not spend much time planning how to kill themselves.

Teenagers often attempt suicide within a few hours after deciding to do so.

Suicide is thought of as the only way out. Teenagers who try to kill themselves see it as the only way to escape their emotional pain. They want the pain and suffering to stop.
**Myths and Facts**

**MYTH:** “You would think one of her friends would have known about her problems. At the very least, someone in her family should have noticed that she was depressed before she killed herself.”

**FACT:** Teens are often very good at hiding their problems. People around them may not know they are depressed. Adults usually seem depressed and stay depressed for a while. Depressed teens may seem happy for much of the time. Parents are sometimes the last to know. Friends may have a sense that things are not right but not know how to help.

**MYTH:** “I heard him talk about killing himself. But people who talk about suicide do not do it.”

**FACT:** Talk of suicide or wanting to die should never be ignored. Teens who talk about suicide or wanting to die are much more likely to kill themselves than those who do not.

**MYTH:** “If she really wanted to kill herself, she would have done something more deadly.”

**FACT:** A suicide attempt that does not end in death the first time may be followed by one that does. Sometimes teens don’t know how many pills are enough to be fatal. What is considered a “gesture” may be a miscalculation. All suicide attempts need to be taken seriously.

**MYTH:** “He’s just doing it to get attention.”

**FACT:** This is true at times, but the attempt can still be deadly. If the suicide attempt is a call for attention, it needs to be answered.

**Warning Signs for Suicide**

In addition to talking or writing about suicide or death, some other warning signs to watch out for are

**Change in activities**
A drop in grades, neglect of personal appearance or responsibilities, or losing interest in things that used to be fun.
thought of suicide or not wanting to live anymore. Asking will not make someone attempt suicide; it may actually stop it.

Try to be understanding if teens are in trouble or feel very badly about themselves. Let them know that whatever trouble they are in at the moment, you have faith in who they are and their future.

**Gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender teens**

Teenagers questioning their sexual identity are at an especially high risk for suicide. Listen, be supportive, and get them help. Every teenager needs to know that life is better than death.

If you know of a teen struggling with this and fear there is a risk for suicide, there are local, state, and national resources that can provide information and advice. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), at 202/467-8180 or www.pflag.org, can help connect teens with resources.

**How other teens can help**

Talk with teens and let them know that if any friend talks about suicide, they need to get help from an adult right away! This may be a matter of life and death and is too much for even a close friend to handle alone. Let them know that even if they have been “sworn to secrecy” by a friend, telling—no matter how wrong it feels—is better than having to live with a friend’s death.

**When you’re concerned about mental health issues**

Depression or other mental health problems can come on suddenly or be present on and off for most of a teen’s life. If you are worried, talk with someone, like your pediatrician, a school counselor, a mental health professional, or a suicide prevention hotline.

The good news is that treatments—medications and therapy—are available. They make a difference.

**Homes With Guns**

Remove all guns from the home

The risk of teen suicide is 4 to 10 times higher in homes with guns than in homes without. Studies have shown that even in homes where the guns are locked up, teens are much more likely to kill themselves than in homes without guns.

Guns can turn a moment of despair into a tragedy

Teenagers who attempt suicide with a gun are more likely to succeed in killing themselves than those who attempt suicide in many other ways.

When teenagers attempt suicide without using a gun, many can recover with therapy. If a gun is used, they will never get that chance.