

A Suicidal Teen: Help Knowing the Warning Signs and Risk Factors

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Introduction

Suicide is such an unexplained, meaningless, tragic, contradictory and mystified complex public health problem having dimensions of physical, biological, somatic, mental, psychological, psychiatric, cultural, social and spiritual phenomenon. In spite of the several identified background factors, the real reasons behind suicide is not clear, because suicide is multi-causal, and can never be traced back to one single cause. However, the strongest suicide risk factor is an unrecognized and untreated mental disorder. Suicide among young people is one of the most serious public health problems.¹ According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) suicide is the second leading cause of death for teens and young adults.² The suicide rate among teenage girls reached an all-time high in 2015. The analysis found an increase in teen suicides across the board between 2007 and 2015. The suicide rate increased 31% for teen boys and doubled for teen girls during this time period³

The numbers are a sobering reminder that suicide is a growing public health concern and that teens are a particularly vulnerable group. Research shows that teen depression is on the rise⁴ and suicide is always a risk during the course of a major depressive episode.⁵ World Health Organization Global Health Observatory estimates reported suicide rate in Bangladesh is 7.8 per 100,000 population in 2012.⁶ However, in a paper published by Feroz et al., reported that suicide rate was 30.4% below 20 years of age in Bangladesh.⁷ The Bangladesh Police are the only authorities to keep track of the suicides in the country. According to their 2017 statistics, on average around 30 people commit suicide every day. Statistics show that 9,665 people committed suicide in 2010 and the number rose to 11,095 in 2017 among them the largest portion was below 20 years of age. But the police, activists and experts concur strongly that the actual numbers would be much higher as many incidents go unreported.⁸

So it is time to take action against teen suicide. At first we have to know about the warning signs of suicide and also know about, how to help the teens to prevent the catastrophic event.

Warning signs for teen suicide

Four out of five teens who attempt suicide give warning signs. But often, those signs are missed or ignored.⁹ All teens are different and many are adept at masking their

feelings. To the end, it isn't always possible to predict signs of suicidal ideation. Many do, however, exhibit some symptoms. The following are some (but not the only) potential warning signs of suicidal ideation as follows.¹⁰

- Talking about death, suicide, and/or self-harm
- Changes in personality or behavior that is out of character
- Talking about feeling worthless, helpless, and/or hopeless
- Changes in sleep patterns and eating habits
- Risky or self-destructive behavior
- Lack of concentration and changes in school performance
- Isolating from peers and/or family
- Giving away prized possessions
- Expressing feelings of overwhelming shame and guilt, and making statements that others don't care or others will be better off without me
- Lack of hope for the future, feeling like things can't possibly improve
- Visiting or calling on loved ones
- Getting affairs in order.

Factors trigger suicidal behavior in teens:^{2,10,11}

- Depression, anxiety and other mental health disorders
- Anger
- Sadness
- Rejection by peers
- Loneliness
- Irritability
- Social issues
- Family discord
- Social media use (Negative ideation)

There are also risk factors that put youth at an increased risk level for suicidal ideation:

- Perfectionism
- Substance abuse
- History of sexual or physical abuse
- Low self-esteem
- Academic struggles
- Teens lacking social and family support
- Family history of suicide.
- Frequent conflicts with friends or family

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- Impulsive behavior
- A tendency to take unhealthy risks (behaviors that could result in physical harm)

Help a suicidal teen

Suicide remains the second leading cause of death among teens. To prevent this consequence everybody should be aware and ready to help a suicidal teen.

Help your Friend:^{12, 13}

1. Know the warning signs. Read over the list above and keep it in a safe place.
2. Do not be afraid to talk to your friends. Listen to their feelings. Make sure they know how important they are to you, but don't believe you can keep them from hurting themselves on your own. Preventing suicide will require help from friends.
3. Make no deals. Never keep secret a friend's suicidal plans or thoughts. You cannot promise that you will not tell or disclose to others. You have to tell to save your friend.
4. Tell an adult: Talk to your parent, your friend's parent, your school's psychologist or counselor or any trusted adult. Don't be afraid that the adults will not believe you or will not take you seriously. Keep talking until they listen, Even if you are not sure your friend is suicidal, talk to someone. This is definitely the time to be safe, not sorry!
5. Ask if your school has a crisis team: Many schools have organized crisis teams, which include teachers, counselors, social workers, school psychologists and principals. These teams help train all staff to recognize warning signs of suicide as well as how to help in a crisis situation. These teams can also help students understand warning signs of violence and suicide. Whether or not you think someone at your school might be suicidal, find out if your school has a crisis team in place. If your school does not have a crisis team, ask your student council or faculty advisor to look into starting a team
6. Pay attention to their language and behavior: People often talk about suicide in vague or unclear ways. Your friend could say things that reflect a sense of shame, hopelessness, or failure. They may not say, "I want to die," or "I want to kill myself." Instead, they might say: "I just want the pain to stop." or "I don't know if I can go on." or "I'm a burden to everyone." or "I'll never feel better."
7. Offer compassion: To validate their feelings do not argue, respect their opinion and offer hope e.g: "That sounds so painful, and I appreciate you sharing that with me. How can I help?" "I know things seem bleak now, but it can be hard to see possible solutions when you feel so overwhelmed." "I'm concerned about you because I care, and I want to offer support however I can. You can talk to me."

Help your family members:

As a family member of a suicidal teen you can do the following things:¹⁰

Make time to connect with your teen 1 on 1, If your teen keeps a busy, high-pressure schedule, find ways to slow down and decrease commitments, Encourage your teen to connect with positive, supportive friends, Practice relaxing activities together (going for a walk, journaling, drawing, using a mindfulness app), Exercise together, Help your teen create a list of people to call or text when feeling overwhelmed,

Acknowledge your teen's pain and validate your teen's emotions, Be patient, it will take time to break the cycle, Remove means of suicide from suicidal teens, and reach out to the school counselor to assist with accommodations in school

Help your students:

Every student spent a huge amount of time at school and with their teachers. So a teacher can do the following things:¹

1. Strengthen students' self-esteem.
2. Increase the level of mental education/nurturing.
3. Help the students to express emotion in controlled and positive way.
4. Prevent bullying and violence at school.
5. Provide information about mental care services.
6. Recognize and treat every depressed student.
7. Built trustful communication.
8. Improve school staff's communication skills.
9. Every school needs to have an emergency plan on how to inform school staff, especially teachers, fellow pupils and parents when suicide has been attempted or committed in school.

Conclusion

Thoughts of suicide, even if it seems vague, should always be taken seriously. If someone is at risk for suicide, it's better to take action and offer help. Nobody can control someone's thoughts, but some words and actions have more power than people think. Feeling hopeless, helpless, loneliness or can result in extreme emotional pain and depression. Sometimes these feelings result in thoughts of suicide, but it is important to let the person (with suicidal thoughts) know that *'you are not alone, there is help and hope'*.

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