



## GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF\*\*

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for adolescents in the United States. \*
- In recent years, more young people have died from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, congenital birth defects, and diabetes combined. \*
- For every young person who dies by suicide, between 100-200 attempt suicide. \*
- Males are four times as likely to die by suicide as females, although females attempt suicide three times as often as males. \*

### SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE

Here is what you can do:

- **Talk** to your student about suicide. Asking direct questions will not put ideas into their heads, as many fear. Asking for help is the single greatest skill that will protect your student. Help your student identify and connect to caring adults to talk to when they need guidance and support.
- **Know** the risk factors and warning signs of suicide. Participate and frequently review the suicide prevention training information from your school district.

\*M. Heron, D. L. Hoyert, S. L. Murphy, J. Xu, K. D. Kochanek, & B. Tejada-Vera. (2009, April). Deaths: Final Data for 2006. National Vital Statistics Reports, 57(14).

\*\*Lieberman, R., Poland, S. & Cassel, R. (2008). Suicide intervention. In Thomas, A. & Grimes, J., Best practices in school psychology V. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

#### LA COUNTY RESOURCE

**877.7.CRISIS or 877.727.4747**

**Suicide Prevention Center**

<http://preventsuicide.lacoe.edu>

#### NATIONAL RESOURCE

**800.273.TALK (8255)**

**National Suicide Prevention  
Lifeline**

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- **Remain calm.** Becoming too excited or distressed will communicate that you are not able to talk about suicide.
- **Listen** without judging. Allow for the discussion of experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Be prepared for expression of intense feelings. Try to understand the reasons for considering suicide without taking a position about whether such behavior is justified.
- **Supervise** constantly. Do not leave the individual alone until a caregiver (often a parent) or school crisis team member has been contacted and agrees to provide appropriate supervision.
- **Ask** if there is a plan for suicide. If it does not put you or the student in danger, attempt to remove the suicide means.
- **Respond** immediately. Escort the student to a member of your school's crisis team. If you are unsure of who is on your school crisis team, find the principal, assistant principal, school social worker, psychologist, counselor, or school nurse.
- **Join** the crisis team. You know your student the best. Provide essential background information that will help with assessing the student's risk for suicide. When a teacher says, "this behavior is not like this student", this is critical information indicating a sudden change in behavior.

## YOUTH SUICIDE RISK FACTORS

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While the path that leads to suicidal behavior is long and complex and there is no "profile" that predicts suicidal behavior with certainty, there are certain risk factors associated with increased suicide risk. In isolation, these factors are not signs of suicidal thinking. However, when present they signal the need to be vigilant for the warning signs of suicide. In addition, they are also appropriate targets for suicide prevention programs. Specifically, these risk factors include the following:

- History of depression, mental illness, or substance/alcohol abuse disorders
- Presence of a firearm or rope
- Isolation or lack of social support
- Situational crisis
- Family history of suicide or suicide in community
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Incarceration

### Suicide Warning Signs

Warning signs are observable behaviors that may signal the presence of suicidal thinking. They might be considered cries for help or invitations to intervene. These warning signs signal the need to inquire directly about whether the

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individual has thoughts of suicide. If such thinking is acknowledged, then suicide interventions will be required. Warning signs include the following:

- **Suicide threats.** It has been estimated that up to 80% of all suicide victims have given some clues regarding their intentions. Both direct ("I want to kill myself.") and indirect ("I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up.") threats need to be taken seriously. Consider social media posts that include direct or indirect threats.
- **Suicide notes and plans.** The presence of a suicide note is an especially significant sign of danger. The greater the planning revealed by the youth, the greater the risk of suicidal behavior.
- **Prior suicidal behavior.** Prior behavior is a powerful predictor of future behavior. Thus, anyone with a history of suicidal behavior should be carefully observed for future suicidal behavior.
- **Making final arrangements.** Making funeral arrangements, writing a will, and/or giving away prized possessions may be warning signs of impending suicidal behavior.
- **Preoccupation with death.** Excessive talking, drawing, reading, writing, or posting on social media about death may suggest suicidal thinking.
- **Changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts, and/or feelings.** Depression (especially when combined with hopelessness), sudden happiness (especially when preceded by significant depression), a move toward social isolation, giving away personal possessions, and reduced interest in

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previously important activities are among the changes considered to be suicide warning signs.

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