

## Your Role in Preventing Youth Suicide

Suicide is a preventable public health concern that should be addressed in schools because of the unique environment schools provide. Adolescents spend most of their time at school where adults interact with them in different capacities allowing for them to observe risk factors and warning signs. Use this guide to learn how to identify and respond to suicide risk in your students.

### Identify Students Who May Be At Risk

You may notice problems facing your students that may put them at risk for suicide. Some of the most significant risk factors:

- Depression (and other mental health disorders)
- Prior suicide attempt(s)
- Problems with drugs or alcohol
- Non-suicidal self-injury (hurting their body on purpose to reduce emotional pain)

Other behaviors may also indicate serious risk:

- Talking about feeling trapped, in unbearable pain, or being a burden
- Talking/writing about death
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Decreased interest in activities they once enjoyed

Suicide risk is usually greater among people with more than one risk factor. For individuals who are already at risk, a “triggering” event causing shame or despair may make them more likely to attempt suicide. These events may include:

- Problems in school (academic and/or discipline)
- Family problems or abuse
- Relationship problems or break-ups
- Bullying or trouble with the law

Suicide is complex. A number of risk factors are generally present but many may be unknown to school faculty/staff. If you are aware of a student who experiences a troubling event or displays warning signs, take action immediately.

### Respond To Students Who May Be At Risk

If a student is:

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as obtaining lethal means
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

Take the following steps right away:

1. Supervise the student constantly (or make sure the student is supervised by caring adults) until they can be seen by the mental health contact
2. Escort the student to see the mental health contact or administrator
3. Provide any additional information to the mental health professional evaluating the student to help in the assessment process.

### Reach Out To Student Who May Be At Risk

If a student isn't displaying immediate warning signs but you believe they may be at risk, you can still help:

- Talk with your school's mental health contact about your concerns. They may decide to obtain information about the student from other school staff to determine how best to help the student.
- Reach out to the student and ask how they are doing. Listen without judging. You can mention changes you have noticed in their behavior and that you are concerned.
- Suggest that the student see the school mental health contact and offer to accompany them.

Once you have referred a student to the school mental health contact, you still have an important role to play. Continue to stay in contact with the student and pay attention to how they are doing. Also, stay in touch with the school mental health contact and provide updates as needed.

### **Helping Your Colleagues**

Suicide can occur among your colleagues as well as among students. If you notice signs of risk for anyone in your school, you can assist them in obtaining help, too.

**The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24/7 and provides free, confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources at 1-800-273-8255. Crisis Text Line Text 'ACT' to 741741 for free, 24/7 crisis support in the U.S.**

