

society for the prevention of teen suicide

The Role of the School Nurse in Suicide Prevention

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Who Am I?



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What We Want You Know

Understand	why youth suicide prevention is important
Recognize	potentially at-risk students
Know	your role in the prevention process
Understand	why and how to make a referral

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**IF YOU BELIEVE
WHAT THE MEDIA TELLS YOU...**

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How Real is Youth Suicide

- ▶ 2nd leading cause of death among youth aged 10-24
- ▶ Since the pandemic:
 - ▶ 37.1% of youth experienced poor mental health during the pandemic
 - ▶ 50% rise in emergency room visits for adolescent girls for suspected suicide attempts
 - ▶ 3.7% rise in ER visits for adolescent boys for suspected suicide attempts
 - ▶ 24% increase in mental health related emergency room visits for youth aged 5-11

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The First Step: What You Bring to the Table

- Do you have personal or professional experience with suicide?
- What are the words that come to your mind when you think of a suicidal person? A suicidal youth?
- What do you already understand about suicide?
- What would help you understand suicide better?

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The language of suicide

<p>AVOID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COMMITTED SUICIDE • SUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT • SUICIDE VICTIM • PERMANENT SOLUTION TO TEMPORARY PROBLEM 	<p>USE INSTEAD;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DIED BY SUICIDE • ATTEMPT OR COMPLETION • PERSON WHO DIED BY SUICIDE • A CRISIS RESPONSE TO A PROBLEM PERCEIVED AS UNSOLVEABLE
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Understanding Suicide Better

A behavioral definition puts suicide into words that are easy to understand:


Suicide is an attempt to solve a problem of intense emotional pain with impaired problem-solving skills

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What Does "Intense Emotional Pain" Feel Like?

- Worthlessness
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Like being a loser
- Confusion
- Emptiness
- Desperation




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What Problems Can Seem “Unsolvable”?

- Getting into trouble at home, in school or with the law
- Being humiliated in front of friends, especially for boys
- Loss of a relationship, an opportunity, a dream
- Any transition for which the student feels unprepared



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Internal Characteristics of Suicide

Internal characteristics are categories of **GENERALLY** consistent or universal features.

Depression, hopelessness, impulsivity, etc. are specific feelings or behaviors that are not universally present.

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Characteristics of Suicide

- Perceived as alternative to unsolvable problem
- Crisis thinking predominates
- Ambivalence usually present
- Irrational quality to problem-solving
- Type of communication

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Helpful Interventions for Characteristics

1. Alternative – **Ask about problem**
2. Crisis – **Ventilate & validate**
3. Ambivalence- **Validate, lend hope**
4. Irrational- **Lend ego, reality testing**
5. Communication- **Ask about message**

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**VENTILATION & VALIDATION
YOUR INDISPENSIBLE
TOOLS:**

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Ventilation sounds like:
PERSON BEING ABLE TO TALK FULLY AND FREELY WITHOUT INTERRUPTION

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Validation sounds like

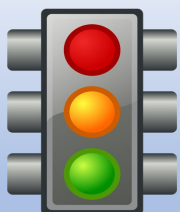
- Focusing on the other person
- Being mindful of who is doing the most talking
 - Not rushing
 - Not solving
- Focusing on emotions



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Suicide Risk Factors & Warning Signs

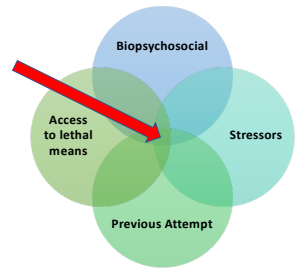
Red	Warning
Amber	Risk
Green	Protective



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Dynamics of Risk Factors



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What You Need to Know About Risk Factors:

- Risk factors are situations or factors that increase the possibility that someone might be suicidal
- Most of your students enter school with risk factors, leave with risk factors and are never suicidal
- There is always more than one risk factor for suicide
- Your school may never know what a student's risk factors are

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Students at Elevated Risk

Mental health diagnoses

- ADHD
- Impulse Control Disorders
- Eating Disorders
- Non-suicidal self-injury




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Students at Elevated Risk

- Threatening Suicide
- Looking for access to means
- Talking about, writing about death, dying, suicide
- Hospitalized for previous attempt
- Youth of Color
- LGBTQ youth



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The Most Serious Risk Factors for Youth?

- Making a previous suicide attempt
- Having access to lethal means



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Suicide Warning Signs - FACTS

Feelings
Hopelessness, anxiety, desperation

Actions
Aggression, risky behavior, online suicide searches

Changes
Observable changes in behavior, withdrawal from friends or changes in social activity; anger or hostility, changes in sleep

Threats
Talking about, writing about or making plans for suicide

Situations
Stressful situations including loss, change, humiliation, trouble at home or legal troubles are triggers for suicide




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What Are Some Warning Signs You May See in School?

- Changes in student appearance
- Changes in mood, for example, no longer cheerful or suddenly cheerful
- Changes in eating habits
- Student isolated on school bus, in cafeteria
- Bullying behavior- even as a bystander



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What Are Some Warning Signs You May See in School?


- **Frequent visits to school nurse**
- **Actual threats or suicide notes**
- **Disturbing themes in school assignments**
- **Unusual pattern of absences or tardiness**
- **Cutting classes or leaving school early**
- **Concerns expressed by other students**

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- Increased complaints of headache, stomachache, muscle pain and/or tiredness.
- Shutting down and withdrawing from people and activities.
- Increased anger or irritability (i.e., lashing out at people and situations).
- Crying more often and appearing teary-eyed.
- Feelings of hopelessness.
- Chronic anxiety and nervousness.
- Changes in sleeping and eating habits (i.e., insomnia, nightmares, or being "too busy" to eat).
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Experimentation with drugs or alcohol (middle school to high school).


Signs of Distress in Students



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Our Role As School Nurses

- **Observe** signs of stress and trauma in students
- **Identify** students who may be at risk for suicide
- **Refer** to proper resources in school and outside of school



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Tell Me More

How you can make a difference

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**Practice
“Tell Me More”**



- Reflects the 3 hardest but most important words to say to a suicidal student
- Opens the door to talking about suicide in a conversational way
- Addresses questions about suicide risk from a developmental perspective
- Frames suicide as the solution to that seemingly unsolvable problem

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What is the “Tell Me More” Model?

- Reflects the 3 hardest but most important words to say to a suicidal student
- Opens the door to talking about suicide in a conversational way
- Addresses questions about suicide risk from a developmental perspective
- Frames suicide as the solution to that seemingly unsolvable problem

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Warm Handoff: Step-by-Step

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    graph TD
      A[Listen  
To the student's answers] --> B[Be prepared  
For them to disagree- say they're ok]
      B --> C[Remind  
Them of the reasons for your concern]
      C --> D[Suggest  
A referral to your school's resource staff]
      D --> E[Follow  
Your school's policy to make that referral]
      E --> F[EVEN IF  
The student disagrees, talk with resource staff]
      F --> G[Follow-up  
With student and resource staff]
      style A fill:#90EE90,stroke:#333,stroke-width:1px
      style B fill:#90EE90,stroke:#333,stroke-width:1px
      style C fill:#90EE90,stroke:#333,stroke-width:1px
      style D fill:#90EE90,stroke:#333,stroke-width:1px
      style E fill:#90EE90,stroke:#333,stroke-width:1px
      style F fill:#ADD8E6,stroke:#333,stroke-width:1px
      style G fill:#ADD8E6,stroke:#333,stroke-width:1px
    
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What NOT to Say

- Don't worry, everything will be all right
- By next week, you'll forget all about it
- This is nothing!
- Cheer up!
- You have so much to be thankful for
- Think about how your family/friends would feel if you killed yourself

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Engaging Parents and Caregivers

- Involve student
- Assume parents want to act in their child's best interests.
- Remain nonjudgmental and calm.
- Anticipate previous parental contact with mental health.
- Avoid power struggles!

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Fostering Protective Factors

- Teach students it is okay to ask for help
- Help students identify trusted adults
- Encourage participation in school & community activities
- Acknowledge student efforts
- Be a good listener, as often as you can

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Contact with a trusted adult is the most significant protective factor...


...and that adult could be you!

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How Does a School Reinforce Protective Factors?

- Policies and protocols
- Curriculum that fosters development of social emotional learning and help-seeking skills
- Opportunities for student connection
- Information and resources for parents/guardians
- Faculty and staff training
- Lead U and SPTS




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Behavioral Health Toolkit


- ▶ **Increase Parental Knowledge**
The Toolkit aims to increase parental knowledge of behavioral and emotional health issues and when to be concerned.
- ▶ **Assist Parents in Speaking with their Children**
The Toolkit provides parents with conversational language to speak with their children about mental health issues.
- ▶ **Provides Families Resources**
The Toolkit highlights local and state resources for parents to be prepared.



Behavioral Health Toolkit
Guidance and Resources for Parents & Caregivers

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And remember...



We are all in this together!

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www.sptsusa.org

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