



Suicidal Thoughts

“I’ve had feelings of just wanting to disappear. It’s more than depression, like a complete giving up of life and all of its routine tasks.”

Kim T., University of Wisconsin

For persons 15 to 24 years old, suicide is the third leading cause of death, behind unintentional injury and homicide. More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease *combined*. Young women attempt suicide 4 to 8 times more often than young men, but males are 4 times more likely than females to die from suicide.

Signs & Symptoms

A lot of people think about suicide or say things like, “I wish I was dead,” at times of great stress. For most people, these thoughts are a way to express anger and other emotions. They may not, in and of themselves, be a sign of a problem. The signs and symptoms that follow need medical care.

- Writing a suicide note.
- Suicidal threats, gestures, or attempts.
- Thoughts of suicide that don’t go away or that occur often.

(**Note:** In some suicides, no warning signs are shown or noticed.)

Causes

- Depression.
- Bipolar disorder.
- Schizophrenia.
- Grief. Loss of a loved one.
- A side effect of some medicines. One is isotretinoin. This is prescribed for severe acne. Some antidepressant medicines can increase the risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors, too. This is especially noted in children and adolescents. This risk may be higher within the first days to a month after starting the medicine. Persons who take antidepressants should be closely monitored.
- A family history of suicide or depression.
- Money and relationship problems.



Treatment

Suicidal threats and attempts are a person’s way of letting others know that he or she needs help. They should never be taken lightly or taken only as a “bluff.” Most people who threaten and/or attempt suicide more than once usually succeed if they are not stopped. Emergency care and hospitalization are necessary after an attempted suicide. Persons with suicidal thoughts should seek medical treatment.



Suicidal Thoughts, Continued

Questions to Ask

{**Note:** In some suicides, no warning signs are shown or noticed.}

At this time, are any of the following present?

- Suicide attempts or gestures, such as standing on the edge of a bridge, cutting the wrists, or driving recklessly on purpose.
- Plans are being made for suicide. Has the person purchased or gotten a weapon or pills that could be used for suicide?
- Repeated thoughts of suicide or death.

YES



NO

Has the person recently done any of the following?

- Given repeated statements that indicate suicidal thoughts, such as “I don’t want to live anymore,” or “The world would be better off without me.”
- Given away things he or she values most and gotten legal matters in order.
- Suddenly felt better after being very depressed and stated something like, “Now I know what I have to do.”

YES



NO

With thoughts of suicide or death, are any of these conditions present?

- Depression or bipolar disorder.
- Schizophrenia.
- Any other mental health or medical condition.

YES



NO

Have thoughts of suicide occurred after taking, stopping, or changing the dose of a prescribed medicine (this includes certain antidepressants) or using drugs and/or alcohol?

YES



NO

Does the person thinking about suicide have **signs and symptoms of depression** (see at www.HealthyLearn.com)?

YES



NO

Does the person thinking about suicide have other blood relatives who attempted or died from suicide?

YES



NO

Have suicidal thoughts come as a result of any of the following (or any other) upsets in life?

- A relationship breakup.
- The death of a loved one.
- A rejection or being ridiculed.

YES



NO





Suicidal Thoughts, Continued

Self-Care

If You Are Having Thoughts of Suicide

- Let someone know. Talk to a trusted family member, friend, or teacher. If it is hard for you to talk directly to someone, write your thoughts down and let someone else read them.
- Call your school's Mental Health Service, your local Crisis Intervention Center or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800.273.8255. Follow up with a visit to your health care provider or your school's Mental Health Service.

How to Help a Friend Who May Be Suicidal

- Take him or her seriously. If your friend informs you of suicidal intentions, believe the threats.
- Keep firearms, drugs, etc. away from persons at risk.
- Take courses that teach problem solving, coping skills, and suicide awareness.
- If you think the person is serious about suicide, get help. Watch and protect him or her until you get help. Keep the person talking. Ask questions, such as, "Are you thinking about hurting or killing yourself?"



While getting help, do not leave a person alone who threatens suicide.

- Urge the person to call for help. If he or she is already under the care of a health care provider, have the person contact that provider first. If not, other places to contact are listed in the box below. Make the call yourself if the person can't or won't.
- Express concern. The person needs to know that someone cares. Most suicidal persons feel alone. Tell the person how much he or she means to you and others. Talk about reasons to stay alive. Don't judge. The person needs someone to listen, not to preach moral values.
- Tell the person that depression and suicidal tendencies can be treated. Urge him or her to get professional care. Offer help in seeking care.



For Information, Contact:

Your school's Student Counseling or Mental Health Service or Student Health Service

Your local Suicide Prevention Hotline or Crisis Intervention Center

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
888.333.AFSP (2377) • www.afsp.org
(This is not a crisis hotline.)

Metanoia Communications
www.metanoia.org/suicide

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
800.273.TALK (273.8255)
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org