

TEEN SUICIDE

Teenagers typically experience strong feelings of stress, confusion, self-doubt, pressure to succeed, and many other fears while growing up. It is normal for teens to have ups and downs, to experience changes in feelings, and to become moody, particularly when they experience situations like moving to a new community, divorce or loss of a loved one. Under these situations it is normal to feel sad or blue. However, when these feelings become persistent over time or are expressed with great intensity, they may be a warning sign of more serious emotional problems including depression or possible suicide. Please keep in mind that depression and suicidal feelings are treatable mental disorders. All depressed people do not become suicidal; but most who have attempted suicide have been depressed. When in doubt, a psychiatric or psychological consultation may be very helpful. Those who are depressed may need to have their condition diagnosed by a mental health professional, who will create an appropriate treatment plan.

PARENTS SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE:

- Making comments or expressing feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness, for example, comments such as “I never get it right” “Everything I do is wrong,” or “I might as well give up.”
- Talking about suicide as a possibility or solution, for example “It would be better if I wasn’t here,” “I want out,” or “I might as well kill myself.”
- Talking or thinking about death or afterlife, for example, is your teenager playing music, searching internet sites, watching movies, etc., with suicidal or death themes? Are drawings or poetry your teenager is producing morbid, gruesome, or death-oriented?
- Losing interest in activities that have previously been pleasurable, for example, dropping out of sport teams, clubs, not attending dances, parties, and teenage get-togethers.
- Giving away belongings. Saying good-bye. Calling people to give away possessions, hinting about not being around in the future, for example, “ I don’t think I’ll be around for graduation (or my birthday).”
- Having a “death wish,” engaging in high risk-taking behavior. For example, driving too fast or engaging in sports without protective gear.
- Alcohol and drug use can be a sign that your teen is self-medicating a painful depression. Substance use also impairs judgment, significantly increasing the risk that your teen could harm him or herself unintentionally.
- Previous history of self-harm or suicide attempts, for example, if your teen has previously engaged in harmful behavior like cutting or risky driving (for example running red lights).
- Major changes in sleeping or eating habits. Is your teenager sleeping a lot more or a lot less? Has he or she recently gained a lot of weight or lost a lot of weight? These kinds of changes may be symptoms of a developing depression.
- Significant drop in usual quality of school performance and participation. Are your teenager’s grades dropping? Is he or she withdrawing from usual school clubs and activities?
- Increase in moodiness, withdrawal, or isolation.

- A feeling of calm following a period of moodiness. Your teenager may be looking calmer because he or she has finally resolved on a plan to hurt him/herself.
- Impulsive, aggressive behavior. Angry outbursts, for example, getting in trouble with authority figures like parents, teachers, and coaches. Aggressive behavior toward siblings, peers or animals.
- Recent losses, for example, the break-up of a important relationship, the recent death or suicide of a friend or family member, or news reports of other teenagers committing suicide, especially in your community or in or neighboring communities.
- Having the means available. Is your teenager showing an unusual interest in guns, knives, ropes, pills, or poisons?
- Feeling rejected or alone, being the target of bullying. Is your teen scapegoated? Shamed? How is he or she coping with this bullying?
- Significant guilt feelings. Does your teen feel profoundly guilty, overly responsible, or blameworthy?
- Impaired judgment, agitation. Does your teen suffer from racing thoughts, see or hear things other people don't see or hear? Are drugs or alcohol affecting your teen's ability to think clearly?

What can you do if you see these warning signs?

- If you think your teenager is depressed to the point where he or she is contemplating suicide please take it very seriously. Listen to what your child is saying. Talk openly and lovingly. Ask them what they plan to do. If they have already initiated a plan, for example if they have ingested pills, immediately call 911 and have them taken to an emergency room for medical care and evaluation.
- If they have a plan, for example, taking medication from the medicine cabinet, ingesting a cleaning product, or using a weapon immediately remove the object of potential danger and stay with your child. Do not leave the child alone. Seek help and begin by setting up appointments with a mental health professional.

Resources:

Sometimes people don't get help they need because they don't know where to turn. It is important not to go through this situation alone. As a parent, you might want to talk to family, friends, or clergy. Find an adult whose advice you value or someone who feels like a parent to you.

Individuals suffering from these problems need continuing support for an ongoing problem.

Many individuals have health insurance and EAP programs. Glastonbury residents are eligible for free services at the local youth service bureau.

Here are some places to call for support. Don't delay:

- 911 in any emergency
- 211 Infoline's Suicide Hotline
- Glastonbury Youth and Family Services: 652-7661
- GHS guidance Department: 652-7211 for high school psychologists and guidance counselors

- Smith Middle School Guidance Counselors or school psychologist: 652-7040
- Call police for intervention (Glastonbury Police Youth Unit): 652-4280
- Your child's pediatrician
- Licensed mental health professional, social worker, or psychologist
- Clergy person

The consequences for not getting help can be serious. Untreated problems often continue and can get worse.

Never keep talk of suicide a secret even if your child asks you to. They are letting you know they need help.

If your child's doctor has prescribed medications to treat depression or mental illness it is very important to provide support, to closely monitor the situation, and to stay in contact with the doctor.

With proper treatment and support, teenagers can find positive ways to overcome or manage their depression and suicidal feelings and thoughts. They are not alone and neither are you. Please make that first call to begin getting help.

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org