

# Warning signs of suicide can be organized around the word “FACTS”:

## F eelings

- Hopelessness: feeling like things are bad and won't get any better
- Fear of losing control, going crazy, harming himself/herself or others
- Helplessness: a belief that there's nothing that can be done to make life better
- Worthlessness: feeling like an awful person and that people would be better off if he/she were dead
- Hating himself/herself, feeling guilty or ashamed
- Being extremely sad and lonely
- Feeling anxious, worried, or angry all the time

## A ctions

- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Talking or writing about death or destruction
- Aggression: getting into fights or having arguments with other people
- Recklessness: doing risky or dangerous things

## C hanges

- Personality: behaving like a different person, becoming withdrawn, tired all the time, not caring about anything, or becoming more talkative or outgoing
- Behavior: can't concentrate on school or regular tasks
- Sleeping pattern: sleeping all the time or not being able to sleep at all, or waking up in the middle of the night or early in the morning and not being able to get back to sleep
- Eating habits: loss of appetite and/or overeating and gaining weight
- Losing interest in friends, hobbies, and appearance or in activities or sports previously enjoyed
- Sudden improvement after a period of being down or withdrawn

## T hreats

- Statements like “How long does it take to bleed to death?”
- Threats like “I won't be around much longer” or “Don't tell anyone else . . . you won't be my friend if you tell!”
- Plans like giving away favorite things, studying about ways to die, obtaining a weapon or a stash of pills: the risk is very high if a person has a plan and the way to do it.
- Suicide attempts like overdosing, wrist cutting

## S ituations

- Getting into trouble at school, at home, or with the law
- Recent loss through death, divorce, or separation; the breakup of a relationship; losing an opportunity or a dream; losing self-esteem
- Changes in life that feel overwhelming
- Being exposed to suicide or the death of a peer under any circumstances

Listen and look for these warning signs for suicidal behavior. Warning signs are the earliest detectable signs that indicate heightened risk for suicide *in the near term* (i.e., within minutes, hours, or days), as opposed to risk factors that suggest longer-term risk (i.e., a year to a lifetime). Note that aside from direct statements or behaviors threatening suicide, it is often a constellation of signs that raises concern, rather than one or two symptoms alone.

Seek help by talking to your parent, teacher, guidance counselor or other trusted adult. You can talk with a mental health professional (some resources are listed on the last page) or by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for a referral should you witness, hear, or see someone exhibiting one or more of the warning signs.

## **Warning Signs for Suicide That Require Immediate Attention**

Call 9-1-1 or seek immediate help from a mental health provider when you hear or see any of these behaviors:

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill himself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill himself
- Someone looking for ways to kill herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Someone talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person

## **Looking out for your Friends and Peers:**

If you believe any of your friends or classmates may be thinking of killing themselves—or have serious problems that they have not told anyone about—tell a responsible adult. Find someone who is concerned with and understands young people and can help. This may be a teacher, guidance counselor, or other member of the school staff. It might also be your parents, the parents or sibling of a friend, a member of the clergy, or someone who works at the local youth center. If this adult doesn't take you or your friend's problem seriously, or doesn't know what to do, talk to someone else. If you need help finding someone who can help, call (800) 273-TALK (8255).

Don't be afraid of being wrong. It is often hard to tell if someone is really thinking about killing or hurting him- or herself. Some of the warning signs for suicide could also be signs of drug or alcohol use, serious family problems, or depression or another mental illness. People with these problems still need help—and you can help.

Just talking to them can make a big difference. Teens will often share secrets and feelings with other teens that they will not share with adults. However, you may need to be persistent before they are willing to talk. Ask them if they are thinking about killing themselves. Talking about suicide or suicidal thoughts will *not* push someone to kill him- or herself. It is also not true that people who talk about killing themselves will not actually try it. If a friend says that he or she is thinking about killing him- or herself, take your friend seriously.

You should be especially concerned if people tell you that they have made a detailed suicide plan or obtained a means of hurting themselves. If they announce that they are thinking of taking an overdose of prescription medication or jumping from a particular bridge, stay with them until they are willing to go with you and talk to a responsible adult—or until a responsible adult can be found who will come to you.

Don't pretend you have all the answers. Be honest. The most important thing you can do may be to help them find help. *Never* promise to keep someone's intention to kill or hurt him- or herself a secret. Let the person know that you would never tell this secret to just anyone, but you will tell a responsible adult if you think the person needs help.

## **Taking Care of Yourself**

If you are having problems and thinking of hurting yourself, tell someone who can help. If you cannot talk to your parents, find someone else: a relative, a friend, a teacher, the school nurse or guidance counselor, or a friend's parents. Or, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-TALK (8255), and they will help you.

Don't be ashamed or embarrassed. A lot of teens and adults have problems that they cannot solve on their own. Finding the courage to get help is often the first step toward solving your problems and becoming a happier person.

## **Resources for Teens**

**Jason Foundation** (<http://www.jasonfoundation.com/>) is a nationally recognized leader in youth suicide awareness, education, and prevention. The Student section of the website (<http://www.jasonfoundation.com/student.html>) contains information on preventing suicide, suggestions for working in your school or community on suicide prevention projects, basic information about suicide and its warning signs, and other information useful for doing term papers on suicide and suicide prevention.

**National Institute of Mental Health** ([www.nimh.nih.gov/](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/)) is a Federal research agency. Its website features several publications for teens on suicide and depression, for example:

- **Facts for Teens: Teen Suicide** (<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/teens/docs/suicide.pdf>)
- **What to Do When a Friend Is Depressed—Guide for Students** (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/friend.cfm>)
- **Let's Talk About Depression** (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/letstalk.cfm>)

## **General Resources on Suicide and Suicide Prevention**

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention** (<http://www.afsp.org>). The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is dedicated to advancing our knowledge of suicide and our ability to prevent it.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** (<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>). The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides immediate assistance to individuals in suicidal crisis by connecting them to the nearest available suicide prevention and mental health service provider through a toll-free telephone number: (800) 273-TALK (8255).

**Suicide Prevention Action Network USA** (<http://www.spanusa.org>). Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA) is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors (those who have lost a loved one to suicide) and others to advance public policies that help prevent suicide.

### **Local Resources—WHO TO CALL IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR FRIEND'S SAFETY**

Crisis Line	(270) 684-9466	(800) 433-7291
River Valley Behavioral Health	(270) 683-4039	(800) 769-4920
Owensboro Medical Health System	(270) 688-2000	
Deaconess Cross Pointe (Evansville)	(800) 947-6789	
Lincoln Trail Behavioral Health	(800) 274-7374	

**Names and numbers of people you can trust:**

**Guidance counselor / teacher / administrator** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Other Trusted Adults** \_\_\_\_\_

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