



Suicide Prevention and Intervention Risk Factors & Warning Signs

There is no definitive checklist of either risk factors or warning signs for adolescent suicide. This handout is provided as a guideline. Please consult the Colorado School Safety Resource Center's: *Resources for Youth Suicide Prevention and Intervention* for additional information.

Risk factors may predispose youth to suicide behavior while **warning signs** may indicate the possibility of a suicidal crisis. Be sure immediately to contact a mental health professional when concerned who will also notify parents and **DO NOT** leave the student unattended.

Risk Factors

- Mental health disorders
- Familial factors
- Personality and behavioral traits
- Biological factors
- Environmental factors
- Genetic factors
- Psychosocial life events
- Situational crises

Most Common Situational Crises Associated With Suicide:

- death of a significant other (especially traumatic death)
- parental divorce
- family moves
- incarceration
- trouble at school
- family violence
- parental arguments
- physical and sexual abuse
- running away from home
- exposure to suicidology in others

Other Considerations:

- Impulsivity
- Substance use/abuse
- Access to firearms
- Uncertainty about the future
- School, relationship, societal failures or conflicts
- Contagion
- Ethnic minority youth and LGBTQ youth
- Students with disabilities



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Warning Signs

- Change in sleeping and eating habits
- Withdrawal
- Fatigue
- Sudden change in personality that persists
- Hopelessness or helplessness
- Increased risk-taking
- Drop in grades
- Neglect in appearance
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Inability to concentrate or think rationally
- Change in or lack of interests both current and future, excessive boredom
- Frequent complaints of headache, stomachache, fatigue
- Irritability, anger/lashing out at others, intolerant of praise
- Suddenly becomes cheerful after period of being unhappy (may be increased risk)
- Giving away possessions
- Talking about death
- Verbal hints

Behavioral Signs

1. Suicide threats.
2. Suicide plan, method, and means.
3. Previous attempts.
4. Making final arrangements.
5. Suicide notes
6. Symptoms of depression.

Sample Verbal Warning Signs

1. "Everybody would be better off if I just weren't around."
2. "I'm not going to bug you much longer."
3. "I hate my life. I hate everyone and everything."
4. "I'm the cause of all of my family's/friend's troubles."
5. "I wish I would just go to sleep and never wake up."
6. "I've tried everything but nothing seems to help."
7. "Nobody can help me."
8. "I want to kill myself but I don't have the guts."
9. "I'm no good to anyone."
10. "If my (father, mother, teacher) doesn't leave me alone I'm going to kill myself."
11. "Don't buy me anything. I won't need any (clothes, books)."
12. "If I don't see you again, thanks for everything."
13. "It doesn't matter now."
14. "I love you, remember that."

Common Myths about Youth Suicide:

- Asking questions or talking about suicide will increase the probability of its occurrence.
- Those who attempt suicide usually receive medical attention or treatment.
- Most young people who die by suicide usually leave a suicide note.
- Parents or caregivers are aware of their child's suicidal behavior.

Concerns During School Discipline:

- ❖ Safety must always be considered
- ❖ All discipline should include a proactive-support plan – not just punishment
- ❖ Student is never left unsupervised
- ❖ Removing structure can make student feel more out-of-control & contribute to suicidal ideation
- ❖ Inform parents of precautions and/or concerns