

What parents and caregivers need to know about teen suicide

September 17 2020, by From Mayo Clinic News Network, Mayo Clinic News Network



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Is your teen at risk of suicide? While no teen is immune, there are factors that can make some adolescents more vulnerable than others. Understand how to tell if your teen might be suicidal and where to turn for help and treatment.

What makes teens vulnerable to suicide?

Many teens who attempt or die by suicide have a mental health condition. As a result, they have trouble coping with the stress of being a teen, such as dealing with rejection, failure, breakups and family turmoil. They might also be unable to see that they can turn their lives around—and that suicide is a permanent response, not a solution, to a temporary problem.

What are the risk factors for teen suicide?

A teen might feel suicidal due to certain life circumstances such as:

- Having a psychiatric disorder, including depression
- Loss of or conflict with close friends or [family members](#)
- History of physical or sexual abuse or exposure to violence
- Problems with alcohol or drugs
- Physical or medical issues, for example, becoming pregnant or having a sexually transmitted infection
- Being the victim of bullying
- Being uncertain of sexual orientation
- Exposure to the suicide of a family member or friend
- Being adopted
- Family history of mood disorder or [suicidal behavior](#)

What role do antidepressants play?

Most antidepressants are generally safe, but the Food and Drug Administration requires that all antidepressants carry black box warnings, the strictest warnings for prescriptions. The warnings call attention to the fact that children, teenagers and [young adults](#) under 25 might have an increase in [suicidal thoughts](#) or behavior when taking

antidepressants, especially in the first few weeks after starting or when the dose is changed.

Keep in mind that antidepressants are more likely to reduce suicide risk in the long run by improving mood.

What are the warning signs that a teen might be suicidal?

Warning signs of teen suicide might include:

- Talking or writing about suicide—for example, making statements such as "I'm going to kill myself," or "I won't be a problem for you much longer"
- Withdrawing from social contact
- Having mood swings
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Feeling trapped or hopeless about a situation
- Changing normal routine, including eating or sleeping patterns
- Doing risky or self-destructive things
- Giving away belongings when there is no other logical explanation for why this is being done
- Developing personality changes or being severely anxious or agitated when experiencing some of the [warning](#) signs listed above

What should I do if I suspect my teen is suicidal?

If you think your teen is in immediate danger, call 911, your local emergency number or a suicide hotline number—such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255) in the United States.

If you suspect that your teen might be thinking about suicide, talk to him or her immediately. Don't be afraid to use the word "suicide." Talking about suicide won't plant ideas in your teen's head. Ask your teen to talk about his or her feelings and listen. Don't dismiss his or her problems. Instead, reassure your teen of your love. Remind your teen that he or she can work through whatever is going on—and that you're willing to help.

Also, seek [medical help](#) for your teen. Ask your teen's doctor to guide you. Teens who are feeling suicidal usually need to see a psychiatrist or psychologist experienced in diagnosing and treating children with mental health problems. The doctor will want to get an accurate picture of what's going on from a variety of sources, such as the teen, parents or guardians, other people close to the teen, school reports, and previous medical or psychiatric evaluations.

What can I do to prevent teen suicide?

You can take steps to help protect your teen. For example:

- Address depression or anxiety. Don't wait for your teen to come to you. If your teen is sad, anxious or appears to be struggling—ask what's wrong and offer your help.
- Pay attention. If your teen is thinking about suicide, he or she is likely displaying warning signs. Listen to what your child is saying and watch how he or she is acting. Never shrug off threats of [suicide](#) as teen melodrama.
- Discourage isolation. Encourage your teen to spend time with supportive friends and family.
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle. Help your teen eat well, exercise and get regular sleep.
- Support the treatment plan. If your teen is undergoing treatment for suicidal behavior, remind him or her that it might take time to feel better. Help your teen follow his or her doctor's

recommendations. Also, encourage your teen to participate in activities that will help him or her rebuild confidence.

- Safely store firearms, alcohol and medications. Access to them can play a role if a [teen](#) is already suicidal.

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Citation: What parents and caregivers need to know about teen suicide (2020, September 17)
retrieved 19 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-parents-caregivers-teen-suicide.html>

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