

# 'Feeling like a burden' can be motivator for suicide in preteens

April 15 2024, by Dennis Thompson

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Quiet preteens who feel they're a burden on others are more likely to

have suicidal thoughts and behaviors, a new study reports.

Criticism from parents or caregivers also increased the likelihood of [suicidal thoughts](#) and behaviors, researchers found.

Preteen girls with these traits are at especially high risk, according to the study published recently in the [Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#).

"Preadolescent [suicidal thoughts and behaviors] are dramatically increasing, and it is critical to identify [risk factors](#) that can be clinically assessed and modified with treatment," said lead researcher Renee Thompson, an associate professor of psychological and brain sciences with Washington University in St. Louis.

For the study, Thompson and her team surveyed 192 children ages 7 to 12 for signs of suicidal thoughts, based on risk factors like depression, feelings of disconnection or burdensomeness, criticism and conflict with caregivers, and the ability to express one's feelings.

The surveys were conducted weekly with children whose caregivers reported incidents of suicidal thoughts or [self-harm](#), and monthly for other kids, for a year.

About 30% of the kids met the criteria for major [depression](#), and during the year 70 children were found to have suicidal thoughts or behaviors.

Overall, girls were four times more likely than [boys](#) to report thoughts of suicide or self-harming actions, researchers found.

Boys and girls with symptoms of severe depression were 10 times more likely to think of suicide or act on those thoughts.

Looking closer at the week-to-week responses of known high-risk preteens, researchers found that certain factors tended to predate a suicidal thought or behavior occurring the following week.

These factors included problems expressing their feelings, perceptions of being a burden and criticism from caregivers, researchers said. They noted that similar factors also influence suicidal thoughts and behaviors among teenagers and adults.

All of this points to "potential targets for prevention and treatment aimed at decreasing risk" of suicidal thoughts in kids, the authors concluded.

**More information:** If you or a loved one is struggling with suicidal thoughts and feelings, the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) can help.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [suicide prevention](#).

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