



## SUICIDE PREVENTION

Facts, Signs & Intervention



KidsPeace, The National Center  
for Kids Overcoming Crisis

1-800-25-PEACE  
[www.kidspeace.org](http://www.kidspeace.org)  
[www.TeenCentral.Net](http://www.TeenCentral.Net)



With increasing stresses and pressures in a world that is growing more and more complex and uncertain every day, most of us experience trouble coping at one time or another. Children are even more vulnerable to feeling lost, scared, or overwhelmed because they do not have as much preparation, experience, or practice coping with and overcoming difficult problems.

From abuse and neglect, to bullying and school shootings, eating disorders, peer pressure – even fears of war and terrorism – the strain on kids today is unprecedented and sometimes it may become too much to bear. When this happens, kids begin to seek some form of escape from their woes and in the most severe cases, when there does not appear to be an alternative, children may even turn to suicide to free themselves from the pain, grief, dread, or despair they are suffering.

Alarming, in recent years, suicide has increased dramatically and, sadly, more and more of our children are choosing to end their lives rather than face the hardships the world hurls at them.

## Statistics Speak Louder than Words:

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people 15 to 24 years of age
- From 1980-1996, the rate of suicide among all persons aged 10-14 years has increased by **100%**
- Since 1950, the suicide rate for white females ages 15-24 has **DOUBLED**
- Since 1950, the suicide rate for white males ages 15-24 has **TRIPLED**



## Why Suicide?

### What Drives Our Children to Such a Drastic Solution

There are a number of reasons why children, like adults, may find themselves thinking the unthinkable. At the core of all motivating factors lies a desperate need to cope with a situation that may seem beyond remedy. The most important reasons include:

- **Ending an unresolved conflict**
- **Ending suffering of acute or prolonged pain (emotional or physical)**
- **Escape from an unbearable situation**
  - Grief and loss
  - Desire to join a deceased loved one
  - Means of self-punishment
  - Anger at others
  - Act of defiance, punishment of survivors, or revenge
  - Aim to avoid punishment for a crime
  - Means of gaining status or fame
  - Impulsive act during a psychotic episode
  - Copycat intent – when there is a suicide in a large school, the chance of a second one increases by 300%

## Recognizing the Risk Indicators For Youth Suicide

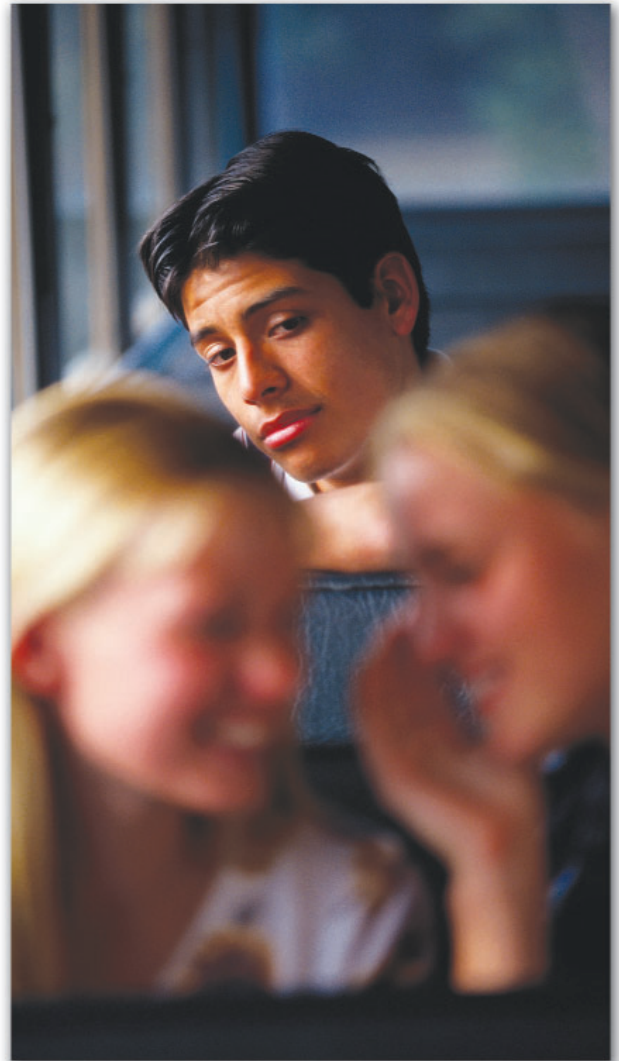
### Factors that May Foreshadow Thoughts or Deeds

Certain characteristics or factors put children at an increased risk for contemplating or attempting suicide. Being aware of these risk factors improves the chances of spotting warnings signs in time to prevent a child from taking their life. The most important risk factors include:

- A previous suicide attempt – this is the #1 indicator of current suicide risk
- An attempted suicide by a family member or friend
- Addiction to alcohol or drugs – according to a Department of Education Study, drug and alcohol abuse was the most common characteristic of young people who attempted suicide; 70% of attempters frequently used drugs and/or alcohol
- Serious medical problems that may be life-threatening or life-changing such as diabetes, leukemia, or a car accident causing paralysis
- Major psychiatric illness such as depression, bipolar disorder, or conduct disorder  
Studies of patients with bipolar disorder indicate that 25-50% of persons with this illness make at least one suicide attempt
- A loss of any kind – real and symbolic
- History of impulsive or erratic behavior (especially running away)
- History of family problems, few or no friends
- Trouble talking about problems or lack of communication
- History of frustration and conflicts with important people
- Perpetual feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
- History of abuse

- Presence of a learning disability
- Easy access to things a child can use to hurt himself such as guns, razor blades, sharp objects, medications, or a cord of any type

*“I can’t take this anymore.”*



*“I wish I was dead.”*

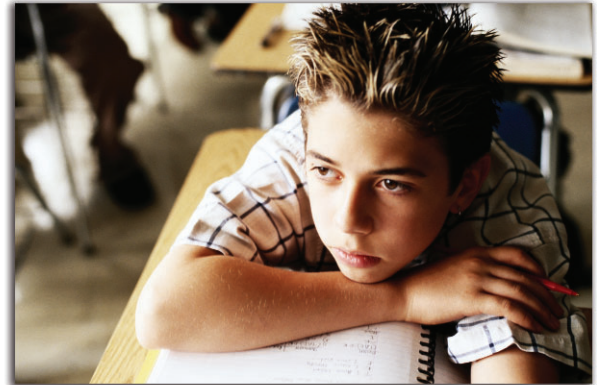
## Spotting Warning Signs

### Detecting the Cries for Help That Could Foreshadow Suicide

There are many signs and symptoms that might provide hints or clues that a child is contemplating or planning to attempt suicide. Some are more visible while others are rather subtle. It is important to be alert and attentive when it comes to potential clues, especially if a child is at an increased risk. The most important signals to look out for are:

- Prior history of attempted suicide or suicide by someone close to the child
- Writings about suicide (poems, stories, etc.)
- Indirect threats (“I wish I was dead.”) or direct threats (“I’m going to kill myself.”)
- Preoccupation with death including:
  - Talking about death or compulsively thinking about and longing for a dead person
  - Sudden, intense interest in religion and afterlife
  - Making final arrangements (writing a will, talking about their funeral, etc.)
  - Giving away prized possessions
  - Creating artwork or writing or listening to music about death/dying
- Visible changes in behavior, physical condition, thoughts, or feelings such as:
  - Social withdrawal, isolation, or loss of interest in social interaction
  - Diminished involvement in usual interests, activities, or hobbies
  - Increased risk-taking behaviors, recklessness, or aggressiveness
  - Decreased academic performance
  - Increased use of alcohol or drugs
  - Frequent unexplained lateness, absence from school or regular activities
  - Crying easily
  - Abrupt changes in appearance
  - Recent weight or appetite change
  - Change in sleep patterns

*“Everything is hopeless.”*



- Exhaustion, laziness, extreme drowsiness
- Inability to concentrate or think rationally
- Exaggerated fears, extreme anxiety, or depression
- Low self-esteem
- Hopelessness or helplessness
- Increased irritability or anger, mood swings or withdrawal from communication
- Stress from difficult situations including:
  - Inability to cope with loss (such as divorce, breaking up with a boy/girlfriend, loss of a job or status, death of a loved one)
  - Feelings of worthlessness
  - A victim mentality caused by physical, sexual or emotional abuse

**If you spot any of these symptoms, ask the three Cs:**

**CHANGE:**

Is this a new behavior?

**CLUSTER:**

How many signs and symptoms does the child have?

**CONTINUUM:**

How intense or strong are those symptoms?

## Stepping In

### What to Do to Prevent Suicide

If you spot any of the signs, symptoms, or cries for help, don't waste time, especially when a combination of multiple symptoms has persisted over time and they do not appear to be subsiding. Step in right away and do whatever it takes to prevent a child from acting on their impulse and taking their life. Here are some things you can and should do right away:

- Talk, talk, talk and encourage the child to talk – discussing suicide openly is one of the most important things you can do to. This will help to:
  - Acknowledge and increase understanding of the child's problems and feelings
  - Reduce feelings of isolation and alienation the child may be experiencing
  - Aid the child to gain perspective and dilute some of the painful feelings
- Listen and pay attention
- Be there and show you care
- Take the child seriously
- Reassure the child without dismissing feelings
- Restrict access to anything the child can use to harm themselves
- Document everything (risk indicators, symptoms, motives, how you intervened, how the child responded, other safety measures, people you have notified)
- Make sure to follow-up with a mental health professional
- Consider hospitalization – sometimes this is a necessary step to ensure a child is safe
- Visit KidsPeace at [www.kidspeace.org](http://www.kidspeace.org) for advice that can help you prevent a suicide
- Urge the child to log on to TeenCentral.Net ([www.TeenCentral.Net](http://www.TeenCentral.Net)) (see inside back cover)
- Call a suicide prevention hotline, mental health professional, or facility for advice (see National Resources inside back cover)

*“Are you feeling so bad that you're considering suicide?”*



*“That sounds like an awful lot for one person to take. Has it made you think about killing yourself to escape?”*



## About KidsPeace

KidsPeace is a 123-year-old charity dedicated to giving hope, help and healing to children facing crisis. With more than 50 centers across the country, this national nonprofit helps thousands of children each day through life-saving treatment, and reaches millions of kids and families each year with prevention and public education campaigns designed to help kids avoid and overcome the kinds of crises that can strike any child. Founded in Bethlehem, PA, KidsPeace has more than a century of experience in healing and guiding children through disasters, personal traumas, family problems, abuse, neglect, depression, and, today, the many stresses of modern life.

KidsPeace exists to give kids peace.

*“KidsPeace is a prototype of what we should have for all children everywhere.”*

*– Dr. Lee Salk*

## National Resources

TeenCentral.Net, the award-winning website created by KidsPeace, helps older kids and teens to work out tough problems with advice from trained counselors and the help of peers. The site is free, safe, and anonymous, providing clinically screened help kids need to cope with tough choices, everyday problems of growing up, or life crises that can strike any child. TeenCentral.Net gets millions of hits from children every month and has prevented children from doing harm to themselves or others in the past.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline connects individuals in suicidal crisis to the nearest available suicide prevention and mental health service provider through a toll-free telephone number – 1-800-273-TALK (8255). [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

LOG ON. WORK IT OUT.  
[www.teencentral.net](http://www.teencentral.net)

*“LOG ON, WORK IT OUT  
on TeenCentral.Net”*