

Risk Factors, Warning Signs, and Precipitating Events

Suicide is complex. There are generally a number of factors that come together to increase a person's risk. Fortunately, this gives us many avenues to intervene. Consider how you may be able to intervene if a child is experiencing some of the risk factors and warning signs below.

Risk Factors

While no student is immune from suicide, some students face increased risk.

Mental Health

Depression and other mental health concerns like non-suicidal self-injury are key risk factors for suicide. These mental health conditions are treatable. Connecting a young person to treatment is the best prevention for youth suicide.

Substance Use

Many young people who struggle with depression also struggle with alcohol and/or drug use. Teach students about the dangers of using alcohol or drugs to cope with negative emotions. Screen for substance use and intervene early to treat this mental health concern.

Hopelessness, Social Isolation, Poor Problem Solving

Some young people feel desperate and are unable to see a solution to end their suffering. Forming connections with disconnected kids and helping them to learn coping skills and build social supports are crucial steps in prevention.

Adverse Life Events

Unfortunately, too many children suffer from abuse and trauma. There are many steps to be taken to decrease instances of bullying and violence at school. Exposure to peer suicide increases risk for all students in your school, so preventing one suicide can prevent others.

Access to Guns

Suicide crises are often short-term but having access to a gun makes it easier to carry out the act in an instant. Educate your community about the danger of storing guns in the home.

Warning Signs

A warning sign is an indication that someone might be having thoughts of suicide. Most people give clues or signals of their intentions. If you see/hear a warning sign, seek immediate help.

Listen: “I wish I were dead” and “I won’t be around to deal with this much longer” are warnings of serious suicidal thoughts.

Read writing assignments and social media where young people often share their feelings. Writing about death or actively seeking weapons/means to carry out the act are warning of a suicidal crisis.

Watch for big changes:

- Significant differences in appearance or mood
 - Extreme withdrawal
 - Increase in risky behavior (including alcohol/drug use)
 - Decreased interest in things they once enjoyed
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Precipitating Event

Sometimes a major life event moves a person from thinking about suicide to attempting suicide. Certain events may be insignificant to one person and very troubling to another.

Consider what events might have a big impact on students you know. A few examples include:

- Breakup
 - Bullying incident
 - Sudden death of a loved one
 - Trouble at school
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The National Suicide Prevention Life line is available 24/7 and provides free, confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).