

**Suicide: What Parents & Teachers Can Do to Reduce Risk**  
**YOU ARE A LIFESAVER!**

**It takes one caring adult to save the life of a child.**  
**Know warning signs and identify students who might be at risk.**

**Remember the Risk Factors:**

- Medical illness
- Psychiatric Disorders
- Isolation – Lack of Connectedness!
- Family history of mental illness
- Previous suicide attempt
- Substance use/abuse
- Impulsivity or Aggressiveness
- Recent traumatic event or loss (particularly loss of a loved one by suicide)
- Problems with the law
- History of physical or sexual abuse (experiencing or witnessing)
- Childhood trauma or witnessing trauma
- Easy access to lethal methods, especially guns
- The pressure of being a good student/athlete/child

**Watch for Warning Signs:**

- Isolation or withdrawal
- Depressed, sad
- Loss of energy
- Deterioration in self care
- Decreased school attendance or performance
- Reading books on suicide/death
- Increased use of drugs, alcohol, sex
- Reference being dead, joking about it
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities or sports
- Changes in behavior, academics, social
- Self-defeating statements (I'd be better off dead)
- Hopelessness about the future
- Serious illness or injury especially with consequences (i.e. can no longer play sports)
- Feeling helpless or worthless
- Trouble concentrating or thinking quickly
- Preoccupation with death in comics/movies
- Discussing suicide in their writings...
- Increased hostility, defensiveness
- Change in eating or sleeping (weight loss/gain)
- Disinterest in making future plans
- Euphoria, attitude becomes calm, certain

**If ANY of the above are present...refer your child immediately.**

**Protective Factors:**

Having social supports, feeling connected, being cognitively flexible, willing to obtain treatment, strong spiritual or religious ties, being physically healthy, being hopeful, having coping strategies, & having RESILIENCE.

**Remember...**

*It is better to be safe than sorry.*

*Suicide is a PERMANENT solution to a TEMPORARY problem.*

*Children/Teens want to end the emotional pain more than they really want to die.*

**What is a Suicidal Emergency?**

It may be an emergency if your child expresses any of these:

- Intense feeling of being a burden to others
- Intense feeling of not belonging
- Intense feelings of hopelessness; no reason to live
- Intense thoughts of lethal self-harm
- Describing a specific plan
- Seeking means of self-harm
- Talking about wanting to die
- Agitation, rage or labile mood

These warning signs are especially noteworthy in light of a recent suicide death or other loss of someone close to your child. If your child mentions suicide, take it seriously.

**What to do:**

*If there seems to be a suicidal emergency, do not leave your child alone. Get help immediately:*

- If in school, take them to a mental health/guidance staff member immediately
- Out of school, take them to a local crisis center
- Suicide Hotlines: 1-800-273-TALK or 1-800-SUICIDE
- Call 911

*If it is not an emergency, but you are concerned about your child, you may decide to contact your school's guidance office, your medical doctor, or a private therapist or psychiatrist.*

**Remember that the NUMBER ONE protective factor in the life of a child is a caring adult who listens to a child without judgment. This is often a parent or teacher!**

Source: Erbacher, T.A. (2013). Lending a Helping Hand: Suicide in Schools: Empowering School Districts. Booklet published by the Delaware County Intermediate Unit, Morton, PA.