

Risk factors are characteristics that make it more likely that individuals will consider, attempt, or die by suicide. **Protective factors**, however, are characteristics that make it less likely that individuals will consider, attempt, or die by suicide.

Risk and protective factors play a critical role in suicide prevention. Identifying risk and protective factors provides critical information to assess and manage suicide risk in individuals and yields areas of emphasis for interventions that help prevent suicide. Simply stated, decreasing risk factors and increasing protective factors should decrease suicide risk significantly. This is why awareness and intervention is absolutely necessary for prevention.

RISK FACTORS FOR SUICIDE

- Alcohol and other drug/ substance abuse disorders
- History of trauma and abuse
- Feelings of hopelessness and despair
- Impulsive and aggressive tendencies/behavior
- Mental and emotional disorders, particularly depression and other serious mood disorders
- Not knowing that there is mental healthcare/counseling readily available
- Lack of support group (peers, friends, family) and abnormal feelings of isolation
- Lack of healthcare (especially mental healthcare)
- Major physical/medical illness
- Loss of a significant relationship
- Family history of suicide
- Previous suicide attempt
- Job or financial losses

Teenagers are especially vulnerable to suicide, as the emotions they experience are highly charged and magnified. Teenagers have limited foresight that often results in reactionary and rapid mood decline and depression, leading to the fatal conclusion that life will never get any better. They often can't see past their emotional pain. This type of hopelessness and despair is a very large red flag, indeed, as it can be so terribly strong that it dominates the willingness to end ones' life.

The good news is that **suicide awareness and prevention saves lives.** Reaching out with intervention is necessary, not a choice. Mandate vs. option is the correct and loving mind-set. Parents understand how important it is for us to trust our teenagers. We look for appropriate and responsible behavior. We want them to develop kind values, use good judgment, and stay actively involved with family and positive peer relationships. We want them to make good decisions, exercise good choices, and develop a mature sense of accountability for their actions.

However, **there is a problem parents often overlook—** a crucial yet fundamental necessity in raising teenagers: Our children need to trust us as parents. Teenagers frequently believe that their parents will not be able to handle their problems and strong feelings, so they don't express them or open up about their problems and difficulties. There is a strong reluctance that they will be misunderstood, minimized, or even feel like a burden to their families.

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

- Talking about wanting to die
- Talking about being a burden to others/ feelings of self-blame and shame
- Marked increase in the use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated, irritable, or reckless (risk-taking behavior)
- Displaying extreme mood swings, especially depression and despair
- Talking about feeling hopeless/having no purpose/ reason to live
- Insomnia or significant loss of sleep for an extended period
- Withdrawing from friends, family, activities/ isolating oneself
- Talking about being in unbearable pain
- Planning a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling trapped
- Showing rage and hostile outbursts/talking about seeking revenge

So parents, adults, and friends: **Listen and respond, but never judge or shame.** Keep the rapport positive and solution-oriented. A mind-set alone can save lives. Reach out to professional resources—including family doctors, clergy, educators, mental health professionals, and suicide awareness foundations. These are protective factors that decrease suicide risk.

Finally, if you are sad—talk to someone. Pain shared is pain lessened. Thank you for reading.

We are A.R.C. Angels Foundation.
Our mission is to save lives.

If you are experiencing a crisis, call 911 or the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.