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Suicide Prevention

By CWK Network Producer

"There's a myth out there that if you talk about it, then you aren't going to do it. Well that isn't true. If you talk about it, usually it's a cry for help."

-Catherine Marnell, a high school counselor

This year an estimated 5 thousand young people in the U.S. will take their own life. And studies show that for every one suicide, there are nearly 200 teens who try to die and fail. That translates into one million kids who are experiencing serious psychological pain. But there are ways that parents, teachers and even other students can help.

At one area high school, the first line of defense against conflict and depression are the 25 student members of the Peer Helpers program. They talk about all kinds of issues affecting teens today, including youth suicide prevention.

"I've known three people [who've] committed suicide," says Shalisha, 17.

"I had a best friend who tried to commit suicide. I've known her since kindergarten, but I never saw anything because she never really said anything about it," 16-year-old Karina says.

"I've had three or four people I know kill themselves and about two attempt it – just one in the past week," says Alexis, 16. "It's sad. It's unfathomable."

Each year, 16 percent of teens seriously consider suicide. Another eight percent actually attempt to take their own life. It is the third leading cause of death among young people.

"We need to reach out and help these kids who are hurting," says Catherine Marnell, a school counselor who runs the Peer Helpers program. She says parents should act whenever there are signs of depression. Marnell advises parents not to minimize their child's pain or assume it's not real.

"They'll say, 'Oh, no, my kid is just having a bad day.' And I think parents tend to want to believe that everything is going to be OK, when they need to instead seek professional intervention," Marnell says.

Like their parents, students can help their peers by recognizing the signs of a suicidal teen.

"My friends would give stuff away, they would tell me that they're not happy. They'd tell me flat out that they're gonna try to commit suicide," Alexis says.

"We try to kinda be a lifeline throughout the school," 16-year-old Brandon says. "We want to let everybody know that they can come and talk to us whenever they need to."

Not the Only Option

By CWK Network, Inc

Some teenagers feel so overwhelmed with what they are experiencing that they believe their only escape is through suicide. Many parents and friends may not know there is a problem, however, until it is already too late. The risk of suicide may become evident to others if they know the warning signs of suicide. They include:

- Suicide notes
- Extreme depression
- Previous suicide attempts
- Drastic changes in mood, behaviors or tendencies
- References to death or dying
- Extremely risky behavior
- Giving away meaningful possessions

What Parents Need To Know

Intervention may be the best way to prevent suicide. If your child suspects a friend of having suicidal thoughts or tendencies, share with them the following options, developed by the National Association of School Psychologists:

- Know the warning signs! Read over the list above and keep it in a safe place.
- Do not be afraid to talk to your friends. Listen to their feelings. Make sure they know how important they are to you, but don't believe you can keep them from hurting themselves on your own. Preventing suicide will require adult help.
- Make no deals. Never keep secret a friend's suicidal plans or thoughts. You cannot promise that you will not tell – you have to tell to save your friend.
- Tell an adult. Talk to your parent, your friend's parent, your school's psychologist or counselor – a trusted adult. And don't wait. Don't be afraid that the adults will not believe you or take you seriously – keep talking until they listen. Even if you are not sure your friend is suicidal, talk to someone. It's okay if you "jump the gun" – this is definitely the time to be safe and not sorry.
- Ask if your school has a crisis team. Many schools have organized crisis teams, which include teachers, counselors, social workers, psychologists and principals. These teams help train all staff to recognize warning signs of suicide, as well as how to help in a crisis situation. These teams can also help students understand warning signs of violence and suicide. If your school does not have a crisis team, ask your student council or faculty advisor to look into starting a team.

If you suspect your child of considering suicide, be sure to act quickly and take it seriously. Many times, the main factor leading kids to consider suicide is depression. If you suspect your child is struggling with depression, consider sharing with him/her the following suggestions, created by Teen Contact:

- Get help. Talk to someone that can help you get the help you need. Depression is a serious condition.
- Be active. Exercise daily and be around people. Don't isolate yourself.
- Monitor your eating habits and make sure you're eating a healthy diet.
- Consult a doctor.
- Don't make any big decisions while you are depressed. You're probably not thinking clearly. Also, don't accept any additional responsibility while you are feeling depressed. Keep your tasks manageable.
- Change takes time. It probably took you a while to get depressed, so realize that it will probably take a while to feel better.
- Start using positive thinking and positive self-talk with yourself. Negative thinking plays a big part in depression. When you catch yourself thinking negatively, turn it around. This takes practice, but keep it up.
- Do some volunteer work. Helping others can help you, too.

Resources

- [National Association of School Psychologists](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Center for Education, Treatment and Prevention of Addiction](#)

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