

# Teen Suicide Prevention

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 [pathwaysreallife.com/teen-suicide-prevention](http://pathwaysreallife.com/teen-suicide-prevention)



Per the Center for Disease Control more than 5,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 took their own lives in 2015, making it the second most common cause of death in that age group. It was also the third most common cause for people aged between 10 and 14. High teen suicide rates mean that young people of all social backgrounds and ethnicities are at risk, and these tragedies are also indiscriminate to gender. Although boys are more likely to succeed in taking their own lives, the evidence shows that girls are at least as likely to attempt to do so.

In a time of increasing social and economic pressures, and ever present social media, it may seem more difficult than ever to protect the mental health of our young people, but fortunately there are a number of ways to prevent teen suicide which are very effective if the necessary steps are taken when the first early warning signs become visible.

## **Attention:**

**If you are in crisis, call the toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text the Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 741741. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**

## **How to Recognize the Warning Signs**

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**Verbal Clues** – If a teen, or anyone, talks directly about suicide or death, then of course it should be an immediate cause for concern. Such direct references may include discussing the methods which might be used, as well as how to obtain drugs or weapons. But there are also less obvious verbal signals that you should be aware of. **Phrases such as “if anything happens to me”, or “always remember that I love you”,** may well be innocuous, especially if said as a one off, and signal no more than a passing mood. But if

they are repeated often they may be an early warning of a developing problem. Young people who are beginning to experience mental health problems may also express persistent feeling of worthlessness, hopelessness and despair for the future, of an intensity which goes far beyond normal “adolescent blues”.

Frequent complaints of tiredness, head or stomach aches or muscular pains from individuals who appear physically healthy are another common indicator of potential problems.

**Behavioral Cues** – But even more important, perhaps, than what emotionally troubled young people say, are the behavioral changes they may display. It is very common for potentially suicidal teens to become socially withdrawn. So ***previously happy, outgoing and sociable young people with many friends may begin to turn down invitations, refuse to participate in family, social or sports activities and be resistant or even hostile when encouraged to do so.***

Other signs may include:

- declining performance at school or work, and problems with attendance
- Teens who begin to use drugs and/or alcohol, or whose eating, sleep and exercise habits change without explanation
- neglect of personal appearance and hygiene
- Unpredictable and extreme mood swings and apathy being followed quickly by anger, rebellion, deliberately disruptive behavior or even violence.
- Driving at excessive speed and other deliberate high-risk behaviors are also warning signals to look for.

## Why it’s Hard to Tell if a Teen is at Risk

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One of the main difficulties in preventing teen suicide is that many of these symptoms or behavioral issues are of course quite common in adolescents. And thankfully, most “moody” teens are simply going through a normal phase of their development and are not and never will be suicidal. So even the closest of families or friends may find it difficult to determine when a loved one’s behavior is departing from the norm and should be a cause for concern. ***“Better safe than sorry” is a wise approach in these circumstances. You don’t need to try and deal with this on your own. Trust your instincts and seek the advice of a suitably qualified professional if you’re in any doubt at all.***

## How to Talk with Someone You’re Worried About

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***First, be aware that if you’re worried that a teen close to you may be thinking about suicide, it’s ok to ask them directly about it.*** Many parents and friends worry that by doing so they may risk somehow creating the idea in that young person’s mind. ***But all the evidence suggests that talking openly about suicide reduces the risk that a person will act on the idea.*** If someone is displaying the signs discussed above, but is not talking explicitly about suicide or self-harm, a warm empathetic approach is important. Acknowledge and validate the feelings of the person in a non-judgmental way. Demanding that they “pull themselves together” or “start shaping up”, is seldom, if ever helpful. If a teen

is resistant to engaging in conversation and unresponsive to questions, try to avoid showing any frustration you may feel. Staying close by as a silent but comforting presence can also be helpful.

## Suggesting Treatment or Therapy

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However difficult it may sometimes be, it's crucial to keep lines of communication open. Talk regularly to the person you're concerned about, however unresponsive they may be, and make sure they know that you're there to support and help in any way they need. ***If you believe the person may have formed a definite plan to harm themselves or if they have begun to behave erratically or irrationally, you should seek immediate help, including calling 911 in extreme cases.*** But even in less urgent situations, don't be afraid to ask for professional advice. You need it for your own good as much as for that of the person at risk, and their safety and welfare should outweigh any guilt you may feel about breaching their confidence.

## Helping Suicidal Teens

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- **Offer help and listen.** Encourage depressed teens to talk about their feelings. Listen, don't lecture.
- **Trust your instincts.** If it seems that the situation may be serious, seek prompt help. Break a confidence if necessary, in order to save a life.
- **Pay attention to talk about suicide.** Ask direct questions and don't be afraid of frank discussions. Silence is deadly!
- **Seek professional help.** It is essential to seek expert advice from a mental health professional who has experience helping depressed teens. Also, alert key adults in the teen's life — family, friends and teachers.

### Youth Suicide Prevention – What You Can Do



Probably the most important thing for parents and friends to do, at least in the early stages of a developing problem, is to be as aware and supportive as possible. This means encouraging and rewarding positive social interactions such as sports, arts or music activities. But you also need to try to be as aware as possible of your teen's environment.

This may mean monitoring social media use, as un-intrusively as possible, talking to their friends and the parents of their friends, and developing close relationships with teachers and coaches. You will also want to monitor alcohol and other substance use, including any prescription medications, and if necessary try to restrict access to them in a non-confrontational way. These kind of tactics often prove successful in helping teens through difficult but normal phases of development. But if you feel at any time that you cannot cope or are risk of losing control of the situation, you need to consult an experienced professional as soon as possible.

## Professional Therapy for Teen Suicide Prevention

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A wide range of different therapies is available depending on an individual's particular needs.

A teen who is diagnosed with a specific mental health condition such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, alcohol addiction, or schizophrenia may respond well to appropriate medication. For others, psychotherapy (talk therapy) may be indicated. This can involve cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which aims to help individuals modify their behavior through a better understanding of their particular emotional triggers; or dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), which has proved particularly effective for people with borderline personality disorder, proneness to mood swings and self-image issues.

It's important to find a therapist and treatment center that both you and your teen are comfortable with and have confidence in. Any program should begin with a comprehensive assessment of the individual's overall health and medical history, identifying any previous learning or behavioral problems, which may be relevant. A good therapist will also take into account the individual's personal preferences regarding treatment while bearing in mind the seriousness of the threat of self-harm.

Therapy may be conducted either through one-to one sessions, group family meetings or a combination of both. Sessions will normally be conducted in the home or on an out-patient basis, but in rare, more extreme, cases residential care or even hospitalization may be indicated.

## Pathways Treats Depressed and Suicidal Teens in Utah – Get a Free Consultation

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At Pathways Real Life Recovery, we take a holistic approach to treatment based on our deep conviction of the value of every individual who comes through our doors. ***We offer experienced therapists in a wide variety of specialties, including medical doctors, psychotherapists, addiction specialists and licensed counsellors.*** We will draw on as many of these experts as necessary to put together a personalized treatment program based on a detailed assessment of a person's history and current needs And our care doesn't stop there. At the end of the formal treatment program we will stay in touch to advise and monitor progress for a further three years. We accept all major insurances and financing is also available.

Suicide in teens is not only a huge social problem, but also a devastating and avoidable tragedy for thousands of families every year. If you have any worries or concerns at all about someone close to you, please get in touch with us right away.