

Youth Suicide



What a Parent Needs to Know

Now approaching epidemic proportions, suicide is currently the third leading cause of death among teenagers in the United States. It is estimated that 300 to 400 teen suicides occur per year in Los Angeles County; this is equivalent to one teenager lost every day. Evidence indicates that for every suicide, there are 50 to 100 attempts at suicide. Due to the stigma associated with suicide, available statistics may well underestimate the problem. Nevertheless, these figures do underscore the urgent need to seek a solution to the suicide epidemic among our young people.

What Parents, Adults Can Do To Help

Look for Danger Signs of Suicide

- Previous suicide attempts
- The verbalizing of suicide threats
- The giving away of prized personal possessions
- The collection and discussion of information on suicide methods
- The expression of hopelessness, helplessness, and anger at oneself or the world
- Themes of death or depression evident in conversation, written expressions, reading selections, or artwork

- Statements or suggestions that the speaker would not be missed if he or she were gone
- The scratching or marking of the body, or other self-destructive acts
- Recent loss of a friend or a family member (or even a pet) through death or suicide; other losses (for example, loss of a parent resulting from divorce)
- Acute personality changes, unusual withdrawal, aggressiveness, or moodiness, or new involvement in high-risk activities
- Sudden dramatic decline or improvement in academic performance, chronic truancy or tardiness, or running away
- Physical symptoms such as eating disturbances, sleeplessness or excessive sleeping, chronic headaches or stomach-aches, menstrual irregularities, apathetic appearance
- Use or increased use of substances

Note: *Look for sudden changes in behaviour that are significant, last for a long time, and are apparent in all or most areas of his or her life*

When a child talks of suicide you should ...

LISTEN:

- Encourage the child to talk to you or to some other trusted person.
- Listen to the child's feelings. Don't give advice or feel obligated to find simple solutions. Try to imagine how you would feel in the child's place.

BE HONEST:

- If the child's words or actions scare you, tell him or her. If you're worried or don't know what to do, say so. Don't be a cheerful phony.

SHARE FEELINGS:

- At times everyone feels sad, hurt, or hopeless. You know what that's like; share your feelings. Let the child know he or she is not alone.

GET HELP:

- Professional help is crucial when something as serious as suicide is considered.
- Help may be found at a suicide prevention and crisis centre, local mental health association, or through clergy.

Become familiar with the suicide prevention program at the child's school. Contact the appropriate person(s) at the school.