

Teens who are thinking about suicide may not want to die; but they do want to end their pain! Unfortunately, feeling alone, without hope that their situation will get better, and helpless to change their problem, suicide becomes a coping strategy – a way to handle their hurt.

Warning Signs

Most teens who think about suicide show some general changes and concerning signs:

- withdrawing from friends, family and/or favorite activities
- crying; mood swings
- changes in sleeping, eating, concentration and activity patterns
- increased use of drugs or alcohol
- cutting, scratching, pinching, banging their head or pulling out their hair

There are other suicide specific warning signs that should never be ignored:

- having previously attempted suicide (a prior suicide attempt is a strong indicator of future death by suicide)
- talking, writing, drawing or joking about death, dying or suicide
- researching suicide/death on the internet
- texting about suicide; posting on any social network
- discussions about suicide
- writing a will; giving stuff away
- entering suicide chat rooms
- having family or friends who have attempted or died by suicide

- saying things like the following:
 - “I wish I was dead”
 - “There’s no reason left for living”
 - “You would be better off without me”
 - “What’s the point in living?”

Triggers

Often a triggering event has recently occurred, or there is something the young person fears will occur in the next few days. These events are typically about loss – breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend, fighting with parents or friends, death of someone close, failing something special, parents fighting, bullying.

Most youth who think about suicide believe that their pain will never end and no one understands or cares. They feel helpless, hopeless and alone as they struggle with their feelings of loss.

Asking About Suicide

The only way adults will know if a teen is suicidal is if the adult becomes curious and asks. “Are you thinking about suicide?” “Do you wish you were dead?” “Have you been thinking about killing yourself?” Just as it may be difficult to ask a youth about suicide, it can be harder for the teen to let you know they have been thinking about dying. For some, there may be a sigh of relief that they finally have someone to talk with about their suicidal thinking. By asking you are letting the youth know that you care, you are worried about them, and you are able to talk

about suicide. Interestingly, a number of youth are worried about upsetting their parents by sharing thoughts of suicide.

Listening

Once you have asked about suicide simply listen. Don’t lecture. Don’t try to fix their problems. Don’t judge them. Don’t offer solutions. Don’t tell them all the reasons they have for living. Simply listen! Listening lets the teen talk about the things that are important to them. Helpful conversation comments can be, “Tell me what is happening.” “What is making life so awful?” “What is the worse thing?”

Listening helps the young person to not feel alone, demonstrates that caring help is available, and increases their hope that possibly their pain will eventually go away.

Other important questions include, “Have you thought about how you will kill yourself?” “Do you know when you will suicide?” “Have you started collecting what you need to kill yourself?” “Have you talked about this with anyone else?” This last question helps you determine if other supportive people are involved, or if there are other youth at risk of suicide.

Getting Help

The more detailed the plan and preparation, and/or the closer it is to the time when the young person wants to die, the increase the risk. Someone who knows how to suicide,

have what they need, and know when they will die can not be left alone. Immediate help - such as urgent response resources, hospital, or 911 - is needed.

For youth whose plan and preparation is less developed, help is still required. Get others involved. These people need to be adults whom the youth knows and trusts, such as extended family members, their best friend's parent, coaches, spiritual/cultural leaders, or one-on-one workers. Counseling is often necessary. A list of helpful agencies, resources, and numbers appear at the back of this brochure.

After getting others involved, stay involved! The teen told you their suicide thoughts because they trust you. Keeping involved is important.

There are times when teens will refuse to see a counselor. Should this occur it is important you speak with someone trained in child & youth mental wellness that can help you to help the young person.

Safe Proofing the Environment

In all cases remove from the home any items the teen has indicated would be used to suicide. Also important is to remove, or lock, potentially harmful items such as guns, knives, medication, poisons, or cleaning products.

Taking Care of You

And when all of this is done, breathe! Listening to someone you love talk about suicide can be scary and sad. Good self care is important. Music, meditation, prayer, journaling and exercise are ways that can help you manage stress. Talking to a friend, family member, spiritual leader or counselor can help you cope with your fears and concerns. Remember you are not alone!

Helpful Information

24 Hour Support

Crisis Line	1-866-661-3311
Suicide Helpline	1-800-784-2433
Kids Help Phone	1-800-668-6868
Native Youth Crisis Hotline	1-877-209-1266

For Parents:

www3.suicideinfo.ca/youthatrisk/

For Parents to give to Youth:

www.youthinbc.ca

www.kidshelpphone.ca

"Darkness Calls" Comic Book

The Healthy Aboriginal Network

<http://www.thehealthyaboriginal.net/>

**For further information & training:
J.NorthConsulting@gmail.com**

Talking to a Teen about Suicide

**For Parents, Caregivers &
Others Who Are Concerned**

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Finding Hope in Times of Crisis