

## [Preventing Youth Suicide - Tips for Parents and Educators](#)

National Suicide Prevention Week is an annual week-long campaign (week of Sept 7<sup>th</sup>) which helps raise awareness about suicide prevention. National Suicide Prevention week corresponds with September 10, World Suicide Prevention Day.

With the recent news and media regarding suicide, the general public has been paying more attention to suicide prevention and the warning signs of suicide. What the media did not touch on, however, was the prevalence of suicide among our youth. The following information was prepared by the National Association of School Psychologists (<http://www.nasponline.org/index.aspx>) and American Association of Suicidology (<http://www.suicidology.org/ncpys>).

**What you may not know is suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth between 10 and 19 years of age.** You also may not have known that, **suicide is preventable.** Youth who are contemplating suicide frequently give warning signs of their distress. Parents, teachers, and friends are in a key position to pick up on these signs and get help. *Most important is to never take these warning signs lightly or promise to keep them secret.* When all adults and students in the school community are committed to making suicide prevention a priority—and are empowered to take the correct actions—we can help youth before they engage in behavior with irreversible consequences.

### **What are the warning signs?**

The following tips were designed for Parents and Educators by the National Association of School Psychologists. Please review this link, read carefully, and educate others by sharing.

[http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis\\_safety/suicidept1\\_general.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/suicidept1_general.aspx)

1. ***Suicide notes.*** These are a very real sign of danger and should be taken seriously.
2. ***Threats.*** Threats may be direct (“I want to die.” “I am going to kill myself”) or, unfortunately, indirect (“The world would be better without me,” “Nobody will miss me anyway”). In adolescence, indirect clues could be offered through joking or through references in school assignments, particularly creative writing or art pieces. Young children and those who view the world in more concrete terms may not be able to express their feelings in words, but may provide indirect clues in the form of acting-out, violent behavior, often accompanied by suicidal/homicidal threats.
3. ***Previous attempts.*** Often the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior, which can indicate a coping style.
4. ***Depression*** (helplessness/hopelessness). When symptoms of depression include pervasive thoughts of helplessness and hopelessness, a child or adolescent is conceivably at greater risk for suicide.
5. ***Masked depression.*** Risk-taking behaviors can include acts of aggression, gunplay, and alcohol/substance abuse.
6. ***Final arrangements.*** This behavior may take many forms. In adolescents, it might be giving away prized possessions such as jewelry, clothing, journals or pictures.
7. ***Efforts to hurt oneself.*** Self-mutilating behaviors occur among children as young as elementary school-age. Common self-destructive behaviors include running into traffic, jumping from heights, and scratching/cutting/marking the body.
8. ***Inability to concentrate or think rationally.*** Such problems may be reflected in children’s classroom behavior, homework habits, academic performance, household chores, even conversation.

9. **Changes in physical habits and appearance.** Changes include inability to sleep or sleeping all the time, sudden weight gain or loss, disinterest in appearance, hygiene, etc.
10. **Sudden changes in personality, friends, behaviors.** Parents, teachers and peers are often the best observers of sudden changes in suicidal students. Changes can include withdrawing from normal relationships, increased absenteeism in school, loss of involvement in regular interests or activities, and social withdrawal and isolation.
11. **Death and suicidal themes.** These might appear in classroom drawings, work samples, journals or homework.
12. **Plan/method/access.** A suicidal child or adolescent may show an increased focus on guns and other weapons, increased access to guns, pills, etc., and/or may talk about or allude to a suicide plan. The greater the planning, the greater the potential.

### What should I do if I see warning signs?

- Remain calm.
- Ask the youth directly if he or she is thinking about suicide.
- Focus on your concern for their wellbeing and avoid being accusatory.
- Listen.
- Reassure them that there is help and they will not feel like this forever.
- Do not judge.
- **Provide constant supervision. Do not leave the youth alone.**
- Remove means for self-harm.
- **Get help:** Peers should not agree to keep the suicidal thoughts a secret and instead should tell an adult, such as a parent, teacher, or school psychologist. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources as soon as possible. School staff should take the student to the designated school mental health professional or administrator.

### How do I get help?

- If an individual somehow indicates or communicates suicidal thoughts, get help **immediately** from a mental health professional or a professional in a hospital emergency department.
- Warning signs of suicide but not critical risk: Call Anne Arundel County Crisis Response System known as the "**Community Warmline**" (410) 768-5522. The Warmline is a free service that provides Anne Arundel County Residents in crisis with supportive assistance and linkages to resources within the community 24/7.
- Critical Risk of Suicide: **Call 911 immediately** if an individual threatens to hurt or kill him or herself; or talks of wanting to hurt or kill him or herself; and/or looks for ways to kill him or herself by seeking access to firearms, pills, or other means.