

# PREVENTING YOUTH SUICIDE

Presented by Washington-Lee  
School Psychologists

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## **PURPOSE OF PRESENTATION**

1. What are the risk factors for suicide?
2. What are the warning signs for suicide?
3. What can I do if I suspect my child might be having suicidal ideation?
4. What is Washington-Lee doing to help?

## Suicide Risk Factors

Certain characteristics are associated with increased suicide risk. These include:

- Mental illness - depression, conduct disorders, substance abuse
- Family stress / dysfunction / violence, incarceration
- Suicide of a family member.
- Environmental risks, including presence of a firearm in home
- Situational crises (death of a loved one, physical or sexual abuse)
- LGBTQ +

## Suicide Warning Signs

Many suicidal youth demonstrate observable behaviors that signal their suicidal thinking. These include:

- Suicidal threats in the form of direct and indirect statements.
- Suicide notes and plans.
- Prior attempts.
- Making final arrangements (e.g., writing a will, giving away prized possessions)
- Preoccupation with death.
- Changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts and/or feelings.
- All-or-nothing thinking
- Loss of interest in activities that are usually pleasurable
- Ongoing, intense feelings of hopelessness or sadness; irritability and/or anger

## **Indirect / Coded VERBAL CLUES:**

- “I’m tired of life, I just can’t go on.”
- “My family would be better off without me.”
- “Who cares if I’m dead anyway.”
- “I just want out.”
- “I won’t be around much longer.”
- “Pretty soon you won’t have to worry about me.”

## **Behavioral Clues**

- Impulsivity / increased risk taking
- Unexplained anger, aggression, irritability
- Chronic truancy, running away
- Perfectionism
- Getting a gun or stockpiling pills
- Giving away prized possessions

## Resiliency Factors

Resiliency factors can lessen risk of suicidal ideation and behaviors. Once a child or adolescent is considered at risk, schools, families, and friends should work to build these factors in and around the youth. These include:

- Family support and cohesion, including good communication.
- Peer support and close social networks.
- School and community connectedness.
- Cultural or religious beliefs that discourage suicide & promote healthy living.
- Adaptive coping and problem-solving skills, including conflict-resolution.
- General life satisfaction, good self-esteem, sense of purpose.
- Access to effective medical and mental health resources.

## What to Do

Youth who feel suicidal may not seek help directly; however, parents, school personnel, and peers can recognize the warning signs and take immediate action to keep the youth safe.

When a youth gives signs that they may be considering suicide, the following actions should be taken:

- **Remain calm.**

- Ask the youth directly if he or she is thinking about suicide.
- Focus on your concern for their wellbeing and avoid judgement.
- Listen.
- Reassure them that there is help and they will not feel like this forever.
- Provide constant supervision. Do not leave the youth alone.
- Remove means for self-harm.

## Get help:

Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources as soon as possible. Possible resources include:

- **Emergency Mental Health**

703-228-5160

703-228-4256 (24 hrs)

- **Arlington Mental Health**

Youth: 703-228-1550

Adult: 703-228-5150

- **CRISIS LINK**

703-527-4077

1-800-SUICIDE

- **Trevor Helpline (LGBTQ+)**

866-488-7386

- **911** or take student to any **Emergency Room.**

## Suicide Prevention Lifeline number:

**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

This puts you in touch with a *local* crisis center. *Anyone* can call—someone who feels suicidal or in distress or someone who is worried about a friend/family member.

## WASHINGTON – LEE

-We are fortunate to have 12 school counselors, 2 social workers, 2 school psychologists, and 2 Interlude Therapists, all of whom are trained in risk assessment.

-School Counselors, Social Workers, and Psychologists provide mental health support to students on an as-needed basis.

-We present a lesson entitled, “Signs of Suicide” in all 10<sup>th</sup> grade health classes

-Counselors visit all 9<sup>th</sup> grade health classes with lessons on mental health, in addition to providing daily walk-in support to students

We take **EVERY SITUATION** seriously and will ALWAYS contact parents if a student undergoes a risk assessment, regardless of the outcome of the assessment

**A WORD ABOUT BALANCE AND “MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE WHOLE CHILD”...**

Our students are under a great deal of pressure to succeed, and it takes a toll, as evidenced by the increasingly high prevalence of Anxiety in our population. In an effort to avoid overload and burnout, we encourage students and families to recognize the need for balance and down-time in their lives.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!**

**QUESTIONS?**