

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

Schools, families, and friends should build these factors around the youth, especially those considered at risk.

***When educators, parents, learners and community leaders are committed and empowered to prevent suicides, we can help the youth before they take actions with irreversible consequences.***

**For help and more information contact:**

- The nearest clinic
- The nearest hospital
- The nearest health care provider
- Your religious leader
- A social worker



## Preventing youth suicide - Advice for parents, caregivers and educators



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## Preventing youth suicide - Advice for parents, caregivers and educators

Suicide is on the increase among young people. Children as young as 10 years commit suicide. Young people who are thinking about suicide usually give warning signs of their distress. It is important that parents, educators, care givers, friends and loved ones know the warning signs so they can pick up on it and get help.

### Warning signs

Suicide among young people often occurs following a stressful life event, such as problems at school, a breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend, the death of a loved one, a divorce, a major family conflict or other stressful situations.

### Many suicidal young people show visible signs that they are thinking about suicide. They may:

- Pull away from friends or family;
- Lose interest in activities that they use to like and enjoy;
- Lose interest in school or sports;
- Change behaviour and appearance;

- Talk about feeling hopeless or guilty;
- Show trouble concentrating or thinking clearly;
- Change eating or sleeping habits;
- Engage in risky behavior;
- Frequently talk about suicide or death;
- Hint that they may not be around any longer;
- Write songs, poems, letters or pictures about death, separation, and loss;
- Be preoccupied with death;
- Give away treasured possessions to siblings or friends;
- Make suicidal threats in direct and indirect statements;
- Make suicide notes and plans;
- Make final arrangements like for a funeral.

### What to do if a young person shows signs of being suicidal

When a young person shows signs that they may be considering suicide:

- Remain calm;
- Ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide;
- Focus on your concern for their wellbeing and do not accuse them;
- Listen;
- Reassure them that there is help and they will

not feel like this forever;

- Do not judge;
- Remove harmful objects;
- Provide constant supervision. Do not leave them alone;
- Immediately seek help from the nearest clinic, hospital emergency room or health care provider.

### What parents, care givers and educators should know

- Take warning signs seriously. Do not ignore it as “attention-seeking”
- Ignoring them may increase the chance of young people harming themselves
- Listen to them carefully and give them a chance to express their feelings. Let them know that you are concerned and want to help
- Keep the lines of communication open and express your concern, support, and love
- Keep a close eye on a young person who looks depressed and withdrawn
- Depression in young people can look different from commonly held beliefs. It may take the form of problems with friends, grades, sleep, or being cranky and irritable rather than chronic sadness or crying
- If they confide in you, take those concerns

seriously. A fight with a friend may not seem like a big deal to you but for a teen it can feel consuming

- Do not minimize or discount what your teen is going through. This can increase their sense of hopelessness
- If they do not feel comfortable talking to you, suggest a more neutral person, like another relative, pastor, coach, school counselor, or their doctor.

### Factors that may increase the risk of suicide include:

- Mental illness, like depression and conduct disorders
- Substance abuse
- Family stress or dysfunction
- A firearm in the home
- Prior suicidal behaviour
- Crises like the traumatic death of a loved one, physical or sexual abuse, family violence, etc.

Schools, families, and friends should deal with and eliminate these factors to reduce the risk of suicide.

### Factors that may lessen the risk of suicide:

- Family support and good communication