

Health Enews



What Parents Need to Know About Increasing Suicide Rates in Children and Teens.

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In a study published by *Pediatrics*, data was taken from 31 children's hospitals around the country and the percentage of emergency room visits related to suicidal thoughts or attempts have more than doubled over an 8-year period. Nearly two-thirds of suicide encounters involved girls, with the highest among 15 - 17 year olds, followed by 12 - 14 year olds. Rates have increased for both boys and girls but the increase was greater in girls. Researchers also noticed an increase in rates related to the season; rates were higher during the fall and the spring with rates lowest in the summer. Dr. Plemmons of Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital hypothesized that the increase was likely related to the school year. With school back in session in the Fall, cliques are forming and cyberbullying increases.

Sadly, reports indicate that suicide is the third leading cause of death amongst adolescents in the United States, behind motor vehicle accidents and homicides, according to data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Among 10 – 14 year olds, it is now tied for first.

Warning signs that a teen might be suicidal:

- Withdrawing from social contact
- Change in routine, including eating or sleeping patterns
- Doing risky or self-destructive things
- Developing personality changes or being severely anxious or agitated
- Talking or writing about suicide—for example, making statements such as “I’m going to kill myself,” or “I won’t be a problem much longer”
- Feeling trapped or hopeless about a situation
- Giving away belongings when there is no other logical explanation for why this is being done
- Having mood swings



What steps can you take to protect your teen:

- **Immediately address depression or anxiety.** Don't wait for your teen to come to you. If your teen is sad, anxious, or appears to be struggling—ask what's wrong and offer to help. If you think your teen might be thinking about suicide, talk to him or her immediately. Don't be afraid to use the word "suicide." Talking about suicide won't plant ideas in your teen's head. Ask your teen about his or her feelings and listen; don't dismiss his or her problems. Instead, reassure your teen of your love and remind him or her that they can work through whatever is going on—and that you're willing to help.
- **Seek medical help for your teen.** Ask your teen's doctor to guide you. Teens who are feeling suicidal need to see a psychiatrist or psychologist experienced in diagnosing and treating children with mental health problems. If you feel like your teen isn't feeling better or getting the proper treatment, seek a second opinion.
- **Pay attention.** If your teen is thinking about suicide, he or she may likely be displaying warning signs. Listen to what your child is saying and watch how he or she is acting. **Never** shrug off threats of suicide as a teen melodrama. If your teen has a plan on how to commit suicide, that would warrant **immediate** medical intervention.
- **Discourage isolation.** Encourage your teen to spend time with supportive friends and family.
- **Encourage a healthy lifestyle.** Help your teen eat well, exercise, and get regular sleep.
- **Support a treatment plan.** If your teen is undergoing treatment for suicidal behavior, remind him or her that it might take time to feel better. Some antidepressants can take from 6-8 weeks to be fully effective.
- **Safely store firearms, alcohol, and medications.** Access to means can play a role if a teen is already suicidal.

If your teen is in immediate danger, call 911. Additionally, the National Suicide Prevention Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) can be a helpful resource.