

# Teen suicide



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Suicide amongst teenagers is a growing pandemic. However, it is preventable. The key to preventing teen suicides and attempted suicides is being aware and knowledgeable about the subject. Knowing what causes a teen to commit or attempt to commit suicide and what factors increase a teenagers risk of committing or attempting to commit suicide are the first steps towards preventing teen suicide. Teenagers are highly susceptible to suicide largely due to the way puberty affects their brains and behaviors.

It is also important to understand what effects the suicide of a teen has on his or her surviving family and friends and how to help them during the grieving process. The death of a young person through suicide can have a different effect on his or her family than a death by other means. The most important thing to remember about preventing teen suicide is to know the signs and to get treatment (often psychiatric treatment, because the causes are mostly mental) for each underlying cause as early as possible.

Teen suicide is a very real and serious issue. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death amongst teenagers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the third leading cause for death amongst youth between the ages of 10 and 24, and it claims approximately 4, 600 teen lives a year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also reports that the number of teen suicides and attempted suicides is on the rise in recent years.

With the number of youths attempting and committing suicide increasing it is important to know what causes teens to attempt suicide, warning signs to look for, the effect suicide has on those left behind, and what can be done to prevent teen suicide. First, it is important to know what causes a teen to

attempt suicide. Suicide in anyone of any age has been associated with a person's brain chemistry. " Research shows that the risk for suicide is associated with changes in brain chemicals called neurotransmitters, including serotonin," (Suicide In the U. S).

The teenage years are a time of many and major changes to the adolescent brain. A teenager's brain during puberty is undergoing major changes that can have major effects on that person's brain chemistry. Furthermore, " decreased levels of serotonin have been found in people with depression, impulsive disorders, and a history of suicide attempts, and in the brains of suicide victims," (Suicide In the U. S. ). Teenagers are specifically affected by this fact because, " the teen years are also a time of the lowest levels of Serotonin in the human brain during human life," (Dupont, 2013).

The developing teenage brain during puberty is undergoing considerable rewiring. This rewiring has a substantial effect on a teenagers behavior and emotional responses. According to the National Institute of Mental Health: Several lines of evidence suggest that the brain circuitry involved in emotional responses is changing during the teen years. Functional brain imaging studies, for example, suggest that the responses of teens to emotionally loaded images and situations are heightened relative to younger children and adults.

The brain changes underlying these patterns involve brain centers and signaling molecules that are part of the reward system with which the brain motivates behavior. These age-related changes shape how much different parts of the brain are activated in response to experience, and in terms of behavior, the urgency and intensity of emotional reactions. (The Teen Brain).

A teenagers brain is designed to overact to stressful and emotional situations. Teenagers are especially susceptible to suicide, because their developing brains put them at a higher risk.

Not only are teenagers' brains putting them at risk of suicide, but puberty itself is a stressful time of life. “ Teenagers going through puberty often experience a significant degree of stress, resulting from physiological demands, as well as from psychosocial responses to the changes occurring in the body. Puberty and stress can influence each other negatively in a cyclical manner,” (Boyd, 2010). Stress is a significant factor in determining a person’s risk of suicide. “ Stress is a well-known contributor to mood, mental disorders, and suicide risk,” (Cornette & Busch).

The stress of puberty combined with the changes to the brain that puberty causes is like a loaded gun for teens when it comes to suicide. There are many other risk factors that lead to teen suicide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists the following as the major factors contributing to a teenagers risk of suicide: “ History of previous suicide attempts; Family history of suicide; History of depression or other mental illness; Alcohol or drug abuse; Stressful life event or loss; Easy access to lethal methods; Exposure to the suicidal behavior of others; Incarceration,” (Suicide Prevention).

Although, these factors are a proficient way of determining a teenager’s risk of suicide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention note that, “ having these risk factors does not always mean that suicide will occur,” (Suicide Prevention). There are, also, several warning signs which could indicate a teen is suicidal that parents and care givers should be aware of.

The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center lists the following warning signs: changes in eating and sleep habits; loss of interest in usual activities; withdrawal from friends and family members; acting out behaviors and running away; alcohol and drug use; neglect of personal appearance; unnecessary risk-taking; preoccupation with death and dying; increased physical complaints frequently associated with emotional distress such as stomach aches, headaches, and fatigue; loss of; interest in school or schoolwork; feelings of boredom; difficulty concentrating; feelings of wanting to die; lack of response to praise; indicates plans or efforts toward plans to commit suicide, including the following: verbalizes " I want to kill myself," or " I'm going to commit suicide. "; gives verbal hints such as " I won't be a problem much longer," or " If anything happens to me, I want you to know ...."; gives away favorite possessions; throws away important belongings; becomes suddenly cheerful after a period of depression; may express bizarre thoughts; writes one or more suicide notes (Teen Suicide).

The suicide of a teenager can be an extremely confusing and emotional time for the family. The lives of the surviving family members will be changed forever. “ Committing suicide in the teenage years can be perceived as the ultimate rejection of family, of significant others, and of society. ” (Lindgvist, et al. , 2008). Family members, parents or guardians especially, feel a sense of responsibility for the teenager’s suicide. They see the death of the teen as a reflection of their parenting and often feel guilty for the suicide. Losing a loved one to suicide is a different experience than losing a loved one through other means.

“ The bereavement process after a suicide may differ qualitatively from other types of losses with prolonged reactions of grief and loneliness, greater feelings of shame, and perhaps most importantly, the prolonged search for the motive behind the suicide,” (Lindgvist, et al. , 2008). Often times the suicide of a young person is a shock to the surviving family as they struggle to understand why the situation occurred. Not only does the family have to struggle with the shock and grief of a teenage suicide, they also have to deal with the social stigma associated with suicide. The suicide of a teenager is already a complex rollercoaster of emotions for the surviving family, and “ it is further complicated by the societal perception that the act of suicide is a failure by the victim and the family to deal with some emotional issue and ultimately society affixes blame for the loss on the survivors.

This individual or societal stigma introduces a unique stress on the bereavement process that in some cases requires clinical intervention,” (Cvinar, 2005). The social stigmas associated with suicide serve to heighten and intensify the feelings of grief and guilt in the surviving family. Surviving siblings of teenage suicide victims are uniquely affected by teenage suicide. Not only can they experience the same effects that a parent or caregiver does, but their needs can sometimes be overlooked due to the grief of the parents or caregivers. “ Parents who have lost a child to suicide are often devastated for a long time having a reduced capacity to care for siblings who, therefore, need attention and support from resources outside the family,” (Lindgvist, et al. , 2008).

This fact can be particularly damaging for younger siblings, because younger siblings are “ more likely to be burdened than older siblings and need more

time, more persistence, and an uncompromising readiness by the adult to deal with the most difficult questions,” (Lindgvist, et al. , 2008). The younger sibling relies on the parents or caregivers to help deal with the grief of losing a sibling to suicide, but the parents are also struggling to deal with the same loss. This conflict can mean that the needs of the younger sibling during this extremely emotional time can be neglected. Therefore, care for the grieving family members is sometimes left to outside sources, but these sources should be someone the family trusts.

“ Family doctors can organize a long-term, individually formulated support scheme for the bereaved, including laymen who can play a most significant role in the grief process,” (Lindgvist, et al. , 2008). Because teen suicides are on the rise, it is important to know how it can be prevented. Research has been done that gives insight into how one might be able to prevent a teenager from committing or attempting suicide. Treating the causes of teen suicide individually is a very effective preventative measure. “ For example, because research has shown that mental and substance-abuse disorders are major risk factors for suicide, many programs also focus on treating these disorders as well as addressing suicide risk directly,” (Suicide In the U. S. ).

Because the causes of teen suicide have a largely mental factor, getting psychiatric help from a mental health provider can be extremely beneficial in preventing teen suicide. “ Studies have shown that suicide prevention programs most likely to succeed are those focused on identification and treatment of mental illness and substance abuse, coping with stress, and controlling aggressive behaviors,” (Teen Suicide). Another key factor in preventing teen suicide is the early detection and intervention of the risk

factors associated with suicide. According to The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center this is the most important part of the prevention process (Teen Suicide). The sooner a problem is detected the sooner and more effectively it can be counteracted.

The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center offers the following steps that parents can take to help prevent their teenager from attempting suicide: Keep medications and firearms away from children; Get your child help (medical or mental health professional); Support your child (listen, avoid undue criticism, remain connected); Become informed (library, local support group, Internet). " They also offer the following the advice for teenagers to help prevent a friend from attempting suicide: " Take your friend's behavior and discussion of suicide seriously; Encourage your friend to seek professional help, accompany if necessary; Talk to an adult you trust. Don't be alone in helping your friend.