**National Suicide Prevention Week**

*September 8th through the 14th is National Suicide Prevention Week. Its purpose is to raise awareness of and to prevent suicide, the third leading cause of death of United States children and young people, ages 10 – 24.*



Because many causes already have a ribbon color, the American Association of Suicidology decided on using two! Purple and turquoise are both healing colors. The color combination stands for survivors of suicide and suicide itself. The ribbon serves as a reminder that suicide is an issue we need to talk about. You can download a ribbon image for your website or FaceBook page at <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/GetInvolved/AwarenessRibbons>.

Counselors, parents, teachers, and others who care for young people can benefit from the information in the video “Not *MY* Kid.” It is provided by the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide.

[](http://www.sptsusa.org/)

The video presents FACTS about the warning signs of suicide: Feelings, Actions, Changes, Threats.

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# Warning Signs

Warning signs can be organized around the word **FACTS:**

**Feelings:**

* Hopelessness*-*feeling like things are bad now and they won’t get any better
* Fear of losing control, going crazy, harming yourself or others.
* Helplessness- a belief that there’s nothing you –or anybody- can do to make your life better
* Worthlessness- feeling like an awful person and that people would be better off if you were dead
* Hating yourself, feeling guilty or ashamed
* Being extremely sad and lonely
* Feeling anxious or worried or angry all the time

**Action:**

* Drug or alcohol abuse.
* Talking or writing about death or destruction.
* Aggression – getting into fights or having arguments with people
* Recklessness- doing risky or dangerous things.

**Changes:**

* Personality- behaving like a different person- becoming withdrawn, tired all the time, not caring about anything, or more talkative, outgoing.
* Behavior-can’t concentrate on school, regular tasks.
* Sleeping pattern-sleeping all the time or not being able to sleep at all, or waking up in the middle of the night or early in the morning and not being able to get back to sleep
* Eating habits-losing appetite and or overeating and gaining weight.
* Losing interest in friends, hobbies, and the way you look or in activities or sports you previously enjoyed.
* Sudden improvement after a period of being down or withdrawn.

**Threats:**

* Statements- like “How long does it take to bleed to death?”
* Threats- “ I won’t be around much longer.” Or “Don’t tell anyone else…you won’t be my friend if you tell!”
* Plans- giving away favorite things, studying about ways to die, obtaining a weapon or a stash of pills- \*\*\*the risk is very high if a person has a plan and the means to carry it out!!
* Suicide attempts- overdosing, wrist cutting.

**Situations**

* Getting into trouble at school, at home or with the law
* Recent loss- through death, divorce or separation, the break-up of a relationship, losing an

opportunity or a dream; losing self-esteem

* Changes in your life that you feel you can’t cope with
* Being exposed to suicide or the death of a peer under any circumstances

Lots of people think about suicide at one time or another in their lives, teens included. Usually it's because they're struggling with problems in their lives that seem overwhelming, and they feel trapped, helpless, and hopeless. It isn't that they want to die—they just want to stop feeling miserable. They may be depressed, angry, or empty- but whatever they feel, they're not thinking clearly.

If you or any of your friends are feeling this way and have had thoughts of suicide, the most important thing to do is to talk immediately with an adult you trust. Sometimes friends tell us things in confidence and make us promise not to tell anyone else. You may have done this yourself. But keeping the secret of suicide doesn't help anyone—it can actually make things worse. Secrets can take on a life of their own and become even more powerful because they're private. The last thing you want to do is keep a secret that will harm you or others. Instead of ignoring thoughts of suicide, get help to make those thoughts go away. If you don't know an adult who would be helpful, call the national hotline number **1-800-273-TALK** and ask them to help you figure out what to do.

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**A First-Person Message for Teens**

**by Stacy Hollingsworth, College Student**

I used to think that depression and suicide were things that happened to other people, that the way I approached my life somehow prevented me from becoming a victim of mental illness. I realized just how incorrect that assumption was when my own life was turned upside down by major depression.

I first noticed that something was wrong in 8th grade. Apparently, so did one of my teachers, because she asked me if anything was wrong. Unfortunately, she did so in front of the whole class. From that day on, I put up a wall to protect myself from the embarrassment of having a stigmatized illness. I wore a mask—a façade—to cover up what I was actually going through. I didn't feel comfortable sharing my feelings with any adults in my life at that time.

My depression continued in high school. I was hoping that someone—anyone—would bring up the topics of depression and suicide, so that I wouldn't have to. In school, there were always lessons about alcohol, drugs, and safe sex—but never ONCE were depression or suicide mentioned. Maybe, just maybe, if the adults in my life had been educated in these topics, I would have felt comfortable asking for help, and I would have been spared years of suffering.

But I'm one of the lucky ones. I did get help. I'm here today as the voice of those who are not yet being heard - the child who's sitting in a class full of students thinking he or she is the only one feeling this way...or the teen who can't focus in school because he or she is trapped by the isolation and pain of depression.

Help IS available—ask your friends, your resource staff at school, your parents, or call the suicide hotline at **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**. The right resources are there—look for them—because they CAN save your life!

## When a Friend is Talking About Suicide

### by Christine Henderson

Time is the crucial thing when dealing with a friend who is having suicidal thoughts. It is important that once you hear your friend talking about these feelings, to recognize them for what they are: a serious threat to your friend's life. Don't ignore them and assume the person is just being dramatic. If your friend is talking about killing him or herself, you just can't handle it on your own- you HAVE TO tell a trusted adult! This may seem like something you hear all the time: tell an adult. But in this case, we're talking about someone's existence on earth, someone's life. That is something that should grab your attention and motivate you to tell someone immediately. Don't be a fool and think you can take care of this yourself- you can't!

You may be nervous that this person will be upset with you if you tell someone. To be honest, that is a risk you are going to have to take. You have to understand that having this person alive and on earth is more important than having them for a friend. You are going to have to risk sacrificing the friendship and get up your courage or else your friend might lose his or her life. This fact may seem scary and daunting, but having that person kill themselves will make that fear seem like a walk in the park. Feeling suicidal is indescribable pain that no one should have to deal with, and the pain of losing someone to suicide is just as bad, trust me. You don't want to look back and wish you had told someone. You will carry that regret with you for the rest of your life, so please, do something about it! Tell an adult you trust will know what to do in the situation.

Acting like an adult yourself and asking for help is a big step and can be quite overwhelming and stressful. However, you need to think about this situation in the grand scheme of things – like how will you feel if you keep this information to yourself and your friend dies? This can be difficult to think about, but challenge yourself to think about this very real reality. And if you do decide to tell someone, and your friend's distress is caught early enough, then your friend can get help. The point is: the ability of your friend to have the option of living a happy life can ultimately depend on your telling someone. You will be making a proactive and potentially life-saving decision to intervene at the right moment.

One last time I want to remind you, time is of the essence. Maybe your friend will ultimately thank you, and maybe not. But in the big picture, that really doesn't matter. If you get the slightest inkling that someone might not be okay, do something about it! Don't wait around. And don't try to be a rescuer and take care of it on your own to save the friendship. Act on your instincts, trust your gut, be a grown-up, and tell! It could save the life of someone very dear to you.

Christine is a college freshman whose personal experience with the suicide of her mother has inspired her to become an advocate for youth suicide prevention.

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