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# Detecting the Warning Signs of Suicide in Children

**S**uicide is a serious public health issue. According to the American Association of Suicidology's data, 32,637 people had completed suicide in 2005, including over 4,200 young people ages 15 to 24. More teens and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease combined. In many cases, these deaths could have been prevented. We must learn the warning signs and know where to turn for help. The depression that so often precedes suicide is both recognizable and treatable, according to the Suicide Prevention Education Alliance.

## Risk factors

There are certain factors that make a person more vulnerable to suicide. Some of those factors are:

- Mental illness
- Family history of suicide

- Substance abuse
- Access to firearms
- Stress
- Significant loss
- Previous attempts

## Warning signs

Knowing the warning signs is the first step toward helping in a suicide crisis. Some of the signs are:

- Statements about suicide or that things would be better if the person wasn't around
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide
- Expressions of hopelessness, feeling trapped
- Rage, uncontrolled anger
- Increased substance use
- Changes in personality

- Engaging in risky behaviors, seemingly without considering the consequences
- Giving away treasured items
- Becoming uninterested in things that used to be important

## How to help

Everyone can learn what questions to ask and how to help. The Suicide Prevention Education Alliance has a complete list of “do’s” and don’ts” on their web site. Here are some of those:

- Do reach out and ask questions including the “S” question, “Have you thought of ending your life?”
- Show that you care and encourage the person to talk. Don’t dismiss their thoughts or act upset or shocked.
- Do not leave the person alone but get help. Getting help means knowing the resources in your community that can help. Your local mental health center will

have a hotline that can be called. If you aren’t sure of that number call the national hotline 1-800-273-TALK. If the threat is imminent call 911 and don’t leave the person alone until help arrives.

If you sometimes feel like ending your life, don’t be ashamed to seek help. Many people have those same feelings and there is help available. For all of us we must learn the myths and the facts about suicide and how to help in a suicide crisis. You may have an opportunity to save a life.

## References and resources

Suicide Prevention Resource Center:

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

American Association of Suicidology:

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

Suicide Prevention Education Association:

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

Mental Health America:

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

Original author: Ella Mae Bard

Revised by Therese Worthington, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences

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Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension

TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868