

Suicidal Ideation



What does it mean when a child or teen is suicidal?

- A student who is feeling suicidal is *considering taking, or planning to take, their own life.*
- In many cases, young people who consider or attempt suicide do not *really* want to die:
 - Instead, they want to escape their pain and problems, but can't see a way out or imagine things getting better.
 - Often a suicide attempt is a “cry for help” from a student who doesn't know where to turn.

Warning Signs of Possible Suicidal Behavior

The signs and symptoms of depression and suicidal behavior in adolescents are often observable behaviors first noticed by school personnel.

- **ABRUPT CHANGES IN ATTENDANCE:** *Remain alert to excessive absenteeism in a student with a good attendance record, particularly when the change is sudden.*
- **DWINDLING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE and FAILURE TO COMPLETE ASSIGNMENTS:** *Question any unexpected and sudden decreases in school performance due to inability to concentrate, lack of motivation, etc.*
- **CHANGED RELATIONSHIPS WITH FRIENDS AND CLASSMATES:** *Additional evidence of personal despair may be abrupt changes and withdrawal in friendships and social relationships.*

Warning Signs of Possible Suicidal Behavior

- **LACK OF INTEREST IN ACTIVITIES AND SURROUNDINGS:** *One of the first signs of a potentially suicidal adolescent is general withdrawal, disengagement and apathy.*
- **INCREASED IRRITABILITY, MOODINESS OR AGGRESSIVENESS:** *Depressed, stressed and potentially suicidal individuals demonstrate wide mood swings and unexpected displays of emotion.*
- **DEATH AND SUICIDAL THEMES EVIDENT IN READING SELECTIONS AND WRITTEN ESSAYS:** *The selection of material centering on ideas about death or dying, the uselessness or worthlessness of life, or matters relating to persons.*
- **PARTICIPATING IN SELF INJURY:** *Students who participate in self injury may not necessarily want to die. However, in the long-term, people who self-injure have a much higher risk of suicide, which is why it's important to seek help.*

Urgent Warning Signs

- Saying phrases that include:
 - *“I want to kill myself*
 - *“I want to die”*
 - *“I just want to disappear/sleep forever”*
- Making threats or statements:
 - *“Don’t worry, I won’t be a problem much longer”*
 - *“If anything happens to me, I just want you to know...”*
- Giving away or discarding favorite possessions
- Writing a suicide note
- Attempting to obtain a firearm, knife or rope
- Obtaining, or attempting to obtain, large quantities of medication

What is NOT helpful when working with a student who might be suicidal:

- **Ignoring or dismissing the issue:** This sends the message that you don't hear their message, don't believe them, don't take them serious or you don't care about their pain.
- **Acting shocked or embarrassed**
- **Panicking, preaching, or patronizing**
- **Challenging, debating, or bargaining:** Never challenge a suicidal person. You can't win in a power struggle with someone who may not be thinking clearly.
- **Promising to keep a secret:** The suicidal person is sharing his/her feelings hoping that someone will recognize the pain and help, even though they may verbally contradict this.

What is helpful: Trauma informed lens

- **Acknowledge**: Acknowledge that you are seeing signs of depression or suicide in a student and that it is serious.
 - Be direct, specific, caring, and non-confrontational.
 - **Ask the question** – “Are you thinking about suicide?”
 - *If yes, have you thought about HOW you would do it?*
 - *If yes, do you have WHAT you need to do it?*
 - *If yes, have you thought about WHEN you would do it?*
- **Care**: Let the student know you care about them and you can help.
 - Listen carefully – Be genuine – “I’m concerned about you... about how you feel.”
- **Tell**: Follow your school protocol and tell the mental health contact.
 - **Get help** – Do NOT leave him/her alone – “You are not alone. I will help you get the support you need.”

Suicidal Ideation: Questions to Ask

- Have you ever had thoughts about wanting to die, have you ever had thoughts about killing yourself?
- When was the last time you had those thoughts?
 - How long have you been thinking about killing yourself?
 - How often do you have these thoughts?
- Have you thought about how you would kill yourself?
 - *If yes, what was your plan?*
- Do you have access to (the plan or anything that could be harmful).....
- Do you know when you would do it?

- Have you had thoughts about killing yourself in the past?
 - Have you attempted to kill yourself in the past?
- Have you ever talked to an adult about this?
 - If so, what happened?

Suicidal Ideation: Low Risk vs. High Risk Assessment

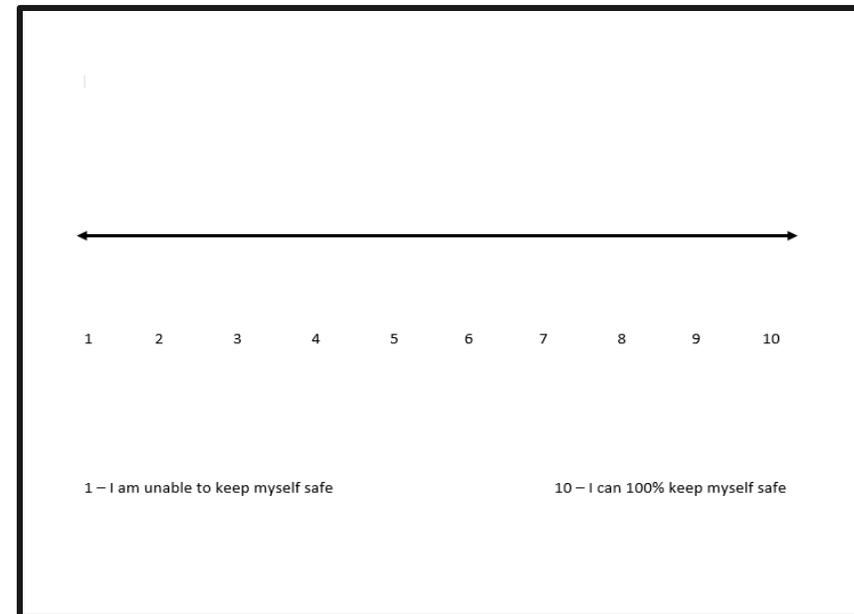
- Language being used by student:
 - “I don’t want to be here”, “I want to fall asleep and never wake up”, “I want to die”, “I want to kill myself”
- Low Risk Assessment – Student is categorized as low risk if:
 - Student has no history of attempted suicide or suicidal ideation
 - Has not identified a specific plan to harm self
 - Does not have the means and intent to harm self
- High Risk Assessment – Student is categorized as high risk if:
 - They have a history of attempted suicide or suicidal ideation
 - They have a history of hospitalization
 - If they have indicated they have the means and plan to harm themselves

Suicidal Ideation: Low Risk vs. High Risk Intervention

- **Low Risk Intervention** – When student is categorized as low risk:
 - Collaborate with student in creating a Safety Plan.
 - *Can be utilized for aggressive/assaultive behaviors or safety concerns which includes self-injurious behaviors, suicidal or homicidal ideation.*
 - Attempt to involve parent and offer resources for mental health support i.e. Individual/Family/Group therapy.
- **High Risk Intervention** – When student is categorized as high risk:
 - A further assessment is needed → Follow your District protocol.
 - Collaborate with student in creating a Safety Plan.
 - If it is determined that student needs to be assessed by the hospital, follow the appropriate steps.
 - *Parent/Guardian transport vs. PERT or Law Enforcement*
 - *Note: Important to include student in this process if possible i.e. explaining process of hospitalization, transport options, etc.*

Scaling Questions: Rating Risk of Youth

- **1 – 10 Safety Scale**
 - 10 = I can keep myself 100% safe
 - 1 = I am unable to keep myself safe
 - *Can also be utilized to scale student's mood (i.e. 10 = High mood, 1 = Low mood).*
- Allow student to rate themselves on scale and describe what that number represents.
 - Note: Student's can have their own interpretations of this scale, making it important to ask follow-up questions
 - Ex. "I am a 5 today but my scale would never go higher than a 7."



When to make a Safety Plan

- A safety plan can be used for almost any concerning behavior.
 - *For example: you can use for aggressive or assaultive behaviors, safety concerns which includes self injurious behaviors, suicidal ideation, or homicidal ideation, bullying/school safety concerns, etc.*
 - Think of safety plan as another tool in your tool box!
 - If completing a safety plan with a student and a parent/guardian is not involved it is very important to contact them to inform them of the plan, they may be additional support.
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