

Name: _____

ADOLESCENT SUICIDE FAQS

How big a problem is adolescent suicide?

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds, after accidents and homicide. Disturbingly, increasing numbers of young people in the ten to 14-year-old age range, and even younger, attempt or complete suicide.

Why do young people kill themselves?

The processes that propel an individual to kill himself or herself are not fully understood. However, some generalizations appear to be true:

- Suicide is associated with mental illness. Young people who are clinically depressed, manic depressive, or have other underlying brain chemistry disorders affecting mood and behavior are more likely to attempt suicide. Often, these conditions go unrecognized.
- Suicide usually is preceded by warning signs. Often, these signs go unnoticed or unheeded.
- Suicide is associated with distorted thinking. Recent advances in brain research show that the adolescent brain is in a state of flux that can create misperceptions and misinterpretations. Especially in combination with a disorder like depression, immature thinking can lead to unrealistically negative perceptions that may contribute to adolescent suicide.
- Suicide often precipitates other suicides. Copycat suicides and cluster suicides are not uncommon occurrences, and following any adolescent suicide, extra vigilance is of critical importance.

Is suicide related to the use of alcohol and other drugs?

For young people, substance use and abuse is often associated with death by suicide. People who are dependent on alcohol and/or other drugs are likely to have other risk factors for suicide, including depression, impulsivity, and social problems.

What are the demographics of suicide among young people?

Males and females attempt suicide at about the same rates, though males are more likely to complete suicide. (This is thought to be in part because males more often choose firearms as a means of suicide.) Historically, in the U.S., white Americans have had much higher rates of suicide than African Americans. However, suicide rates have been rising much faster among young African American males than among young white American males.

Can drugs help prevent suicide?

Drugs can help by correcting your brain chemistry. Antidepressant drugs may be prescribed by a physician. Traditional "talking" therapies also are helpful. Many consider a combination of drugs and psychotherapy to be the most effective treatment.