

CHAPTER
5

Mental and Emotional Problems

LESSON **3** Suicide Prevention

BIG Idea

Professional treatment and support from friends and family can often help prevent suicide.

Study Coach

K-W-L Chart Make a three-column chart. In the first column, list what you **k**now about suicide prevention. In the second column, list what you **w**ant to know about this topic. As you read, use the third column to summarize what you **l**earned.

K	W	L

Picture This

1. Explain Why might a person have feelings of alienation?

● **Before You Read**

If someone you know is considering suicide, what can you do to help? List some strategies or resources you can use. After reading the lesson, add more ideas to your list.

● **Read to Learn**

Knowing the Facts About Suicide

For some people, stress can lead to desperation and alienation. **Alienation** means feeling cut off from everyone else. People with these feelings often cannot cope with difficult life experiences. They may lack support from family and friends and be unable to use community resources to get help. They may consider ending their lives to escape from the pain.

Suicide is the act of intentionally taking one's own life. It is the third leading cause of death for teens ages 15 to 19. Each year, 17 percent of all teens in this age group will consider suicide. More than half of those will actually attempt it.



Tim Fuller Photography

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What are the risk factors for suicide?

Two risk factors are common for those who commit suicide. More than 90 percent suffer from depression or other mental disorders. Others abuse drugs and alcohol. Other risk factors for suicide include:

- A stressful situation or loss.
- Previous suicide attempts.
- Family history of mental disorders, substance abuse, or suicide.
- Access to guns.

Teens who hear of another teen committing suicide may feel compelled to do the same. Sometimes, a series of suicides occur in a community over a short period of time. These are known as **cluster suicides**. Cluster suicides account for about 5 percent of all teen suicides. Some cluster suicides result from pacts made among peers. Others occur in response to a tragic event in the community. Some teens may learn of suicides through the news media. Some of the warning signs of suicide are described in the list below.



Think it Over

- 2. Evaluate** How can abusing alcohol and drugs actually make depression worse?



READING CHECK

- 3. Describe** What are some behaviors that might suggest a person is thinking about suicide?

Recognizing the Warning Signs of Suicide

The warning signs of suicide should be taken seriously. The more signs there are, the more likely it is that the person is thinking about suicide.

- Direct statements such as "I wish I were dead."
- Indirect statements such as "I can't take it anymore."
- Writing poems, song lyrics, or diary entries that deal with death
- Direct or indirect suicide threats
- An unusual obsession with death
- Withdrawal from friends
- Changes in personality or appearance
- Unusual behavior
- A sense of guilt, shame, or rejection
- Drop in grades
- Giving away personal belongings
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Complaints about stomachaches, headaches, and fatigue
- Boredom and indifference
- Violent or rebellious actions
- Intolerance for praise or rewards ✓

Sources: American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; National Mental Health Association.

Strategies to Prevent Suicide

When someone talks about committing suicide, take it seriously. Even if the person is mentioning suicide in a casual or humorous way, do not dismiss it. Any talk of suicide requires immediate attention. Never agree to keep it a secret. Tell an adult right away.

How can you help?

Suicidal people often believe that their death will not matter to anyone. Show empathy and let them know you care. If someone you know may be considering suicide, try to:

- **Have a meaningful conversation.** Show interest, compassion, patience, and understanding.
- **Show support and ask questions.** Remind the person that all problems have solutions, and that suicide is *not* the answer.
- **Persuade the person to seek help.** Encourage the person to talk with a parent, counselor, or other trusted adult. Offer to go with him to get help.

If you believe a friend may be suicidal, contact an adult immediately. Ask what steps the adult will take to help your friend. You can also contact a crisis center or suicide hotline.