

# SILENCE KILLS

## Speaking Up

You know the warning signs, but what do you do if you suspect a friend is thinking about suicide?

1. Take them seriously. If your friend is always making jokes or casual comments about suicide, don't just blow it off. He may sound like he's just playing around, but he may be asking for help.
2. Don't avoid the subject. Many teens think that if you talk to a depressed friend about suicide, you're encouraging them to do it.

That's a myth. The fact is, talking about suicide is the best way to prevent suicide. Ask them, "Are you thinking about killing your-self?" That will get the subject out in the open and give your friend a chance to talk about her feelings.

3. Just talk. Your friend has a life worth living. Talk to him about all of the great things in his life – and remind him that, no matter how bad things seem, things always get better. Remind him that there are people who care about him.
4. Get help. Tell a parent, a teacher, or another trusted adult about your friend – they can make sure she gets the help she needs. And don't leave her alone until you've told someone.

## GETTING BETTER...

Depression is hard to overcome, but with a close support group and self control, you can turn things around. The next time you feel down, try one of these:

- If you've lost someone close to you, instead of keeping it in and letting the grief take over, why not turn your loss into something positive? Use what you learned in coping with loss to counsel others experiencing a similar situation.
- Do something you've always been afraid to do. Take an acting class, or train for a marathon. Focusing on a challenging new goal can be a great way to get over depression.
- Talk to someone. Sometimes, just telling someone how you feel can make a big difference. Talk to a friend or family member instead of keeping your feelings bottled up.
- Get creative. Put your feelings in writing, maybe through poetry or fiction. Try painting or sketching when you feel down. Write a song. Dance. Art and music can be great ways to express your feelings.
- Talk about it with professionals who have experience in helping severe depression. Check out the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at <http://www.afsp.org/>. They have several programs, including support groups, led by physicians and others who know how to help.

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Think you know about suicide? Read the statements below and determine if they are true or false.

1. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among teens.  
A. True                      B. False
2. You should never talk to someone about suicide if you think they want to do it.  
A. True                      B. False
3. Most suicides are impulsive acts, and no one can predict when a friend will do it.  
A. True                      B. False
4. Talking about your depression with friends will help you over come it faster.  
A. True                      B. False
5. If someone jokes about killing themselves, they might be thinking about actually doing it.  
A. True                      B. False

# TEEN SUICIDE



Answers: 1. a; 2. b; 3. b; 4. a; 5. a

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# NO TURNING BACK

## THE SIGNALS OF SUICIDE

### Know the Warning Signs

According to the National Suicide Prevention Resource Center, teen suicides have tripled since 1970. In fact, suicide is the third most common cause of death among teenagers, killing more teens every year than cancer or AIDS. It's a tragic statistic, especially since it can be prevented 100% of the time.

## HOW DO I KNOW SOMEONE'S THINKING ABOUT IT?

A lot of people think that teens who take their own lives act on impulse; that there's no way to predict when someone might commit suicide. The fact is that most suicide victims give clear indications, sometimes months in advance.

Bottom line? Suicide can be prevented if you know what to look for. Some of the most common warning signs include:

- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Insomnia
- Aggressive behavior
- A loss of interest in favorite activities
- Joking about death and suicide
- A sudden drop in grades
- Rapid weight gain or loss
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Giving away possessions
- Mood swings



## WHY SUICIDES HAPPEN

### Peer Pressure, Loss, and Depression

It's no secret that teenagers have to deal with a lot of stress. But why do some teens see suicide as the only answer?

The National Institute of Mental Health says that 42% of teen suicides occur after a loss of a close friend or family member. But really, there's no simple answer or single cause. Many teens who think about suicide are facing a combination of problems, including:

- Loss of a close friend or family member
- Trouble at home
- Relationship issues
- Problems with grades
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Problems with bullying
- Dealing with their sexuality

## CRYING FOR HELP...

### ... but who's listening?

Your best friend Jennifer's older sister died suddenly in a car wreck. Jennifer's whole family is devastated by the loss, but she's taking it harder than anyone else. She's not sleeping, and it looks like she's lost weight. You ask her how she's feeling, but she just gets angry and refuses to talk about it. You ask Jennifer if she's talked to her parents or a counselor, and she tells you she doesn't need to. She's fine.

And then one day, Jennifer comes to school with a big smile on her face and tells you that she's finally worked it all out, and that she's not going to be a problem any longer.

You wonder what Jennifer means, but you don't ask.

That night, you're sitting down to dinner with your family and the phone rings. One of your friends called you to say that Jennifer is dead. She came home from school and took her own life.

You think back to what she told you earlier that day – Jennifer was crying out for help. But nobody was listening.

## WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP

### Finding Support

Sometimes, it's hard to find someone to talk to when you're feeling depressed. Luckily there are a lot of support groups out there that can help. Check out these websites to learn more about teen suicide and depression or to join a support group near you:

#### National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/suicide-in-the-us-statistics-and-prevention/index.shtml>

#### Youth Suicide Prevention Program (YSPP)

<http://www.yspp.org/index.htm>

#### Reach Out

<http://us.reachout.com/>

#### Teen Suicide.us

<http://www.teensuicide.us/>



## STEVE'S STORY

### An Unexpected Turn

Steve had a strong passion for the violin. He practiced it passionately, and was the best violinist in his school. He had a close circle of friends. He had good grades, and he was well on his way to getting a scholarship at a prestigious music school.

So it came as a shock to everyone when Steve killed himself by stepping in front of a fast-moving van. Nobody had seen it coming. Nobody knew Steve was even depressed.

It wasn't until weeks later when a member of the soccer team came to the counselor's office and confessed everything. He and his friends had been bullying Steve after his orchestra practice, day after day, calling him names – sometimes they got physical with him. They had broken his violin once, but Steve apparently had never told his parents. He just borrowed his friend's during practice.

Soon after, Steve's friends admitted that they knew about the bullying, but had remained silent because Steve told them to. A few of Steve's teachers had noticed that Steve seemed withdrawn and that his grades had been slipping recently – but they figured he'd pull out of it.

But he didn't pull out of it.

Like many teens who commit suicide, Steve didn't tell anyone he was depressed. But there were warning signs. If Steve's friends or teachers had spoken up, Steve might be alive today.

