



Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula®  
**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES**  
Clint Eastwood Youth Program



# Teen Suicide

**Teen suicide is one of the leading causes of death for 15-24 year old. The top three causes of death for teens are:**

- accidents
- homicide
- suicide

The risk of suicide increases dramatically when teens have access to firearms at home. Nearly 60 percent of all suicides in the United States are committed with a gun. Girls think about and attempt suicide about twice as often as boys; they tend to overdose on drugs or cut themselves. Boys die by suicide about

four times as often as girls and tend to use firearms, hanging, or jumping from heights.

When someone commits suicide, everyone around them is affected. Even people who didn't know the person well may feel grief, confusion, guilt; they may think, "If only I'd done something differently, I might have prevented the suicide."

## **Why do teens hurt themselves?**

Many teens feel disconnected and isolated from family and friends. Increased risk factors for teen suicide include:

- psychological disorder: depression, bipolar disorder, alcohol and substance use (Approximately 95 percent of those who die by suicide have a psychological disorder at the time of their death.)
- feelings of distress, irritability, or agitation
- feelings of hopelessness and/or worthlessness, often due to repeated failures at school, violence at home, isolation from peers, etc.
- a previous suicide attempt or personal/family history of depression or suicide
- lack of a support network, poor relationships with parents or peers, and feelings of social isolation
- homosexuality or gender identification issues without family or community support
- hostile school environment
- physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse

## **Stressors often precede a suicide attempt**

Stressors for teens can be different than stressors for adults. "Failure" at school (failing a test, not getting the part in the play, slipping grades, getting caught for misbehavior), breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, major family conflict, divorce, or the death of a loved one may cause increased risk.

## **Listen carefully to a teen who:**

- talks about suicide or death in general
- talks about "going away"

- talks about feeling hopeless or guilty
- pulls away from friends or family
- seems to lose interest in favorite things or activities
- begins to have difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly
- has changes in eating or sleeping habits
- displays self-destructive behavior (using alcohol, taking drugs, driving too fast, etc.)

### **What can I do?**

- Watch carefully for signs of depression or withdrawal (e.g., a drop in grades, loss of interest in social connections and/or activities).
- Express your concern, support, and love.
- Take teens' concerns seriously. A fight with a friend may not seem like a big deal to you, but for a teen the fight may be immense and overwhelming.
- Listen to and support your child without minimizing or discounting his or her distress.
- If your teen would be more comfortable talking with someone else, help him or her find an appropriate person - perhaps a friend's parent, a clergy member, a favorite teacher or coach, a professional counselor, the family doctor, or other trusted adult.

We may be reluctant to ask a teen if he or she has been thinking about wanting to die or otherwise hurting him- or herself. Some adults fear that, if they ask, they will put the idea of suicide in the child's head.

Asking a person if he or she is having thoughts about suicide can be difficult, but it can help if you let the person know why you are asking. You might say, "I notice that you've been talking a lot about wanting to be dead. Talk to me about your thoughts about trying to hurt yourself." or "You look sad lately; are you? How often do you have thoughts about hurting yourself? What do you think about doing?"

Suicidal thoughts do tend to come and go. It is important that teens get help developing coping skills to decrease the likelihood that suicidal thoughts and behaviors will overtake them, especially in a crisis. Make an appointment to get your teen a mental health evaluation. And try to get your child to the appointment, even if he or she refuses the evaluation; or attend the session yourself and get help figuring out ways to get your child the help he or she needs.

If someone you love appears to be at risk for hurting him- or herself, get help! As always, the Clint Eastwood Youth Program is here to help.

**This information is brought to you by Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula's Clint Eastwood Youth Program, providing a structured program to treat drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental health problems.**

**For more information or to schedule a free screening, please call 373-0924 or 800-528-8080**



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