

Suicide prevention – “A serious matter for us all”

In response to legislation passed during the 2010 Kentucky General Assembly, the Barren County School System is asking you to take a few moments to consider the content of this document. After you have completed your reading, contact your teacher, school counselor, school support staff, school administrators, district administrators or your parents if you have further questions. We can all make a difference if we work together.

The Role of Teens in Preventing Suicide

Why would someone want to die? Sometimes people want to die because they are suffering from a chemical imbalance that causes depression or another mental disorder, and brings them a great deal of pain. Some young people may be overwhelmed by problems, such as drug or alcohol abuse or family violence.

Young people who feel like they want to die are often in so much emotional pain that they cannot see any other solution to their problems. While you probably can't solve these problems for a friend or classmate, you may be able to help the person find someone who can help. And the first step in doing so is recognizing the signs that someone may be at risk of suicide.

Recognizing the Warning Signs

Teens have their own culture and language. You may know your friends better than their own parents do. And you may be able to tell that something is bothering one of your classmates, even when your teachers and guidance counselors don't have a clue that anything is wrong. You can use your insight to help other teens find help when they are having problems.

While there is no foolproof method of knowing that a teen may be thinking of hurting him- or herself, the following signs might indicate that a young person is considering suicide:

- **A suddenly worsening school performance.** Good students who suddenly start ignoring homework, cutting classes, or missing school altogether may have problems-such as depression or drug and alcohol abuse-that can affect their health and happiness and put them at risk of suicide.
- **A fixation with death or violence.** Teens with problems may develop an unusual interest in death or violence, expressed through poetry, essays, doodling, or artwork; an obsession with violent movies, video games, and music; or a fascination with weapons. Adults often cannot tell a "normal" teen interest in violent video games or music from an obsession that other teens realize is not typical of this age group.
- **Unhealthy peer relationships.** Teens that don't have friends, suddenly reject their friends, or begin associating with other teens known for substance abuse or other risky behaviors may be in trouble. A friend who suddenly stops hanging out with you for no reason or claims that "you just don't understand me any more" may have an emotional problem that he or she is afraid to discuss. That friend may feel isolated and alone and need your help.
- **Violent mood swings or a sudden change in personality.** Kids who become sullen, silent, and withdrawn, or angry and acting out may have problems that can lead to suicide.
- **Other risky behaviors.** Teens who suddenly start having unprotected or promiscuous sex, using drugs or alcohol, driving recklessly or without a license, stealing, or engaging in vandalism may be acting out self-destructive impulses.
- **Bullying.** Kids who are bullied, pushed around, or harassed may be at risk of suicide.
- **Depression.** Depression is an emotional problem that increases a person's risk of suicide. The following signs indicate that a teen may be depressed:
 - A sudden worsening in school performance
 - Withdrawal from friends and extracurricular activities
 - Lowered self-esteem, or feelings of guilt

Some warning signs demand immediate action:

- Announcing that the person has made a plan to kill him- or herself
- Talking or writing about suicide or death
- Saying things like:
 - *I wish I were dead.*
 - *I'm going to end it all.*
 - *You will be better off without me.*
- Staying by him- or herself rather than hanging out with friends and family
- Expressing the belief that life is meaningless
- Giving away prized possessions
- Neglecting his or her appearance and hygiene
- Dropping out of school or social, athletic, and/or community activities
- Obtaining a weapon or another means of hurting him- or herself (such as prescription medications)

Helping Peers

If you think that any of your friends or classmates may be thinking of killing themselves-or have serious problems that they have not told anyone about-tell a responsible adult. Find someone who is concerned with and understands young people and can help. This may be a teacher, guidance counselor, or other member of the school staff. It might also be your parents, the parents or sibling of a friend, a member of the clergy, or someone who works at the local youth center. If this adult doesn't take you or your friend's problem seriously, or doesn't know what to do, talk to someone else. If you need help finding someone who can help, call (800) 273-TALK (8255).

Don't be afraid of being wrong. It is often hard to tell if someone is really thinking about killing or hurting him- or herself. Some of the warning signs for suicide could also be signs of drug or alcohol use, serious family problems, or depression or another mental illness. People with these problems still need help-and you can help.

Just talking to them can make a big difference. Teens will often share secrets and feelings with other teens that they will not share with adults. However, you may need to be persistent before they are willing to talk. Ask them if they are thinking about killing themselves. Talking about suicide or suicidal thoughts will *not* push someone to kill him or herself.

You should be especially concerned if people tell you that they have made a detailed suicide plan or obtained a means of hurting themselves. If they announce that they are thinking of taking an overdose of prescription medication or jumping from a particular bridge, stay with them until they are willing to go with you and talk to a responsible adult-or until a responsible adult can be found who will come to you.

Helping Yourself

If you are having problems and thinking of hurting yourself, tell someone who can help. If you cannot talk to your parents, find someone else: a relative, a friend, a teacher, the school nurse or guidance counselor, or a friend's parents. Or, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-TALK (8255), and they will help you. Don't be ashamed or embarrassed. A lot of teens and adults have problems that they cannot solve on their own. Finding the courage to get help is often the first step toward solving your problems and becoming a happier person.

Check out our district website at www.barrenschools.com for more links to on-line information.