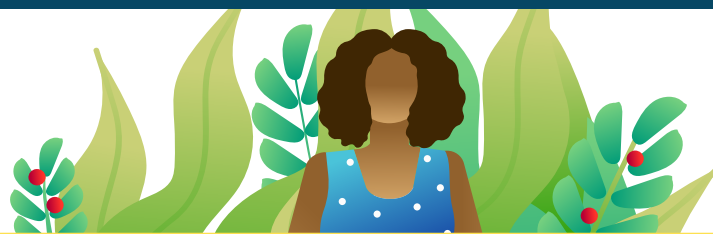


Adolescent Suicide Prevention Tip Sheet



Suicide is a challenging topic and it is hard to know how to respond when it comes up in a session. In your role as a Project Amp mentor, you may be a trusted support for students with suicidal thoughts or for students whose friends may be experiencing suicidal thoughts. You can be prepared for these situations by knowing about suicide risk factors and warning signs and by learning how to respond effectively to students if this comes up in conversation.

Prevalence of Suicide in Adolescents

Suicide is a widespread public health crisis among all age groups but is notably affecting youths and young adults. In 2018, suicide was the second leading cause of death among youth aged 10 through 24.¹ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the suicide rate among this age group increased by 57.4% between 2007 and 2018.² Many hypothesize that this increase is consistent with higher rates of mood disorders among youth and young adults³, increased social media use, and increased access to lethal means.⁴

The unprecedented challenges brought about by COVID-19 may bring about an increase in suicide rates. Social isolation, family financial stress, academic stress, and risk of exposure to physical or sexual violence at home may result in increased suicidality.⁵

What is Suicidal Ideation?

Suicidal ideation includes any thoughts or desire to take one's own life. There are two types of suicidal ideation: *passive* suicidal ideation and *active* suicidal ideation. *Passive* suicidal ideation is characterized by having thoughts of wishing one were dead, but without plans or intent to attempt suicide. This is more common of the two and not necessarily an emergency. *Active* suicidal ideation is characterized by both thinking

about and having the intent to attempt suicide and is considered an emergency. It is important to recognize the difference between the two so that you can seek the right supports for you mentee and yourself.⁶

Risk Factors for Suicidal Ideation

Although suicide can affect anyone, some characteristics put individuals at a higher risk for suicidal ideation.

Risk factors for suicidality or suicidal ideation⁷⁻¹³



- Individual or family history of mental illness
- Individual or family history of alcohol use and substance use disorder
- Loss of parent due to death or divorce
- History of trauma, physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- Lack of social support or feelings of social isolation
- Lack of access to healthcare, mental health care, or substance use treatment
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or gender diverse youth
- Youth who experience family rejection due to their sexual identity
- Major physical illness

Responding to Suicide Risk or Suicidal Ideation as a Project Amp Mentor

As a Project Amp mentor, you may be well suited to spot the warning signs of suicide and be prepared to respond quickly, supportively, and in a trauma-informed

manner. Warning signs of suicidality include individuals speaking or writing about thoughts or desires of hurting themselves, feeling hopeless, and/or feeling like a burden. You also may notice sudden or gradual changes to their mood, sleep habits, appetite, substance use, or interest in regular activities.

Someone who is considering suicide may...^{8, 14, 15}



- talk or write about wanting to die or kill themselves
- threaten to hurt themselves
- talk about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- talk about feeling like a burden
- increase alcohol or substance use
- engage in reckless behavior
- have changes to their sleep pattern—they might sleep too little or too much
- lose interest in regular activities
- isolate themselves
- have extreme mood swings
- give away prized possessions and other personal things

What Should I Do?

If a mentee shows warning signs and you are concerned about their safety, act with care and compassion. You are not expected to know the “right” thing to say. Simply providing support and showing that you care will remind your mentee that you are a safe person to have an open and honest conversation with.^{14,16} Take what they are saying seriously, listen to them with empathy, and provide them with support.¹⁷ Remember that your clinical support team is trained to deal with this situation.

What Steps Should I Follow?

As a Project Amp mentor your role is **not** to provide crisis support or to provide mental health treatment.

If *passive* suicide ideation comes up during a session:

- Listen with empathy and support.
- Check to make sure your mentee is safe for the moment.
- Work with your mentee to create a plan with them to get support. Let them lead in this process by asking them what they are comfortable with doing.
- **Remind them that you are required to connect them to someone who can provide clinical support (guidance department or clinical supervisor)**, but you will still support them every step of the way as they get further help.
- After your conversation, continue to follow up with them to see how they're doing. Check in with them to see if there's anything else you can do to help them.¹⁷

If *active* suicide ideation comes up during a session:

- Listen with empathy and support.
- **Remind them that you are required to connect them to someone who can provide clinical support (guidance department or clinical supervisor).**
- Stay with the student, either in person or in the virtual meeting room, until a clinical support person joins you. Let the mentee know that you will still be there to support them after they receive crisis management support.¹⁴
- After your conversation, continue to follow up with them to see how they're doing. Check in with them to see if there's anything else you can do to help them.¹⁷

Debunking Myths about Suicide

MYTH: People who say they're suicidal are looking for attention.

FACT: If someone is speaking about ending their own life or dying, they must be taken

seriously. This is often a cry for help, and it's our responsibility to recognize the signs and provide them with the support they need.^{17, 18}

MYTH: Asking someone if they are suicidal or speaking about it directly will "put ideas into their head or encourage them to consider suicide".

FACT: Research has proven that openly speaking about suicide won't convince a person to consider suicide. In fact, asking someone about suicide can provide the much-needed social support and safe space for individuals in crisis. It can give them the opportunity to feel supported and give them the opportunity to receive help.¹⁹

MYTH: Suicidality always looks like sadness, excessive crying, and sleeping.

FACT: Suicidal ideation can appear differently in each individual; not everyone will display traditional warning signs.¹⁴ Knowing the warning signs can help identify and respond to suicidal ideation in adolescents.

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