



Warning Signs of Adolescent Suicide¹

Recent B.C. research tells us that 5% of high school students will attempt to end their lives during their high school years.

- Girls seem to be much more likely to make an attempt. While they make fewer suicide attempts, boys tend to die much more often from suicide.
- The aboriginal suicide rate is five to six times higher than non-aboriginal.
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth who are not “out” are 2-3 times more likely to attempt suicide.

We also know most youth who are suicidal:

- Have a strong wish to die AND a strong wish to live
- Present warning signs that all of us can learn to recognize
- Respond honestly when directly asked by someone they trust
- Will make at least one non-lethal attempt prior to completing suicide

Warning Signs

So what does a suicidal youth do, or say that might indicate they are seriously contemplating suicide? And how can you differentiate these behaviours from the often typical emotional and behavioural extremes we associate with adolescence?

Indicators of *potential suicide* are a *cluster* of worrisome, or uncharacteristic *changes in feelings, perceptions, and behaviours* that *persist* for a period of time (i.e., more than two weeks), and usually *accompany* an actual or anticipated *serious loss(es)*. Losses are personal experiences: what seems significant to the youth who is suicidal may seem insignificant to someone else.

Warning signs to watch and listen for include:

- Talking, joking, writing, drawing about suicide, death, dying
- A previous suicide attempt; the suicide of someone important to them
- Isolating or withdrawing from friends, activities and, perhaps family; missing school

¹ This information sourced from the McCreary Centre Society 2008 Adolescent Health Survey, <http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/AHS%20IV%20March%2030%20Final.pdf>



- Seeming down and/or overwrought with worry; perhaps low in energy
- Angry, irritable, frustrated and perhaps violent or raging
- An increase in their alcohol and/or drug use
- Expressing or appearing hopeless, helpless and without a sense of purpose
- Doing risky things without really caring about their own, and perhaps others safety
- Difficulty sleeping, concentrating, with memory; may also sleep a lot more
- Mood swings; strong shifts from one mood to another
- A recent major loss or change, such as break up of family or another important relationship

This isn't a complete list of possible warning signs. It is a list of common indicators, but what's probably most important is that you notice changes in a teen's behaviour that you find worrisome, regardless of whether or not it is on this list.

In BC the Distress Line Network is 1-800-SUICIDE, where help is available 24 hours a day.

The Crisis Centre in Vancouver also offers an Internet chat service called YouthInBC.com, www.YouthInBC.com. The chat operates 12:00noon to 1:00AM 365 days a year. A teen may be more open to connecting with someone through an on-line chat.