

How to Identify and Help Suicidal Youth

A suicidal youth is a youth in crisis. The following seven strategies will help you identify suicidal youth, intervene in the crisis, and redirect the youth toward the help he or she needs.

1. **Recognize the symptoms of a suicidal youth.**
 - a. Threatens suicide (note the specificity and reality of the threat)
 - b. Describes plan or method to kill him- or herself (note the specificity and lethality of the threat)
 - c. Has threatened or attempted suicide in the past
 - d. Shows signs of helplessness and hopelessness
 - e. Shows signs of serious depression, especially one that has lasted 2 or more weeks
 - f. Exhibits unexplained changes in behavior or serious mood changes
 - g. Is currently using drugs, drug use was involved in previous suicide attempt, or both situations exist
 - h. Has experienced an extreme recent loss, disappointment, or serious conflict involving family, friends, school, or a combination of those groups.
 - i. Has the factors that indicate a current threat (SLAP: specificity of plan, lethality of plan, availability of proposed method, and proximity of helping resources is remote)
 - j. Has an increased risk based on prior attempts (DIRT: danger of prior attempt was lethal, impression of youth that danger was high, rescue was remote, and timing was recent)
2. **Trust your judgment.**
 - a. Act on your beliefs about the suicide risk or danger.
 - b. Do not permit others to lead you to ignore signals.
3. **Tell others.**
 - a. Share your concern with those who can help.
 - b. Do not let the student talk you into keeping secrets.
4. **Stay with a suicidal person.**
 - a. Do not leave the youth alone if you believe the danger is immediate.
 - b. Stay with the student until help arrives or the crisis passes.



5. **Listen intelligently.**
 - a. Listen and express empathy.
 - b. Assure the student that there are alternatives.
6. **Be supportive and respond positively.**
 - a. Express your care for the student in words and actions.
 - b. Help the student feel worthwhile again by expressing positive attributes you have observed in him or her.
 - c. Express an invitation to life and hope to counteract the student's invitations to death.
 - d. Stress that problems are opportunities for seeking alternative solutions and making choices.
 - e. Stress that suicide is not contagious. The student does not have to make this choice.
7. **Urge professional help when necessary.**
 - a. Pressure the student and his or her family to seek help from a professional.
 - b. Encourage the student and family to continue with this help and therapy even if it becomes a difficult process.

