



State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Why should we worry about youth suicide? Are many kids really depressed or suicidal?

- For students age 10-14, Wisconsin's suicide rate is fifth highest in the U.S.
- The rate for students age 10-19 is 13th highest in the U.S., 42% higher than the U.S. average
- More than 1 in 5 Wisconsin high school students report symptoms of depression annually
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth age 10-19 in Wisconsin, accounting for more than 17% of all deaths in this age group

What are the risk factors for suicide—things that are associated with suicide attempts?

- Previous suicide attempts are the strongest predictor of future attempts
- Exposure to suicide of another student, of a loved one, or through the media
- A history of depression or other mental disorders, including drug or alcohol abuse
- Unsupervised access to firearms, especially during depression or times of perceived crisis
- Poor problem-solving skills, risky or impulsive actions, conflicts, stressful life events

What are the warning signs? What can school staff members watch for?

Early warning signs are behaviors that adults may notice in many students. For some students, these are the first signs they are struggling with depression or a low mood. Be watchful of these students to see if the symptoms persist for more than a few weeks or a month.

- Difficulty concentrating or a decline in quality of school work
- Social withdrawal, personality and mood changes
- In younger children, physical complaints related to emotions (stomachaches, headaches)
- Changes in sleeping and eating habits—too much or too little of either or both
- Preoccupation with death

Urgent warning signs indicate that a student may have made a decision to harm themselves.

- Threats or hints about suicide, seriously thinking about it, especially a specific plan
- Impulsive or violent actions, rebellious behavior, or running away
- Refusing help or feeling beyond help, claiming to be a bad person, intolerant of praise
- Hopelessness, helplessness, or worthlessness
- Being suddenly cheerful after a period of depression (problems no longer worry them)
- Giving away favorite possessions, making a last will and testament, “tying up loose ends”

Is it legally safe for you to intervene in a suicide attempt?

State law insulates all public and private school district employees and volunteers from civil liability for their acts and omissions when trying to intervene in a student's suicide. Staff members and volunteers should feel safe in doing their best to identify and help suicidal students.

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What can you do if you become concerned about a student?

If a student shares that they are having a difficult time or are thinking about self-harm, be sure to **acknowledge** these feelings rather than minimizing them. Say something like, “I’m sorry to hear about this. It sounds really hard.” Don’t tell them to get over it or move on; that’s not realistic for a person with depression. Next, show **care and concern** by saying, “I’m worried about you and I would hate for anything bad to happen.” The final step is to connect the student with someone who knows how to respond by saying, “Let’s go **tell** someone in the guidance department. They know how to work with students who have concerns like these.” You could also bring the student to talk with an administrator or another person on your crisis team. These simple steps can be summarized as “Acknowledge, Care, and Tell” or ACT. (ACT is a central skill taught to students in “Signs of Suicide,” a program of Screening for Mental Health.)

It’s a myth that asking a student how they are doing or if they have had thoughts about harming themselves will bring on thoughts of suicide. Another myth is that students won’t be honest when asked if they need help. In fact, these students are usually scared and want help. Finally, you don’t need to be a pupil services professional to help a suicidal student, you just need to connect them to help in your school.

What youth suicide prevention resources are available from DPI?

DPI provides a variety of training and resources, all of which are available on our web site. Just go to the DPI main web page (dpi.wi.gov) and enter the words “suicide prevention” in the search box. On our suicide prevention page, you will find the following highlights:

- A web-based video training for all school staff. Our school psychologist gives a brief overview of suicide prevention and intervention, including details about ACT.
- A flyer for DPI’s full-day suicide prevention workshop.
- A complete listing of state laws and rules about youth suicide.
- DPI’s health class curricula for middle and high school students.

What other resources should school staff be aware of?

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, www.afsp.org
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center, www.sprc.org
- Mental Health America of Wisconsin, www.mhawisconsin.org
- Helping Others Prevent and Educate about Suicide, www.hopes-wi.org
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Consult local telephone directories and/or your county mental health board for local resources.

This notice meets the requirements of Wisconsin Statute 115.365 for annual staff notification of suicide prevention resources. For more information about the data, suggestions, or background to this notice, or to download an electronic copy of the notice, please search “suicide prevention” on the DPI web page at dpi.wi.gov.