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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Start Talking!



Building a Drug-Free Future

Know! The Facts on Youth Suicide



Suicide is now the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults ages 12-24, second only to accidental death; and for every suicide, there are 100-200 suicide attempts. This is a vital topic we must be discussing, and revisiting regularly, with our youth.

In the previous tip, [Know! Momo and her Deadly Challenge to our Youth](#), we talked with suicide prevention experts about an internet “game” with potentially harmful, even deadly consequences, and how it is targeting teens.

In this tip we continue the conversation with Shawna Hite-Jones and Austin Lucas of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation to learn more.

Q. *Teen suicide rates have been steadily increasing since 2007. Why the rise and how much of a role does social media play?*

A. That is the million dollar question. The unfortunate reality is that we don't have one direct reason we can point to for the increased rates of youth suicide. There is research out there looking at the link between social media and suicide, and bullying and suicide. We do know that youth who spend more time on social media report higher levels of depression. But even at that level, it is just a link. Same with bullying and suicide. Youth do have a lot more pressures today. There are concerns regarding the expectations for youth succeed in terms of grade-point averages even above the 4.0. There are concerns as far as expectations for youth to be in a million different activities. Is all that contributing to it as well, because they are not learning how to manage all the stress that is present in their lives? There is also some theorizing going on as to whether or not there is increased acceptance of suicide in our youth that wasn't there before. Are they seeing it as a more acceptable action than they used to?

Q. *Are some children at greater risk for suicide than others?*

A. Yes. There are many factors that put a child at greater risk. We look at the experience of childhood abuse; we look at not having a positive role model in one's life, not having parents present in one's life; and we look especially



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at undiagnosed and untreated mental health conditions like depression. We reference the statistic that 90% of individuals who die by suicide have some type of mental health condition at the time of death. Sometimes it has been diagnosed, but many times it hasn't.

According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, other major risk factors include:

- Prior suicide attempt(s)
- Substance abuse
- Mood disorders
- Access to lethal means

Keep in mind, risk factors are not warning signs. Hite-Jones points out that a youth can have a number of risk factors and not experience depression or suicidal thoughts. She also point out that most people who do have a mental health condition, when actively managed, go on to engage in and enjoy life.

As for major protective factors, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center shares the following:

- Effective mental health care
- Connectedness to individuals, family, community, and social institutions
- Problem-solving skills
- Contacts with caregivers

The experts at the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation say while teens are known for being moody, we (as parents, teachers and other important people in the lives of youth) must learn the warning signs of suicide so that we are aware when it may be something more.

The major warning signs for suicide include:

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself
- Seeking a means to kill oneself
- Hopelessness
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Dramatic mood changes

These warning signs indicate that someone may be at immediate risk for suicide and you should seek help without delay.

[Click here for additional warning signs that may not be so obvious](#), along with a comprehensive list of risk factors.

Contrary to popular belief, talking with your child about suicide will not "put the idea of killing suicide into their head." Lucas says research proves the opposite and that bringing it up and asking directly, "Are you thinking about taking your life," can actually relieve the child's anxiety and for them, it feels good to know someone cares enough to ask the question. He says it opens up the conversation for intervention and gives the opportunity for referral to mental health resources.

If you feel your child is considering self-harm or experiencing suicidal thoughts, please connect with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), contact the Crisis Text Line by [texting 4HOPE](#) to 741741, or go to <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> for information or to chat online with a professional. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and



Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.



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confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

Source: [Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation](#). [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Suicide rates rising across the U.S., 2018](#). [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#), & [Rodgers, P. \(2011\). Understanding risk and protective factors for suicide: A primer for preventing suicide](#). Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: Risk Factors and Warning Signs](#).