

# UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE

TheHopeLine.com

PART OF THE DAWSON MCALLISTER NETWORK

*"If you really knew me you would know that I have thought about killing myself a number of times."*

-Teen that called TheHopeLine

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## Introduction

**January, 2011** - She had a tough day. High school has its up and down days. This day was tougher than most; issues with a boy she was fond of had gone awry. Not all things work out as we hope. Sometimes we just need to talk it out. We need someone to hear us, to listen. Encouragement is welcomed by everyone. But today there was no one to hear, no one to listen. No encouragement came. So, she went home on a cold Tennessee day and hung herself. Her problem was solved.

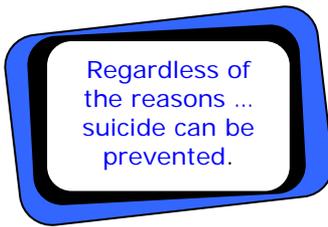


**January, 2010** - He liked to watch television with his friends. When they were done with TV they would dream big and use their Legos to bring those dreams to life. They went to elementary school together, three boys growing up in the South. Life was good. Well, maybe not for all of them because he was troubled about something. No one really knows what it was. There wasn't a chance to talk about it. He simply excused himself from class, went to the restroom and hung himself. His problems were solved.

Suicide is becoming the easy solution for far too many young people today. According to the CDC, suicide is the third leading cause of death in America for young people between the ages of 15-24<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, one person dies in America from suicide every 16.2 seconds. In the time it takes you and I to watch our favorite primetime drama, 222 people will lose their life to suicide. And for every female

that successfully commits suicide there are four males that have taken their own life.

Why, in America, the land of plenty, opportunity and wealth, do people seek to take their own life? In a study conducted by Nemours Foundation for TeensHealth.org most teenagers interviewed after making a suicide attempt say they did it because they were trying to escape from a situation that seemed impossible or to get relief from really bad thoughts or feelings. Some tried to escape feelings of rejection, hurt and loss while others were simply angry



ashamed or guilty about something.<sup>2</sup>

Teen suicide is a very real problem in the United States. With many pressures and a variety of

emotional, social and family issues to confront, many teenagers find themselves having suicidal thoughts. The biggest part of averting a teen suicide is being involved in your teen's life and watching for teen suicide warning signs. It is also important to note that many of the teen suicide warning signs are also indications of depression.<sup>3</sup>

We have put this material together to help you better understand the phenomenon. It is our hope that by reviewing this material you will understand the myths surrounding suicide, be able to recognize warning signs associated with suicide and take the necessary steps to intervene on behalf of one who is desperate and hurting.

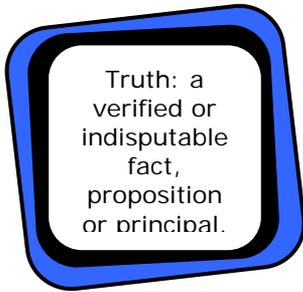
We do not claim to have done this research ourselves. Rather this is a collection of information we have found that has been helpful to us in understanding suicide and helping our volunteers and staff recognize warning signs and

procedures that can be taken to intervene. We hope you find it helpful and informative.



## Myths and Truths

1. Myth – No one can stop a suicide. It is inevitable.  
Truth - If people in crisis get the help they need, they may never be suicidal again.
2. Myth – Confronting a person about suicide will only make them angry and increase the risk of a suicide attempt.  
Truth – Asking someone directly about suicide intent lowers anxiety, opens communication and lowers the risk of an impulsive act.
3. Myth – Only trained experts can prevent suicide.  
Truth – Suicide is everyone’s business and anyone can help prevent the tragedy of suicide.
4. Myth - Suicidal people keep their plans to themselves.  
Truth – Most suicide victims communicate their intent the week preceding their attempt.
5. Myth – Those who openly talk about suicide never do it.  
Truth – Those who talk about it may attempt it, or even complete the act of suicide.
6. Myth – Suicide is a problem of a specific class of people.



Truth - An absolute profile of the suicidal individual does not exist.

7. Myth – Christians will never attempt suicide.

Truth - Christians as well as Non-Christians experience all kinds of emotional disorder, life stress, and traumatic events. We would do well to remember that

no one is immune to feeling alone and desperate.

Women are more likely to attempt suicide; however men are more likely to complete a suicide attempt. Individuals who are currently being treated, or have been treated in the past, for a mental illness may be more likely to attempt suicide; however individuals who have never received any of these services may attempt suicide as well. Risk factors exist for age, sex, race, geographical region, mental health, life stressors, and many others variables, but the bottom line is any person who feels overwhelmed and unable to cope may be at risk of suicide.

## Risk Factors

The adolescent years are a very turbulent time for many teenagers. It is a time full of great confusion, change, and anxiety. There is constant pressure to fit in socially, perform well academically, and act responsibly in almost every environment. With these pressures, feelings of low self-esteem, self-doubt, and alienation can easily develop. For some teens, these feelings can lead to suicidal thinking. Other risk factors to be aware of include:

- Childhood abuse, physical, verbal and sexual
- Recent traumatic events

- Lack of true trustworthy support and encouragement
- Depression or other psychological disorder
- Easy access to suicidal means like guns, drugs, etc.
- Hostile social or school network or environment
- Excessive loss, or perceived excessive loss
- Exposure to other suicides



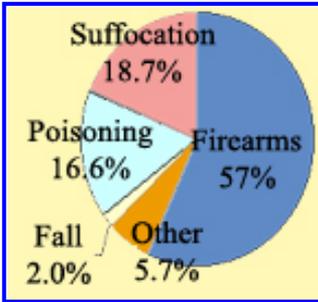
These risk factors highlight only some of the common reasons teenagers might commit suicide; the desperate attempt to get out of what seems to them like an intolerable situation. Constant access to a substantial support system is critical in the life of a teenager. A strong reliable network of friends, family, peer groups or extracurricular activities act as an outlet for everyday struggles they may endure.

## The Most Common Methods of Suicide

There are several different ways a person might kill themselves. These methods include overdosing, hanging, slashing the wrist, car collision, gas poisoning, electrocution, suffocation, etc.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention the most common method of suicide is shooting oneself. Firearms are the most commonly used method for both males and females, accounting for almost 60% of all

teen suicides.<sup>4</sup> Research has shown that the access or availability to a firearm is a significant factor in the increase of youth suicide by a firearm.<sup>4</sup> That is why any gun in your home should be unloaded, locked and kept in a place that is not easily accessible.



The second most common method for males is hanging, or suffocation, and for females the second most common method is overdosing<sup>5</sup>. Studies have shown that these rates differ from male to female because of chemical make-up. Males tend to die from suicide four times as often as girls because they choose more lethal methods, such as firearms, hanging, or jumping from heights. Females tend to choose less direct methods such as overdosing and slashing their wrists.



The graphic above, from the US Department of Health and Human Services, National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, shows the most common methods of suicide attempted by young people in America. Although most suicide attempters admit their intent, not all do, so be aware if your child or friend shows any deliberate self-harming behaviors. Research has also shown that many adolescent suicides occur after school hours in their home<sup>5</sup>. If you feel someone you know might be at risk, make sure they are not left alone. Rather, offer help and a listening ear.

## Teen Suicide Warning Signs

It is important to take warning signs seriously. You should seek help if you think you know a young person that is

considering suicide or has shown some of these warning signs.

- Sudden or gradual disinterest in what was a favorite extracurricular activity
- Problems at work or loss of interest in a previously satisfying job
- Any substance abuse, legal or illegal, alcohol included
- Behavioral problems at school or other activities
- Withdrawing from friends and/or family members
- Sleep changes, sleeping far too long, or the inability to secure a good nights sleep
- Depression
- Chronic complaints of physical issues like aches, pains, migraines or fatigue
- Neglecting personal hygiene or physical appearance
- Inability to concentrate or pay attention
- Declining grades and a loss of interest in school responsibilities
- Risk taking behavior
- Chronic complaints of being bored or trapped
- Disinterest in compliments or praise being offered by others



Don't expect all of these signs, or even most of these signs to be present in one individual. Realize that even "good kids" from "great families" commit suicide. However, if you

notice two or three of these warning signs in one individual begin asking questions, be concerned and get involved.

In addition to these warning signs there are more drastic indicators that point to a suicidal tendency or plan. These indicators<sup>6</sup> include, but are not limited to:

- Actually stating, “I’m thinking of committing suicide”, or, “I think I may kill myself”, or, “I want to die.”
- Verbal phrases such as, “I want you to know something just incase something happens to me”, or, “I won’t be a trouble to you much longer”, or, “Forget it, it doesn’t matter, nothing matters anymore.”
- Gifting of ones belonging or promising them to family or friends
- Discarding of previously important belongings
- Extremes between periods of cheerfulness and depression
- Attempts at hurting oneself
- Death or suicide themes appearing in artwork, schoolwork or journals
- Practicing suicide notes or phrasing
- Occasional expressions of bizarre or unsettling thoughts



Many young people do not understand how to deal with, or cope with their feelings. Desperation sets in and many are unlikely to talk about it with family and friends. When they do decide to speak about it the attempt may come off as

angry, from out of nowhere or confusing. They may simply be looking for someone to help them or understand them.

## How to Help a Suicidal Person

If you believe a friend or family member may be suicidal, it is crucial to understand the immediate danger they may be in while not overreacting. Acknowledging the warning signs

and or drastic indicators is important.<sup>6</sup>



The best way to help is to simply listen. Let them know they are not alone and that you are there to help. Here are some tips on how to help someone who may be suicidal<sup>7</sup>:

- Listen without judgment  
– listen without acting shocked, disappointed or afraid
- Offer hope – help them come to the realization that their pain is temporary and that they are valued by you
- Don't promise confidentiality – refuse to be sworn to secrecy, you may have to seek additional help from law enforcement or professional counseling in order to keep them safe, they need to have someone they trust
- Get professional help – encourage them to get professional help, explain that these feelings are common and help is available, aid in finding a treatment facility and offer to go with them
- Make a plan for life – help them develop a “Plan for Life”, a set of steps that they promise to follow if

they should find themselves in another crisis,  
provide emergency contact numbers

As you're helping a suicidal person, don't forget to take care of yourself. It can be a burdensome and emotionally draining process, so it is important for you to talk to a friend, family member, pastor, or counselor to gain support. Acknowledging the warning signs or more drastic indicators is important.

## **A Portrait in Words**

This piece was sent to me anonymously, via email, in 2010 by a young girl who said she had received help from TheHopeLine and wanted to share something with me that she had written before calling TheHopeLine. This is a real-life example of what young people in America are facing. This is why they need our help. This is why you must refuse to ignore warning signs and indicators of suicide.

### **If You Really Knew Me**. Author Unknown

If you really knew me you would know that I cry myself to sleep like all  
the time.

If you really knew me you would know that I don't feel loved.

If you really knew me you would know that I have no self confidence.

If you really knew me you would know I cut myself for almost 7 years  
off and on.

If you really knew me you would know that I'm scared of everything.

If you really knew me you would know that when I was little I had guy  
touch me in places a little girl should not be touched!

If you really knew me you would know I would rather make other  
people happy instead of myself.

If you really knew me you would know that I don't trust anyone.

If you really knew me you would know that I can't stand to look at  
myself in the mirror because I am ashamed of the thing I have done.

If you really knew me you would know that I hate my mother for not  
being there.

If you really knew me you would know that I have thought about killing  
myself a number of times,

If you really knew me you would know that I have tried to kill myself  
before.

If you really knew me you would know that I do things with guys so that  
they will like me.

If you really knew me you would know that I hate everything about me  
and my body.

If you really knew me you would know that I hate myself for moving  
away from my brother and my sister.

If you really knew me you would know that I feel like I have to do what  
everyone else is doing so that they will like me.

If you really knew me you would know that I was pregnant and then I  
lost the baby.

If you really knew me you would know that I wish that I could take back  
my first time having sex.

If you knew me you would know that I hate the guy that got me pregnant  
because he told me to kill my baby.

If you really knew me you would know that I feel like I have no REAL  
friends.

If you really knew me you would know that I feel alone in this world.

If you really knew me you would know that I fall for guys very easy and  
that I always get my heart broken when I do.

If you really knew me you would know that I only really fell in love one  
time and I still love that person to this day.

If you really knew me you would know that I feel like I am worthless.

If you really knew me you would know that I can't stand my uncle  
sometimes.

If you really knew me you would know that I don't get along with  
people that much.

If you really knew me you would know that I get along with guys better  
than I do with girls.

If you really knew mw you would know that girls call a whore and slut  
because I hang out with guys all the time and cause I talk to guys all the  
time.

If you really knew me you would know that I may act like nothing hurts  
me but deep down inside everything hurts me.

If you really knew me you would know that I wish that I could grow  
closer to god but I just can't.

If you really knew me you would know that I feel like nobody  
understands what I am going through.

If you really knew me you would know that I wish I was someone else.

If you really knew me you would know that I can't let people into my  
heart.

If you really knew me you would know that I am afraid to let my family  
down.

If you really knew me you would know that I think my body is ugly.

If you really knew me you would know that I wish that I had a different  
mother.

If you really knew me you would know that I feel like I let everyone one  
down.

If you really knew me you would know that I sometimes wish I had a  
different family.

If you really knew me you would know that the first time I had sex I was  
so scared I came home and cried myself to sleep.

If you really knew me you would know that just last night I thought  
about cutting myself again.

If you really knew me you would know that I am afraid to get into a  
fight.

If you really knew me you would know that I don't feel good about  
myself at all.

If you really knew me you would know that I wish that my grandmother  
was still here with me.

If you really knew me you would know that I listen to music so I don't  
have to listen to people talk about me.

If you really knew me you would know that I wish I could make my  
father love me.

If you really knew me you would know that I think about the baby I lost  
every day.

If you really knew me you would know that I blame myself for losing  
my baby.

If you really knew me you would know I think about drinking just to get  
away from my problems.

If you really knew me you would know that I don't feel safe when I am  
with friends.

If you really knew me you would know that I would rather stay home on  
the weekends than hang out with friends.

If you really knew me you would know that I would rather stay to  
myself than talk to people.

If you really knew me you would know that I have only a FEW good  
friends.

If you really knew me you would know that I am really a good girl who  
acts bad to get people to notice her.

If you really knew me you would know that I am in love with my best  
guy friend and have been for 3 years now.

If you really knew me then you would know I have made myself puke  
up everything that I have eaten and I have made myself not eat because I  
feel like I need to lose weight.

If you really knew me you would know that I still to this day puke up  
my food when I feel that I have eaten way too much.

If you really knew me you would know that I stopped eating breakfast  
and lunch about 2 weeks ago and the only thing I eat is dinner and that is  
only because I have too.

If you really knew me you would know that I wish that I was out of my  
aunt and uncles house.

If you really knew me you would know that I have gotten in to fist fights  
with my uncle a number of times.

If you really knew me you would know that I ...

## When Support is Available

Below is a transcription of a recoding that came into TheHopeLine from a young man named James from Jacksonville, Florida.

*"About somewhere between 6-8 months ago, I was real down and depressed because two months prior my ex-fiancé called halfway through my schooling and told me it was over. With stress building, I got to the point where I couldn't take it anymore.*

*I was riding around one night, and I went to a spot that I'm always relaxed at, down by the river and I had my Desert Eagle loaded in my*

*car right beside me. And I was listening to a song on 97.9 and when it was over, I made the decision that it was just time to go ahead and end it.*

*Right after that song had ended, I cocked my pistol and all of a sudden I never heard the show [the Dawson McAllister Show DMLive] before and wasn't sure what it was, so I set down the gun for a second and started listening and I was hearing how it [the show] works, and I said, 'Well, maybe I'll give it one more shot.'*

*I called and I talked to Dawson. He gave me words of wisdom ... told me that God had done me a favor by taking someone who really couldn't be trusted away from me, and told me that my daughter was the most important thing, and how she would feel to look at her dad in a coffin. I had unloaded my gun, taken the magazine out, and emptied the magazine.*

*I am now a 21 year-old juvenile corrections officer and everyday I have the opportunity to help somebody. I take care of my daughter, I do what I'm supposed to do, and she knows who daddy is and knows how much daddy loves her. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart, from God above, you are without a doubt, the reason why I am still walking this Earth and breathing God's air."*

## **Closing**

Suicide can be prevented. It takes a little bit of education and awareness and the desire to be the one to help. Don't believe the myths. People in general want to live. God gave us the desire to pursue life and He wants what is best for all of His creation. Be aware, be watchful and be involved.



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