

# Teen Suicide Risk

## *Know the Signs!*

**Harrisburg, Pennsylvania - September 5, 2009** - Teens think about suicide more than parents and teachers may realize. According to a survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 19% of girls and 10% of boys have seriously considered suicide.

Every year 4,500 American youths under age 25 successfully end their own lives -- an average of 12 deaths per day. And this is only a fraction of the number of unsuccessful attempts.

As a public service during National Suicide Prevention Week, September 6 to 13, the Pennsylvania Psychological Association alerts you to the following warning signs that your teen may be at risk for suicidal thoughts or attempts:

- Talking or writing about thoughts of suicide, death, dying or the afterlife (in a context of sadness, boredom, hopelessness or negative feelings)
- Impulsive and aggressive behavior, frequent expressions of rage
- Self-inflicted cutting or injury
- Increasing use of alcohol or other drugs
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities -- seemingly without thinking
- Withdrawing from friends, family, society
- Exposure to another's suicidal behavior
- Recent severe stressor, usually related to interpersonal conflict

"No single factor can predict suicidal behavior," says Dr. Pauline W. Wallin, a licensed psychologist in Camp Hill, "but the more factors involved, the greater the risk." The risk is compounded if:

- Your teen has a history of emotional problems, such as depression, anxiety, drug or alcohol problems, or conduct disorder
- There is serious family conflict or instability
- Your teen has made one or more suicide attempts in the past

### **How to help if you believe your teen is at risk:**

- If you have weapons in the home, lock them up. Better yet, remove them from the premises. Almost half of teen suicides are by self-inflicted gunshots.
- Do the same with medications -- both prescription and over-the-counter. Removing access to lethal substances will not guarantee protection from suicide, but it can buy some time while you help your teen through a crisis period.
- Don't leave your teen alone in the house.
- Don't be afraid to bring up the subject of suicide. If you are concerned that your teen might be at risk, ask directly, "Have you thought about hurting yourself or ending your life?" This will NOT increase any suicidal thoughts that your teen might have. But it will give you more information about how your child is feeling.
- Take all threats (direct or indirect) and self-injuries seriously, even if they've occurred many times previously without actual suicide attempts.

- Call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255). The person on the other end of the phone is trained to help you decide what to do next. You may be directed to a crisis center or hospital emergency room.
- After the immediate crisis is under control, follow up with a psychologist who is experienced in working with teens and their families. With timely intervention, there is hope that your teen can learn constructive ways to cope with life's problems.

For more information on psychological and emotional health for your children and your family, visit the Pennsylvania Psychological Association's Web site, [www.papsy.org](http://www.papsy.org), or the American Psychological Association's Consumer Help Center at [www.APAHelpCenter.org](http://www.APAHelpCenter.org).

The Pennsylvania Psychological Association is a member-driven organization dedicated to promoting and advancing psychology in Pennsylvania, advocating for public access to psychological services, and enhancing multiple dimensions of human welfare while supporting the development of competent and ethical psychologists. Our mission is to educate, update and inform the public and our membership on cutting-edge psychological theory and practice through training activities and public policy initiatives.

**Web site:** <http://www.papsy.org/public/index.html>  
**Pennsylvania Psychological Association**